

National College of Ireland  
Quality Assurance Handbook



7 Support Services for Learners  
November 2018

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## 7.1 INTRODUCTION

National College of Ireland (NCI) believes that the most important first step to ensuring that college is as rewarding and enjoyable an experience as possible for all learners is to make sure the necessary support services can be accessed in a convenient and, where appropriate, confidential manner. **The College's mission of improving access to Higher and Further Education** means that providing exceptional support services to all learners is a top priority.

NCI provides a variety of supports to covering learning, health & welfare and financial needs. Services are provided to all full-time and part-time students, with an emphasis on mirroring the services for both groups. Where possible, supports are mainstreamed across the College, promoting an inclusive environment where all students can access all services irrespective of their individual needs. The services are guided by a philosophy of empowerment, encouraging learners to become independent in their personal and academic lives, easing their transition into College and from College to career.

## 7.2 LEARNING & DISABILITY SUPPORT SERVICE

The principal role of the Learning and Disability Support Service (LDSS) is to ensure that learners with a disability, learning difficulty, mental health condition or significant ongoing illness are fully supported, both personally and academically, for the duration of their studies at NCI. NCI, therefore, has the responsibility to such learners to:

- Ensure that College programmes, services, jobs, activities and facilities, when viewed in their entirety, are accessible and offered in the most integrated and appropriate settings;
- Provide information regarding policies and procedures to learners with disabilities in accessible formats upon request;
- Provide reasonable and appropriate accommodations, academic adjustments and/or auxiliary aids during learning and assessment activities, and for learners with disabilities upon request; and
- Maintain appropriate confidentiality of records and communication regarding learners with disabilities except when disclosure has been authorised by the learner.

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### 7.2.1 Learning and Disability Support Team

The Learning and Disability Support Team consists of:

- The Disability & Inclusion Officer
- The Learning Support Tutor
- The Assistive Technology Officer

The Disability & Inclusion Officer (DIO) coordinates the delivery of all supports available to students who register with LDSS and works closely with staff to provide guidance and advice on all areas of learning and teaching, with a view to enhancing the student experience of this particular cohort.

The Learning Support Tutor (LST) works in conjunction with the DIO as a point of contact and support for the students registered with LDSS. The LST provides support to students to equip them with the necessary skills to help them become more effective and efficient students. Students can seek advice or guidance on an extensive range of topics which include Time Management, Organisational Skills, Study Strategies, Essay Writing, & Exam Techniques.

The Assistive Technology Officer (ATO) works with students registered with LDSS to identify technologies that will help reduce the negative impact a disability, learning difficulty, mental health condition or significant ongoing illness might have on their academic attainment.

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### 7.2.2 Disclosing a Disability, Learning Difficulty, Mental Health Difficulty or Significant Ongoing Illness

NCI recognises that disclosing a disability, learning difficulty, mental health difficulty or significant ongoing illness is a personal and often difficult decision which can cause students some concern. There is no obligation on a student to disclose a disability, learning difficulty, mental health difficulty or significant ongoing illness but disclosure is an important first step in receiving appropriate supports which are designed to help students reach their full potential. The College strongly encourages students to disclose information on their disability, learning difficulty, mental health difficulty or significant ongoing illness to the Disability & Inclusion Officer (DIO) before they apply to college or at any time during their studies. Disclosing a disability, learning difficulty, mental health difficulty or significant ongoing illness at application stage will ensure that appropriate services are coordinated in advance of the academic year.

- Disclosing a disability, learning difficulty, mental health difficulty or significant ongoing illness has the following the benefits for learners:
- The student can discuss his/her specific needs with the DIO to ensure appropriate services are provided.
- It may be possible for the College to apply for funding on behalf of the student if the student has a need for specific supports and/or assistance arising from the disability.
- A student may benefit from more sophisticated and advanced supports than were available in second level education.
- Disclosure of a disability, learning difficulty, mental health difficulty or significant ongoing illness will ensure that the College is responsive to the needs of other students with similar difficulties.

Students can disclose a disability, learning difficulty, mental health difficulty or significant ongoing illness when they apply to study at NCI on the CAO application form (full-time students) or on the NCI application form (part-time students). Disclosure of a disability will **in no way affect a student's application. The DIO will meet with all students with a reported disability who accept a place with National College of Ireland.** The purpose of the meeting is to assess the needs of the student and to advise on the availability of supports. Students who gain entry but elect not to disclose their disability at application stage are encouraged to contact the DIO as soon as possible to discuss appropriate supports which can be provided.

#### 7.2.2.1 Confidentiality

Any documentation or information presented in disclosing a disability, learning difficulty, mental health difficulty or significant ongoing illness is held by the Disability & Inclusion Officer and will not be disclosed to a third party unless authorised by the student. The Code of Practice (see Section 7.3.6 below) contains a confidentiality agreement which must be signed by the student before any personal information is released. In order to avail of particular supports disclosure of information may be necessary. In such instances the supports will only be provided if the student consents to have his/her details released and,

at that stage, information will only be disclosed to individuals who are immediately involved in the delivery of support.

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### 7.2.3 Needs Assessment

- The first meeting with the Disability & Inclusion Officer (DIO) or Learning Support Tutor (LST) is an opportunity for the student to learn more about the support services available at NCI. The DIO or LST will conduct a Needs Assessment to determine the level of support required and the accommodations which may need to be introduced. The Needs Assessment will focus on the following areas:
  - Supports provided at second level or other third level institutions
  - Information on disability, learning difficulty, mental health difficulty or significant ongoing illness and possible impact on education
  - Report from Specialist/Educational Psychologist
  - Required referrals to the appropriate supports:
    - Assistive Technology
    - Library Support
    - Maths Support
    - Learning Support
    - Exam Supports

Following the Needs Assessment, learners will be presented with a copy of the Code of Practice, which must be signed before accommodations and/or supports will be provided. The Code of Practice also contains a confidentiality agreement and students can state if they would like their information to remain private. Please see Section 7.3.6 below for further information about the contents of the Code of Practice.

Similar to the Need Assessment, the Assistive Technology (AT) Assessment is a platform for the AT Officer and the learner to discuss the challenges they experience in their academic life, to identify technologies that will help them overcome these challenges and thus enable them to become an independent learner.

Examples of assistive technology include:

- Voice Recognition Software
- Literacy Support Software
- Note-taking technology
- Text Enlargement Software
- Alternative Keyboards & Mice

Once the technology is identified, tailored training is provided to each student to ensure they are proficient in each technology.

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### 7.2.4 Verification of a Disability, Learning Difficulty, Mental Health Difficulty or Significant Ongoing Illness

To avail of accommodations and supports from the Learning & Disability Support Service all students must provide verification of a disability, learning difficulty, mental health difficulty or significant ongoing illness from an acceptable professional source. The following rules

apply regarding verification of a disability, learning difficulty, mental health difficulty or significant ongoing illness:

- NCI will only accept verification from an Educational Psychologist or a Medical Consultant/Specialist;
- In some cases, documentation must have been completed within the last 5 years; and
- Documentation must clearly identify a specific disability, learning difficulty, mental health difficulty or significant ongoing illness.

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### 7.2.5 Code of Practice

The Code of Practice is a policy document that outlines the rights & responsibilities of the College in the delivery of support and the rights & responsibilities of the learner in the receipt of support. The Code of Practice must be signed by the learner before accommodations and/or supports will be provided. The Code of Practice also contains a confidentiality agreement and learners can state if they would like their information to remain private.

Every learner with a documented disability or learning/health difficulty has a right to:

1. Equal access to programmes, services, jobs, activities and facilities offered at the College.
2. Reasonable and appropriate accommodations, academic adjustments and/or auxiliary aids determined on a case-by-case basis in **accordance with an individual's** certified disability or learning/health difficulty.
3. Appropriate confidentiality of all information regarding a disability unless a learner has given written consent for that information to be disclosed.
4. Information, reasonably available in accessible formats.
5. Be treated with respect and dignity.

Every learner with a documented disability or learning/health difficulty has a responsibility to:

1. Meet qualifications and essential standards as determined by the College for programmes, services, jobs, activities and facilities.
2. Disclose a disability or learning/health difficulty in a timely manner when seeking an accommodation. National College of Ireland requests that learners inform the College of their disability or learning/health difficulty 8 weeks in advance of requiring accommodations.
3. Provide documentation from an acceptable professional source which verifies the nature and functional limitations of the disability or learning/health difficulty. Please note the following:
  - i. National College of Ireland for funded supports will only accept verification from an Educational Psychologist or a Medical Consultant/Specialist. General Practitioner (G.P.) letters can only be accepted if accompanied by documentation from appropriate consultant.
  - ii. Documentation must identify a specific disability or learning/health difficulty.

- iii. Documentation must identify functional limitations of the disability or learning/health difficulty.
  - iv. Documentation must verify the need for requested services.
4. Follow National College of Ireland procedures for obtaining reasonable and appropriate accommodations, academic adjustments and/or auxiliary aids.
  5. Treat staff of the College with dignity and respect.

When dealing with learners who disclose a disability or learning/health difficulty. National College of Ireland has the right to:

1. **Maintain the College's academic standards.**
2. Request that the learner provides documentation from an acceptable professional source which confirms the status of the disability or learning/health difficulty and which supports the need for accommodations, academic adjustments and/or auxiliary aids.
3. **Discuss a learner's need for accommodations, academic adjustments and/or auxiliary aids** with the professional source of his/her documentation, having obtained written consent authorising such disclosure and discussion.
4. In consultation with the learner, the College has the right to select from equally effective accommodations with consideration for cost and/or availability.
5. Deny a request for accommodation, academic adjustment and/or auxiliary aid in the following instances:
  - i. If the documentation does not identify a specific disability or learning/health difficulty.
  - ii. If the documentation does not identify functional limitations of the disability or learning/health difficulty.
  - iii. If the documentation does not verify the need for requested services.
  - iv. If the documentation is not provided within a timely manner (8 weeks in advance of requiring an accommodation, academic adjustment and/or auxiliary aid).
  - v. If the documentation is not completed by an acceptable professional source.
6. Deny a request for an inappropriate or unreasonable accommodation including any that poses a direct threat to the health and safety of others, constitutes a fundamental alteration to a programme, or poses an undue financial or administrative burden on the College.

When dealing with learners who disclose a disability or learning/health difficulty. National College of Ireland has the responsibility to:

1. Ensure that College programmes, services, jobs, activities and facilities, when viewed in their entirety, are offered in the most integrated and appropriate settings.
2. Provide information regarding policies and procedures to learners with disabilities in accessible formats upon request.
3. Provide reasonable and appropriate accommodations, academic adjustments and/or auxiliary aids for learners with disabilities upon request.

4. Maintain appropriate confidentiality of records and communication regarding learners with disabilities except when disclosure has been authorised by the learner.

#### **7.2.5.1 Report to Faculty**

Following the Needs Assessment and providing the learner has consented to have their information disclosed, a report is circulated in strict confidentiality to the relevant faculty members, which details the following:

- **General information on the learner's disability or learning/health difficulty.**
- **Information on the learner's experience of his/her disability or learning/health difficulty** and how this impacts on his/her learning.
- Information on the accommodations organised through Learning & Disability Support Service.
- Information on the exam accommodations which will be introduced.
- Suggested teaching strategies for faculty.

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#### **7.2.6 Provision of Supports**

The purpose of the Needs Assessment is to determine the level of support required and the types of accommodations, academic adjustments and/or auxiliary aids which may need to be introduced. The following sources will be considered in detail when deciding on the appropriate supports to provide:

- Universal Design for Learning
- **Recommendations from a learner's specialist.**
- Recommendations from advisory bodies such as AHEAD, DAWN National Council for the Blind etc.
- Best practice in other third level institutions.
- Previous supports which the learner has benefited from.
- **The learner's preference for a particular support.**
- Supports which have benefited previous learners of NCI.

Learners must sign the Code of Practice which details the rules and regulations governing the provision of supports before accommodations, academic adjustments and/or auxiliary aids are coordinated on the learner's behalf.

#### **7.2.6.1 Exam Arrangements**

NCI is committed to ensuring that all learners compete on an even academic platform while at college. Learners with a disability or learning/health difficulty, are entitled to apply for appropriate supports and arrangements for examinations. Alternative arrangements are offered so that learners with a disability or learning/health difficulty, can perform to the best of their ability during examinations.

The Disability & Inclusion Officer (DIO) or Learning Support Tutor (LST) conducts a Needs Assessment with all learners with a disability, learning difficulty, mental health difficulty, significant ongoing illness to determine appropriate educational supports and exam accommodations. Alternative arrangements for examinations are guided by the following conditions:

- **Verification of a learner's disability or learning/health difficulty, must be provided.** National College of Ireland will only accept verification from an Educational Psychologist or a Medical Consultant/Specialist. General Practitioner (G.P.) letters are only accepted when accompanied by specialist diagnosis.
- Where appropriate NCI will endeavour to implement the recommendations from a **learner's** Educational Psychologist or Medical Consultant/Specialist.
- While every effort will be made to meet the individual needs of every learner, it may not be possible to meet all requirements in every case.
- Learners must contact the relevant staff (DIO/LST/Programme coordinator/lecturer) a minimum of eight weeks before examinations to avail of alternative accommodations. Late application may result in some or all the accommodations not being provided.

Please see Section 7.2.8 below **for NCI's policy and associated** procedures for reasonable accommodations when assessing learners with a disclosed disability or learning/health difficulty.

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### 7.2.7 Reasonable Accommodations in Examinations and Assessments

NCI is committed to ensuring that its examination and assessment system as far as possible enables candidates with disabilities to compete equally with their non-disabled peers. This refers to undergraduate and postgraduate programmes including all assessment and examination procedures that contribute to module or course results. NCI aims to have examination procedures that are effective in assessing the knowledge and abilities of such candidates, whilst at the same time upholding academic standards.

One of the primary functions of Disability Support Services in HEIs is to determine reasonable accommodations in examinations and assessments for students with disabilities. A reasonable accommodation (RA) in examinations might be any action that helps alleviate a substantial disadvantage. Making a reasonable accommodation in examinations might involve changing procedures, modifying examination papers and providing additional facilities such as the use of assistive technology in written examinations. Every student with a disability has different needs. To best tailor the services to individual students, a Needs Assessment is carried out. This Needs Assessment helps determine the additional **examination requirements. Once RA's are determined students may need to be trained in** using the accommodation granted. For example, students who are granted the use of a computer in written exams should be proficient in word processing and with the use of the relevant Assistive Technology (AT).

For the purpose of this policy, a reasonable accommodation might be any action that helps alleviate an educational disadvantage. Making a reasonable accommodation in examinations and assessments might involve changing examination procedures and providing additional services (e.g. additional time, materials in large print, provision of assistive technologies). Reasonable accommodations will also ensure fairness to learners without disabilities in that learners with disabilities will not have advantage over their peers.

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### 7.2.8 General Principles for the Assessment of Learners with a Disability

The following general principles inform NCI's policy and procedure concerning the assessment of learners with a disability.

1. Alternative arrangements should be made for candidates who, because of a temporary, permanent or long-term disability, have special assessment needs in examinations.
2. Provision should be made for both physical and learning disabilities.
3. Alternative arrangements should not put the integrity, status, or reputation of the examination or assessment at risk.
4. Alternative arrangements should be designed to remove, as far as possible, the **impact of a disability on a candidate's performance, so that they can demonstrate in the examination their level of achievement.**
5. Alternative arrangements are designed to assist a candidate in demonstrating their achievements in an examination setting. They are not designed to compensate for a possible lack of achievement arising from a disability.
6. Since a core principle of examinations is to ensure equitable treatment for all candidates, arrangements should not give the candidate for whom they are made an advantage over other candidates.
7. Independent evidence of a disability and support needs should be required before allowing alternative arrangements.
8. The precise arrangements to be made should be determined on the basis of the disability or impairment established in each individual case and of the particular needs of the candidate in each individual subject area. Different subjects and different methods of assessment may make different demands on candidates.
9. The provision of any examination accommodations will be in line with criteria outlined in this document and is at the discretion of National College of Ireland (NCI). Provisions beyond these guidelines can only be given in exceptional circumstances.
10. **A candidate's disability may** be such that it is not possible for him or her to participate in a particular mode of assessment (an aural examination for a candidate with severe hearing impairment), in which case an alternative assessment procedure may be specified.
11. An alternative procedure is not acceptable where the purpose of an examination would be compromised by its use (e.g., reading a test of reading comprehension to a candidate with a specific reading difficulty).
12. **Circumstances that may affect a candidate's performance (e.g., illness, trauma, bereavement)** should, insofar as is possible, be addressed during the examination period.

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### 7.2.9 Assessing Learners with a Disability

NCI's policy regarding the assessment of learners with a disability is that such candidates should, wherever possible, undertake the same assessments as others undertaking the course. The usual way of taking disability into account will be to vary the assessment format. This may involve the use of technology, additional time or alternative formats. To ensure this policy is adhered and that appropriate accommodations are made to learners with a disability so that they are not unfairly disadvantaged in the assessment of their learning, the following conditions must be observed.

1. **It is the candidate's responsibility** to ensure that NCI is aware of his or her disability and to apply for any variation in assessment conditions. For NCI staff to respond appropriately to recognise learner needs, it is crucial that those with disabilities inform NCI a minimum of 8 weeks before end-of-semester exams and 2 weeks before continuous assessments.
  - **A candidate seeking reasonable accommodations in NCI's assessments or examinations** must provide relevant and current medical, psychological or other documentation from a medical or other consultant.
  - Candidates with temporary disabilities (a person is deemed to have a temporary disability if the disability is unlikely to last for longer than a year e.g. a sports injury or temporary illness) must contact the Examinations Office at soon as possible before the commencement of examinations.
  - A candidate who wishes to appeal the refusal to grant a specific examination accommodation can contact the Registrar who will respond within an appropriate timeframe.
  
2. A needs assessment is carried out with the Learning & Disability Support Office. This assessment helps to determine the level of examination supports required. .
  - The Student Support Office will inform the candidate, on completion of their educational needs assessment and on agreement with the Examinations Office, the detail of their granted reasonable accommodations.
  - The Examinations Office is responsible for the provision of agreed examination accommodations for end-of-semester exams and also for communicating the location and detail of examination accommodations directly to candidates with disabilities.
  - The School is responsible for the provision of agreed examination accommodations for continuous assessments and also for communicating the location and detail of examination accommodations directly to candidates with disabilities.
  - The Examinations Office may source educational support workers, such as scribes, used in examinations. These support workers will receive training in their examination duties from the Examinations Office.
  - NCI has a policy of recording the student number on scripts. In such cases, candidates with disabilities are, as far as practicable, marked using this identifier only. Use of alternative examination arrangements may affect the anonymity of the candidate.
  - Candidates with Specific Learning Difficulties and those with hearing impairments may be given the option to note their disability on their examination scripts. The Examinations Office will ensure that marking guidelines, (see Appendix 4) are included and forwarded to the relevant lecturing staff.
  - If a candidate is unable through disability to be assessed by the methods prescribed for the course, NCI may vary the method in consultation with the Dean of School as appropriate, bearing in mind the objectives of the programme and the need to assess the learner on equal terms with other learners.

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## 7.2.10 Guidelines on Reasonable Accommodations

**Ultimate responsibility for ensuring ‘equality of access’ to assessment lies with the Schools** and the Examinations Office although a number of administrative units may be delegated responsibility for agreeing and delivering on reasonable accommodations. The following guidelines have been developed to ensure fairness and consistency within and between Schools.

1. Every student with a disability has different needs. To best tailor services to the needs of individual students, a Needs Assessment is carried out by the Learning & Disability Support Office. A report is generated following this Needs Assessment and the recommendations are circulated to relevant departments and administrative offices in NCI, including the Examinations Office. Should the needs or requirements of the student change, they should ensure that the DIO is informed.
2. Candidates should contact the Learning & Disability Support Office well in advance of any examination and ensure that they meet the relevant deadlines set by NCI to ensure their examination arrangements can be put in place. Candidates who require specialist examination supports such as a computer, assistive technology or reader/scribe will need to attend training in the use of such accommodations.
3. The provision of any examination accommodations will be in line with criteria outlined in this document and is at the discretion of NCI. While every effort will be made to meet the individual needs of each student, the provision of examination accommodations is dependent on the availability of resources. Provisions beyond these guidelines can only be given in exceptional circumstances and must be requested through the DIO
4. The Learning & Disability Support Office will advise on the provision of reasonable accommodations and will liaise with the Examinations Office in relation to reasonable accommodations in end-of-semester examinations. For continuous assessments or other in-class assessments, the Learning & Disability Support Officer will liaise with Schools.

Each learner wishing to apply for reasonable accommodation on the grounds of a disability is responsible for the following.

1. Formally register with the Learning & Disability Support Office as early as possible in the Academic Year.
2. Complete an Educational Needs Assessment with the DIO.
3. Provide appropriate supporting documentation confirming the nature and extent of the disability. The documentation must also identify the difficulties that need to be compensated for by the provision of alternative examination accommodations.
4. **Provide notification of the State Examinations’ Commission (RACE)** Documentation (where possible).
5. Be aware that the provision of reasonable accommodations in examinations will be made known to the relevant academic, administrative and examination staff.
6. Ensure that any changes to exam accommodations should be discussed with the DIO prior to the examination accommodations deadlines set (a minimum of 8 weeks before end-of-semester exams and 2 weeks before continuous assessments). Those registering with the Learning & Disability Support Office after these deadline dates will be accommodated in subsequent examinations.

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## 7.2.11 Alternative Examination Arrangements

For the purposes of this document, a reasonable accommodation might be any action that helps alleviate a substantial disadvantage. Making an alternative examination arrangement might involve changing procedures, modifying the delivery of an examination, providing additional services (for example a reader or materials in large print), or altering the physical environment. These reasonable accommodations are outlined in detail below.

### 7.2.11.1 The Assessment Environment

The following accommodations are permissible to ensure that the conditions of the examination or the environment in which the examination is being conducted do not unfairly disadvantage learners with a disability.

#### 1. Time Allowance

Additional time will be granted where it can be demonstrated, and substantiated by medical and/or psychological evidence, that the candidate has difficulties in one or more of the areas identified below. This extra time is set at 10 minutes per hour. In very exceptional circumstances, this extra time may be extended but such an arrangement would have to be decided during the needs assessment.

Additional time is granted in the following circumstances:

1. Where the average speed of written communication of the candidate is significantly slower than average.
2. **Where a candidate's reading speed is significantly slower than average.**
3. **Where a candidate's working memory/processing speed is significantly lower than average.**
4. Where disability worsens due to stress and/or environmental variations (e.g. those with some mental health or medical conditions).
5. Where candidates with speech difficulties are taking oral tests.
6. **Where the completion of practical tasks is delayed due to the learner's disability**

#### 2. Rest Breaks

Some candidates may require rest breaks during an examination. These may be needed:

1. if the candidate experiences fatigue such that they are unable to concentrate or communicate for an extended period of time;
2. if the candidate requires medical or other treatment during an examination;
3. if the candidate experiences worsening of physical or sensory disability without breaks over the examination time period or is unable to maintain a suitable position for the examination time period.

During rest breaks, candidates are not permitted to:

1. read the examination paper,
2. read their answers
3. write or prepare subsequent answers.

A candidate is responsible for managing this accommodation and they may be allowed to move around the venue, should this be required. Extra time is granted if rest breaks are required. Candidates who require rest breaks to use toilet or other facilities must be accompanied by an invigilator.

### 3. Furniture in Examination Venues

Some candidates may require additional/alternative furniture, such as:

- writing board
- chair supports
- **alternative desk or chair to meet the candidate's needs**
- foot stool

Any additional furniture requirements will be identified as part of a needs assessment.

### 4. Physical Space

The physical space available should be appropriate for the effective provision of the **'reasonable accommodation', for example:**

- a large table to accommodate enlarged papers, Braille material, and/or technological aids
- adequate floor space for manoeuvring wheelchairs, mobility aids, crutches, canes and any other physical aid.

### 5. Personal Assistants

Personal assistants carry out practical tasks for candidates whose disability affects their ability to perform such tasks. A personal assistant will be known to candidates. A personal assistant may be permitted to stay with the candidate in the examination venue.

### 6. Announcements

It will be the responsibility of the Examinations Office to ensure that all announcements and/or amendments by lecturers are conveyed to all candidates with disabilities sitting examinations in separate examination venues.

### 7. Alternative Venues

Candidates with disabilities, receiving reasonable accommodations, should sit examinations in alternative venues to their peer group. These venues can be shared with other candidates

with disabilities. Only in exceptional circumstances should a candidate have an assessment in a separate and individual venue.

### *7.2.11.2 Awareness of Learner's Disability*

Students with dyslexia and students who are deaf or have a hearing impairment may opt to disclose their disability on their examination scripts. The Examinations Office/School provides students with stickers for their answer booklets, which refers examiners to marking guidelines. The onus is on the students to place a sticker on the cover of their examination booklets prior to their submission.

#### Learning Disability Awareness (LDA)

For candidates who are deaf or hard of hearing or who are presenting with a Specific Learning Disability, a Learning Disability Awareness (LDA) will be granted. A Learning Disability Awareness comprises an awareness of difficulties with spelling and grammar as well as syntax, structure and cohesion.

If a core component of assessment in a foreign language is that of competence in reading, spelling and grammar, it is not possible to disregard these elements for a candidate with Specific Learning Difficulties. With regard to levelling the playing field of disadvantage, it could be construed as providing an advantage not open to other students. An oral/aural focus might be welcomed by most candidates with Specific Learning Difficulties, but this obviously depends on the stated aim of the course or strand within a course. Similarly, the decision to provide a reader/scribe is dependent upon the purpose of the assessment; if the examination is assessing competence in reading, and reading comprehension in a foreign language, then provision of a reader may not be appropriate. If the purpose of the assessment is to examine competence in spelling and grammar in a foreign language, then provision of a scribe may not be appropriate.

The purpose of the guidance notes in Appendix 4 is to assist examiners to understand that **even with the provision of additional supports in examinations, a candidate's disabilities** may prevent them from demonstrating their full potential. It provides examiners with a framework for marking the scripts of such candidates. It does not ask examiners to compensate these candidates by giving them additional marks because they have a disability.

### *7.2.11.3 Alternative Presentation of Examination Question Papers*

A candidate with a disability may require an examination paper in one or more of the following formats, with the expectation that NCI will ensure, as far as is practicable, that it is available.

#### 1. Electronic Format

Learners who may require an electronic format of the examination paper are:

- blind/visually impaired
- slower readers due to physical limitations
- learners with a Specific Learning Difficulty such as dyslexia

Such candidates may access the paper using assistive technology such as screen- or text-reading software or screen magnification software.

Text-based papers should be provided in standard text formats such as **Word** (.doc), Rich Text Format (.rtf) or HTML, particularly if the candidate is using screenreading or magnification software such as **JAWS** or **ZoomText**. Visual elements should be accompanied by descriptive text. These formats can be accessed by the candidate on a computer.

Portable Document Format (.PDF) may be appropriate for examination papers where the layout must be preserved or which have been created using applications such as **LaTeX**. PDF is generally unsuitable for candidates with visual impairments using screenreading software such as **JAWS**.

It may be appropriate to provide copies of the paper in multiple formats i.e. **Word** and PDF. Ensure well in advance that the computer being used for the assessment can open the electronic examination paper.

## 2. Braille

Candidates who require a Braille version of the examination paper are those who are blind or vision impaired and fluent Braille readers. A Braille version of the examination paper will be made available when identified as a requirement through the completion of an assessment of need. Requests for examinations in Braille must be made well in advance of the examination and must comply with the examination deadlines set by NCI.

A candidate requesting Braille examination papers will also be provided with a print and/or electronic version of the paper, and in the case of a print paper, access to a reader. This will ensure that an alternative means to access the paper is available to the candidate, should it be required.

## 3. Enlarged Print

Some candidates may need examination papers in enlarged print. Candidates who require enlarged print are those who are vision-impaired, or in some circumstances, those who have Specific Learning Difficulties.

Papers may be provided:

- as an identical version of the standard paper enlarged to A3 size
- in an enlarged **sans-serif** font<sup>1</sup> size on standard A4 paper
- **in an alternative font to suit the candidate's needs**

## 4. Examination Papers in Colour

Some candidates may need the examination paper in a colour other than white. Candidates who may require coloured paper are those who have Specific Learning Difficulties, are vision

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<sup>1</sup> Common sans serif fonts include Arial, Trebuchet MS and Verdana.

impaired and/or whose reading speed, accuracy or comfort is improved by alternative colour contrast.

The Student Support Officer can give advice on appropriate paper for this purpose directly to the learner as part of their on-going learning support needs. Some learners make use of overlays, transparent tinted plastic sheets which can be placed over printed material without the need for coloured paper.

## 5. Tactile Representations of Visual Elements

Many courses rely on graphs, diagrams, maps or other visual elements to convey information. Learners who have visual impairment or visual perceptual impairment may require such information to be presented as tactile representation. Requests for such materials must be made well in advance of the examination. Examiners may also provide description of diagrams for inclusion with tactile diagrams.

### *7.2.11.4 Assistive Technology*

**Depending on the candidate's disability, they may require the use of assistive technology to complete an examination.** NCI will ensure, as far as is practicable, that the following facilities are available as required.

#### 1. Use of a Computer

The use of a computer may be the primary and most effective means of communication by some learners with disabilities. Computers may be required for assessments by:

- Candidates who are blind or have visual disability that require the use of assistive technology available only on a computer, such as screen readers or magnification software
- Candidates with physical disabilities who have limited dexterity that results in handwriting which is difficult to read or unreasonably difficult to produce.
- Candidates with specific medical conditions that result in diminished stamina and whose evidence of disability confirms that the use of technology will benefit the learner and limit stamina difficulties
- Candidates who have a specific learning difficulty resulting in a written expression level significantly below the average and where they demonstrate two or more of the following criteria:
  - a. a lower than average writing speed (below 15 wpm),
  - b. a level of legibility that would make the paper unreadable to an examiner
  - c. a speed of processing at or below the 16th percentile

Where the use of a computer is granted to a candidate with SLD, the spelling and grammar checker will not be enabled.

A computer must be used only by the candidate with a disability and not by somebody acting on her/his behalf. It is the responsibility of the candidate to be proficient in the use

of the computer and appropriate software. Likewise, the candidate should be proficient in the use of any piece of technological aid that she/he is granted to use.

All technological accommodations granted in assessments and examinations are approved on an individual basis and for each set of examinations. Smaller shared examination venues and invigilators may be required as a consequence of the use of technology.

## 2. Braille and Braille-Related Devices and Software

Candidates with a visual disability may use Braille in order to respond to examinations. Note, however, that screen reading software is increasingly preferred over Braille by such candidates.

It is advised that the Braille machine is attached and adapted to a printer, which will produce a printed text. If a printer is not available, a transcription in print of the Braille text should be made for the examiner marking the examination. NCI will supply the printer, Braille paper and/or the computer printout paper.

## 3. Use of Voice Recognition Software for Examinations

The use of voice recognition technology will be granted in the following circumstances:

1. where candidates have been trained in its use over an extensive period of time to develop a mature voice file, with an appropriate subject-specific vocabulary.
2. where the candidate has adapted to the techniques of using dictation to create formal written English.
3. where it is preferable for the candidate to complete an examination in this format rather than, for example using a computer or scribe.

It should be noted that examinations in some subjects, e.g. Medicine, Mathematics or Science, often require diagrams, formulas or other modelled answers, and these will also require handwritten responses.

The use of a computer with voice recognition software requires a separate examination venue and invigilator.

### *7.2.11.5 Communication Supports*

Where possible, candidates with a disability should make use of assistive technology in assessments. In some situations, however, candidates may require human supports to complete an assessment. NCI will ensure, as far as is practicable, that the following supports are available where appropriate.

#### 1. Readers

Candidates who may require the examination paper or their script read to them include those with visual impairments, those with Specific Learning Difficulties such as dyslexia, and

slow readers due to physical limitations. In most cases, these candidates can use text-to-speech software to read the examination paper/script, but sometimes a human reader may be required.

Candidates with Specific Learning Difficulties *may* require a reader where they demonstrate a level of difficulty in reading attainment (speed, accuracy or comprehension) at or below the 16th percentile. In such cases, the following guidelines apply:

1. Additional time of ten minutes per hour is recommended when using a reader. This allows the candidate to be able to complete their exam in a reasonable time using this accommodation. A candidate should have had adequate practice in the use of a reader.
2. A candidate may be provided with the assessment question in an electronic format, together with a computer and text-to-speech software. This may also entail the use of a separate venue and/or use of headphones.
3. The institution will ensure, as far as is practicable, that a reader will have a good working knowledge of the subject under examination. They will be able to accurately read a paper/script at a reasonable rate.
4. If a reader is not the primary means by which a learner is accessing an examination paper (that is, if it is being provided electronically or in Braille), then it may be possible for the invigilator to read the paper or parts thereof to the candidate.
5. If a human reader is provided, a separate examination room and appropriate supervision may be necessary. If several candidates require only occasional reading assistance, they may be accommodated together with a reader/invigilator.

## 2. Interpreters

An interpreter is a communicator who uses alternative modes of expression in order to make a text available to a person with a disability.

Means of communication can include:

- use of sign language
- use of writing
- saying the word or phrase

The interpreter may be made available to interpret when requested to do so by the candidate. Any words or phrases interpreted for the candidate must be underlined on the question paper, and this paper should be returned to the examiner. The institution will ensure as far as is practicable, that the interpreter has a good working knowledge of the subject matter in question. If an interpreter is provided, additional time, a separate examination venue and appropriate invigilation will be granted.

The following methods are all possible, and permission to employ one or more of these will be considered where they are identified through an assessment of need:

- dictation to a scribe
- signing the examination
- the use of technological aids

## 3. Scribes or Use of Voice-Recognition Software

A scribe is a person who transcribes dictation from a person whose disability affects the ability to write. For assessment purposes, this would be interpreted as those whose handwriting is illegible, grammatically incomprehensible or produced so slowly that answers could not be fully recorded even with the extra time allowed. Scribes should only be granted for candidates who cannot produce written communication by any other means, for example, using a computer.

Candidates eligible to use a scribe normally:

- are blind or visually impaired,
- have orthopaedic impairments which affect writing,
- tire easily or have muscle weakness,
- have limited dexterity,
- have a specific learning difficulty resulting in a written expression level significantly below the average.

Candidates with a specific learning difficulty *may* require a scribe where they demonstrate two or more of the following criteria:

- a lower than average writing speed (below 15 wpm),
- a level of legibility that would make the paper unreadable to an examiner
- a speed of processing at or below the 16th percentile

The use of a scribe is not appropriate in subjects that test spelling, such as Modern Foreign Language writing papers, unless it is practical for the candidate to dictate foreign words letter by letter. In other subjects testing written communication skills, including English or Irish, a scribe will be allowed, but the candidate will be assessed only on those aspects of written communication which he or she can demonstrate independently, such as the use of language and effective and grammatical presentation.

If separate marks are awarded for spelling and punctuation, these cannot be credited to a candidate using a scribe. Marks may be awarded for punctuation if this is dictated, and the fact is noted on the scribe cover sheet.

If a core component of assessment in a foreign language is competence in reading, spelling and grammar, it is not possible to disregard these elements for candidates with Specific Learning Difficulties. The use of a scribe in this context may be construed as providing an advantage to a candidate with a specific learning difficulty, which is not available to other candidates. An oral/aural alternative may be welcomed by many students with a specific learning difficulty, but this will depend on the stated aim of the course or strand within a course.

Similarly, the decision to provide a reader/scribe is dependent on the purpose of the assessment. If the examination is assessing competence in reading and reading comprehension in a foreign language, then provision of a reader may not be appropriate. If the purpose of the assessment is to examine competence in spelling and grammar in a foreign language, then provision of a scribe may not be appropriate.

Some possibilities exist where technology can be used instead of or with a scribe:

- Voice-**recognition software which produces a hard copy of the learner’s dictated** speech can be used as a scribe if the candidate is a fully experienced and proficient user of the software.
- Software or equipment which produces speech can be used to dictate to a scribe.
- Software which produces typed text with predictive text when the learner uses a computer may be used as a scribe. See section 5.1.3 for further information on voice recognition software.

A scribe is not a reader but the same person may act as both scribe and reader where appropriate. The candidate may require the scribe to read back part of what has been written but no comment must be made about any part of the answer given.

Additional time of ten minutes per hour is recommended when using a scribe. This allows the candidate to complete their exam in a reasonable time using this accommodation.

It is recommended that a separate venue be granted when this accommodation is used. NCI is responsible for ensuring that a candidate dictating to a scribe cannot distract or be overheard by other candidates.

If the candidate and scribe are accommodated separately, a separate invigilator will be required. In addition, a recording of the assessment session is recommended as this will act as a secondary source of information for the examiner if required.

#### 4. Irish Sign Language Interpreter in Examinations

Candidates whose first language is Irish Sign Language (ISL) may wish to sign their examination and to have this simultaneously transcribed by a scribe. The scribe in this instance needs to be proficient in sign language.

Please Note: All rules governing the use of a scribe and transcription should apply equally to the above.

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### 7.2.12 Alternative Assessment Arrangements

Alternative assessment refers to any alteration in the standard form of assessment in order **to accommodate a candidate’s disability, i.e. provision of an oral examination instead of a written test.**

Flexibility around the scheduling of examinations may also be appropriate. Please Note: flexible examination arrangements are granted in exceptional circumstances only.

#### 7.2.12.1 Flexible Examination Arrangements

Some candidates with disabilities may require flexibility in the scheduling of examinations. This may involve one or more of the following arrangements:

- Changes to scheduled examination times within a given day. For example, candidates with conditions which result in early fatigue and impaired concentration may require morning examinations in preference to afternoon or evening examinations.
- Changes to scheduled examination dates and times within the examination period. For example, a candidate with a physical disability who requires extra time to complete an examination and who experiences fatigue may find it difficult to manage a number of examinations in quick succession. Examinations may therefore need to be scheduled so that, where possible, rest periods are provided between examinations.
- Examinations split into more than one session. When extra time is provided for an examination which is already lengthy (for example a three-hour paper) the result may be too fatiguing, physically and mentally, for some candidates with disabilities. Splitting such examinations into more than one session, either on the same day or on successive days, may be a more suitable arrangement.

The candidate should sign a declaration form where examinations are held at a different time to the scheduled time. The candidate should indicate which part of the examination paper will be answered in that session (for example, part A), and the remainder of the paper will remain unseen by the candidate and retained by the supervisor. Where practical, the candidate should sit the first session on the preceding day(s) to the scheduled examination time, and conclude on the scheduled examination day.

#### *7.2.12.2 Oral Examination and Assessment*

Some candidates with disabilities may find it impractical to write or type their answers and in such cases, an oral assessment may be appropriate. There follows some advice on conducting oral assessments with candidates with disabilities.

The School may prefer to have two staff present at oral interviews; the second examiner is usually the tutor in charge of the tutorial group or section in which the candidate has worked all semester or year. This person will be familiar to the candidate, thus reducing some of the pressure of nervousness, and will also be familiar with the candidate's usual behaviour and competence. If you are both the lecturer and tutor, it is advisable to arrange for an additional member of staff to be present.

If the oral exam involves discussion between the examiners and the candidate, then experience suggests that the senior examiner should remain outside the interaction and provide the main evaluation while the second examiner leads in the questioning and discussion of the materials with the candidate. This permits greater objectivity of assessment.

Logistical difficulties can arise if a number of candidates require an oral assessment. These candidates will need to be examined as close as possible to the time of the equivalent written assessment in order to preserve the integrity of the assessment. In such circumstances it may be necessary to have a team of oral examiners, with an overlap of one examiner for every two teams to help ensure the integrity of the assessment.

The oral assessment will often be held at the same time as the written assessment and may be assessed without benefit of experience in marking the written scripts (which makes it important to have two examiners present to provide two assessments).

From experience, those managing examinations should reach an agreement with the candidates *in advance of the actual interview* about the terms by which the oral assessment is to be conducted.

The procedures for essay-style assessments usually include:

- allowing the candidate the full reading period in which to decide on the questions to be attempted. This may require one examiner to read the questions to the candidate and possibly make initial notes based on the candidate's dictation;
- giving the candidate an agreed amount of time in which to prepare the answer to the first question. This may also involve an examiner taking down some dictated notes;
- giving the candidate an agreed amount of time in which to present the answer orally to the two examiners. The candidate then leaves the room while the two examiners agree on a tentative mark for that question;
- following the same procedure for each of the remaining questions;
- after the final question has been answered, the candidate should be given a few minutes in which to add to, or revise, any previous answers (somewhat equivalent to the editing that may take place in a written assessment).

Both the examiners and the candidates need to know in advance whether the oral assessment consists solely of the candidate presenting the answers to the paper or whether there will be interventions or questions by the examiners leading to possible elaboration, 'editing', or discussion of the material presented by the candidate. If interactions are permitted, the nature of the assessment may diverge from the conditions which prevail for written assessments in which there is generally no possibility of prompted elaboration or clarification of points.

To help ensure that both written and oral scripts are assessed equally, tape the oral interview and retain the tape for later reference. Some examiners prefer to listen again to some or all of the assessment once they have begun marking the written scripts.

The unfamiliarity of an oral interview can cause nervousness for both the examiner and candidate. However, as some learners will face this procedure several times, they may become more experienced than examiners, who may only occasionally participate in oral assessments. Some points for examiners to remember include:

These candidates have not selected an oral assessment as an 'easy option'; this format offers them a practical way of communicating their knowledge. They may develop competency in oral assessment, but this is comparable to other candidates developing 'good exam techniques' in written exams.

Awkward or hesitant oral expression should be regarded in the same terms as semi-legible handwriting. Just as candidates in written assessments may think or write differently in examination conditions, so too should allowances be made for different styles and tempos of oral responses. A candidate should not be expected to talk continuously and fluently for the duration of the assessment; brief (and less than adequate) answers are also common in written assessments.

In conclusion, there are three basic guidelines for holding an oral or taped exam:

1. Agree the assessment procedures to be followed well in advance of the exam both with the candidate(s) and the other examiner(s) in consultation with the Examinations Office. This helps to avoid confusion and unintended compromising of the integrity of the assessment.

2. Be explicit about the procedure of the assessment so that both the examinee and the examiners have some feeling of control over the interview or taping.
3. Decide on the breakdown of the assessment criteria in advance of the assessment and follow these guidelines closely. This helps to safeguard against subjectivity in your assessment of oral materials.

### 7.2.12.3 Combinations and Variations

Examiners sometimes require a combination of written and oral assessment. This combination approach may be appropriate for candidates who have some written capacity but could not sustain that capacity for the duration of the assessment. The variations are agreed on in advance by the examiner and the candidate. The candidate may be asked to write one answer, or half the paper, or spend an hour making outline notes for all the answers; and then complete the rest of the paper orally. The script is then assessed on both the oral presentation and the written answers or outline.

### 7.2.12.4 Multiple-Choice/Short Answer Assessments

For **multiple-choice assessments**, a reader or scribe is the simplest solution - in this situation no special skills or experience are required, so a senior student or tutor could do the job. Extra time may be needed for visually-impaired candidates to allow for the reading and re-reading aloud of each question.

Candidates who can manipulate a mouse or keyboard may be able to take the examination using a computer if the examination paper is presented in an appropriate electronic format.

In **short answer assessments**, the taped exam format is suitable. In an oral interview, the candidate should be given a breathing space between each item and the opportunity to revise previous responses.

### 7.2.12.5 Modification of Examination Papers for Deaf or Hearing Impaired Candidates.

The main educational disadvantages for deaf or hearing-impaired people are language disability and the restriction of access to information. Depending on the onset of deafness, a learner may experience difficulty with syntax and possess a restricted vocabulary. As a consequence, they may have an inappropriate or immature style of writing and/or may misinterpret written material.

If a deaf candidate uses Irish Sign Language (ISL) as their first language, they will learn all technical concepts in the visual medium first. ISL uses a different grammatical structure to English, causing some difficulty when translating ISL. A deaf learner who has become deaf prior to the acquisition of speech will need significantly more time and will have to work harder than their hearing peers to acquire the same knowledge.

While deaf learners will need to familiarise themselves with the terminology of their subject/discipline, they may still experience difficulties in understanding and undertaking assessment tasks. Most deaf candidates will need alternative assessment arrangements.

Alternative arrangements may include the following:

- language modification (see below),

- use of a computer with spell and grammar checker,
- amplification for aural tests or the use of a reader to enable a candidate to lip-read,
- in oral examinations or presentation, the use of a sign language interpreter/lip speaker if the candidate has difficulty with speech,
- presentation of assessments in ISL (see below),
- individual consideration for group work which may include a briefing session for staff and candidates as the specific requirements of the deaf/hearing impaired candidate and the monitoring of group dynamics

#### 7.2.12.6 Language Modification

It may be necessary to review assessment questions with a view to modifying potentially problematic language and phraseology. Where necessary, the carrier language will be modified ***without changing the meaning of the question***. There will be no modification of:

- technical, subject specific terms or phrases
- any text of English Language examinations
- any text of foreign language paper
- material where the understanding of the source material is being assessed.

Deaf candidates should receive both a modified and original copy of the examination/assessment question in order for them to maximise their understanding of the task. Language modification will be undertaken by the Learner Support co-ordinator in Disability Services in consultation with candidate's department. This must be undertaken prior to the final version of the examination paper being agreed and must be approved in the same manner.

#### 7.2.12.7 Presentation in Irish Sign Language (ISL)

In exceptional circumstances where learning outcomes cannot be assessed by any other mode, the presentation of assignments or examinations in ISL recorded on videotape may be permitted. Two independent interpreters will jointly undertake the transcription and sign a declaration, which will be returned with the videotape to the external examiner.

### 7.3 LEARNING SUPPORT SERVICE

Learning support at National College of Ireland is provided to all students through a variety of means including online resources, drop in clinics, workshops, and online classes. Students can also avail of a weekly drop in learning support clinic where they can meet with a tutor to discuss their individual academic concerns.

#### 7.3.1.1 Issues Addressed through Learning Support Service

Students can seek advice or guidance on an extensive range of issues, including but not limited to:

- Learning Styles
- Study Skills
- Note-taking

- Revision Techniques
- Exam Performance
- Referencing
- Project Writing
- Organisational Skills / Time Management
- Reading Skills
- Motivation
- Avoiding Procrastination
- Learning & Remembering
- Improving Concentration
- Thinking Critically
- Analysing Questions
- Reducing Exam Anxiety

The LSS works closely with faculty members to ensure that the support provided to students meets the needs of the students involved in each programme. For example, at the start of the academic year, the service liaises with individual lecturers regarding assessment strategies and inclusive learning and teaching strategies. In addition to this support provided prior to assessment, the service also works with faculty staff to ensure that support sessions are tailored to the needs of individual programmes. Typically, this tailoring is most effective in the first academic assignments, where students are supported in each component of assessment preparation, from conception, planning, structure, researching, referencing and proofing.

#### 7.4 MEDICAL SERVICE

National College of Ireland provides a subsidised medical Service to all full-time & Springboard registered students. This is a comprehensive health Service which mirrors the Service a student could expect to receive from his/her General Practitioner. Students are **charged €10 per appointment and the balance is paid by the College. Appointments are made by contacting the Hanover Medical Centre on (01) 6750040 or email [reception@hanovermedical.ie](mailto:reception@hanovermedical.ie)**

#### 7.5 COUNSELLING SERVICE

The Counselling Service provides students with the opportunity to discuss any difficulties they may be experiencing with a specialist student counsellor in strict confidence. The counsellor helps by listening without judgement, offering new perspectives and working with students on strategies that will help them through a wide range of difficulties, including but not limited to:

- Alcohol Dependence
- Substance Misuse and/or Dependence
- Bereavement
- Confidence
- Depression
- Anxiety

- Family Issues
- Loneliness
- Physical Abuse
- Procrastination and Motivation
- Relationships (Social and Sexual)
- Self-Harm
- Sexual Abuse
- Stress
- Suicidal Thoughts

The Counselling Service is provided free of charge to all full-time registered learners at NCI. Part-time learners who wish to avail of the Service are advised to contact the counsellor directly and a fee for the Service will apply.

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### 7.5.1 Confidentiality

The information shared in a counselling session is considered highly confidential and will only be disclosed to a third party in exceptional circumstances, such as:

- When there is a risk of harm to the learner or others
- When there is a legal obligation to share information

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### 7.5.2 Accessing the Service

Appointments to meet with the counsellor can be organised through Student Support or the learners can contact the counsellor directly. The counsellor meets with learners on-site at National College of Ireland. Appointments are scheduled at times that are convenient to the learners changing each semester as required. The counsellor will meet learners outside of hours in emergency situations.

## 7.6 STUDENT ASSISTANCE FUND

The purpose of the Student Assistance Fund (SAF) is to provide financial support to disadvantaged students who would be unable to fully benefit from third-level education without external support. The Student Assistance Fund is funded by the Irish Government and part-funded by the European Social Fund programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning (PEIL) 2014-2020.

The SAF is best described as a relief fund as opposed to a survival package. Students are encouraged to source additional supports outside the fund as typically the fund will ease a financial burden rather than totally alleviating the situation.

Currently the fund is broken into four parts:

1. SAF Emergency Payment (Full-time students) - This is a payment that the fund will make to a full-time student who is experiencing extreme financial difficulties to assist with the costs of going to college for the year.
2. SAF HEAR Payment - This is an automatic payment issued to full-time students from socio-economic groups who enter the college through the HEAR scheme.

3. SAF Standard Payment (Part-time students) – This is a payment issued to registered part-time students from one of the target groups **as specified by the HEA’s National Access Plan**.
4. SAF Emergency Payment – A student can apply for an emergency payment from the fund to assist with urgent financial costs. This application can be made in addition to a SAF standard payment application and will be assessed on a case by case basis by the SAF Committee. Applications for this fund must be made in person by calling into the Learning and Teaching Office.

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### 7.6.1 Eligibility

SAF is available to full and part-time learners who are participating on a course of no less than one year in duration and that leads to an undergraduate or postgraduate qualification. The categories below serve as an example of some of the instances in which a learner may be approved for funding.

Please Note: a learner is not automatically approved for funding because they fall into one of the categories listed below. Each application is reviewed on an individual basis and a decision is informed by the guidelines below.

- Learner must be experiencing considerable financial difficulty
- Learner is unable to meet daily living expenses
- Financial difficulties are negatively impacting on education
- Sudden or unseen expenses that a learner is unable to meet
- Learner is in financial difficulty due to bereavement in the family
- Learner is in financial difficulty due to family breakdown
- Loss of income from a student and/or parent/guardian
- Learner is from one of the target groups as **specified by the HEA’s National Access Plan**

International Students are NOT eligible for SAF.

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### 7.6.2 Expenses Covered

The following expenses are covered under the SAF:

- Books / Materials
- Transport
- Rent
- Child Care Costs
- Heating / Lighting
- Medical
- Disability

Please Note: Tuition Fees and Loans are not covered under the SAF.

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### 7.6.3 Applying for the Student Assistance Fund

In order to apply a student must be registered and complete the Student Assistance Fund Application Form which is available on NCI360. At present part-time students must complete a paper based application form and return to the Educational Engagement Officer for review.

An application will then go into an online Review Queue for assessment by two members of the SAF Committee. They will be checking the documents, confirming the amount to be paid based on the guidelines and ensuring the application is eligible. The aim is to have this assessment done within 10 working days however sometimes if there has been a huge amount of applications this is not always possible.

If the application is incorrect (e.g. incorrect paperwork, not enough evidence) – the applicant will be emailed and advised what is required. If the applicant is deemed ineligible, they could be rejected at that stage.

If the applicant is approved their status on NCI360 will be changed to approved. Each month then the SAF Committee meet to discuss emergency financial applications and to ratify that month's payments. Once this sign off is done by the Committee all names are sent to Finance for a cheque to be drawn up. This normally takes a week and the applicant will be emailed when the cheque is ready for collection.

To make an appeal a student must complete a Student Assistance Fund Appeal Form and return it to saf@ncirl.ie

## 7.7 ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY SUPPORT SERVICE

The aim of the Assistive Technology (ATSS) is to dismantle the barriers to education for students with disabilities by harnessing the potential of technology. The AT Service promotes independent learning by providing technology and tailored training to meet the needs of individual students.

ATSS works closely with the Disability Support Service to remove **obstacles to learners'** attainment and progression. Following the Educational Needs Assessment, ATSS will conduct an Assistive Technology Assessment to determine what combination of supports best suits **the learner's needs**. Through an Assistive Technology (AT) assessment, technology is identified and individual supports are coordinated that will assist the student in overcoming obstacles and make their learning environments more accessible. This is accomplished through a range of services and initiatives, including but not limited to:

- Weekly workshops on a wide variety of AT software
- Tailored One-to-one sessions
- **Management of the College's Dedicated Assistive Technology Centre**
- Creating awareness amongst staff & students in the area of disability and accessibility
- Promotion of peer-to-peer support
- Introduction and mainstreaming of inclusive AT processes within NCI

**ATSS believes that raising awareness is a key factor in a learner's engagement and ultimate academic success. If faculty, staff and learners are not aware of how a student's disability**

impacts on their ability to learn then they will not understand how they can make situations more accessible for that student. As such, the service runs, as part of faculty induction day, awareness sessions for staff. As part of Student Orientation the ATSS introduces learners to the area of disability and accessibility and in particular the technology available within the Assistive Technology Centre. Mainstreaming the introduction of inclusive AT processes within NCI also encourages students with disabilities or learning/health difficulties to become independent learners.

## 7.8 MATHEMATICS DEVELOPMENT AND SUPPORT SERVICE

The role of the Mathematics Development and Support Service (MDSS) is fourfold: first, the service is a complementary service, scaffolding the learning facilitated by our schools, through the provision of dedicated workshops and tutorials; second, the service is consultative, through representation on programmatic reviews and advising on module development; third, the service is collaborative, contributing and engaging nationally, through the Irish Mathematics Support Network, so as to disseminate best practice throughout the NCI with regard mathematics teaching; fourth, the service is a bridge, facilitating the progression of our incoming students by providing and delivering dedicated modules that cater for our Schools prerequisite needs.

A primary goal of the service is to empower students with confidence to take responsibility for their own mathematical learning through active involvement in service programmes. The service provides an informal environment for students who are experiencing difficulties or wish to improve their understanding of and confidence in mathematical concepts. In particular, the service offers student support through the promotion and hosting of relevant mathematical events at both undergraduate and postgraduate level, these include timetabled tutorials and workshops as well as one-to-one student support.

The service supports all programmes across the School of Business and School of Computing that contain a mathematical content. Tutorials and workshops are tightly coupled to programme module delivery and typically concentrate on those areas, as identified by module lecturers in consultation with the service, that students had been finding extra challenging. The tutorial/workshop environment offers students the opportunity to progress through module content at their own pace, ensuring those challenging concepts have been explored and given due time.

MDSS also provides support to Postgraduate students with respect to their final year dissertations and in particular their hypothesis formulation and testing. This support consists of a series of lectures in research methodology and in particular quantitative data analysis. Support of postgraduate students is provided on a one-to-one basis with supports being tailored for the individual research question.

A popular service provided to students is the services Examination Focused Workshops. These dedicated workshops typically begin four weeks before examinations and run up to examination completion. The sessions concentrate on examination structure and those typical examination style questions, providing the student with as much exposure to past question style and techniques to assist in their solution.

## 7.9 COMPUTING SUPPORT SERVICE

The Computing Support Service (CSS), based in the School of Computing provides academic support for students in a variety of formats. Students can avail of one to one or small group support by contacting the Computing Support Tutor directly. A minimum of 2 hours of support workshops are scheduled as part of the weekly timetable of classes from Week 2 onwards. These sessions allow students to work on lab work and assignments outside of class time with the support of a tutor. Exam revision support is also provided toward the end of semester for modules with a terminal examination.

CSS can provide a range of supports to learners, including but not limited to:

- Online Support
- One-to-one Tutoring
- Small Group Tutorials
- Off Campus Support
- Examination Preparation and Revision
- Whole Class Tutorials

CSS is coordinated by one full time Computing Support Tutor (CST). Support is facilitated by both the CST and a number of part-time tutors. The team of part-time tutors consists of teaching assistants and associate faculty of the School of Computing. As the school provides a broad range of programmes with many modules it is necessary to have a flexible team of tutors with varying knowledge and skills to ensure that all technical modules can be adequately supported.

CSS has a dedicated page on the Colleges Virtual Learning Environment (Moodle). Students can find a schedule of extra classes and weekly workshops as well as past exam papers and revision material for their modules on this site.

## 7.10 LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SERVICES

The Library and Information Services of NCI are centralised in the Norma Smurfit Library, which provides learners, staff and corporate members with access to a wide network of information sources. A fully integrated library management system is in operation, which allows for the operation of an automated system of lending and self-service loans and returns. Users can also utilise specialist subject guides and request assistance with information requests and accessing current research. The library also operates a postal service to ensure all learners, whether full-time, part-time, distance or blended-learning, have equal access to the necessary resources for their programme.

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### 7.10.1 Lending Service

The principal function of the Library is lending items from its print and multimedia collections. The print collection contains primary textbooks for all current programmes, **supplemental texts in key subject areas, reference texts and 'desk-reserved' texts, which** often feature as the required reading for a programme. The multimedia collection is for staff only and contains a range of resources that can be used as part of the teaching strategy for a programme and its constituent modules.

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### 7.10.2 Print Resources

The library has several different print collections, depending on type of loan, which include main lending, reference collections and staff loan only. Books and reports held by the library are organised according to the Dewey Decimal Classification system, while current journals (periodicals) are arranged individually and alphabetically, with back issues bound together and arranged alphabetically. Journals may be photocopied but not borrowed from the Library. The library also operates a request service for high-demand items and desk-reserve service for theses and research reports.

Academic staff are involved in the acquisition process by submitting reading lists prior to the commencement of teaching and providing guidance regarding new publications in their area(s) of expertise.

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### 7.10.3 Inter-Library Loans

The library offers an inter-library loan/document supply service to staff and students of NCI. The service can provide requested articles and the loan of books from a number of different sources. The College has an account with the British Library Document Supply service so photocopies of requested articles and loans of codices can be obtained. Another means of obtaining articles is going direct to online publishers and downloading an electronic version of the text as requested. The ability to order from either online suppliers or the British Library gives the Library flexibility in terms of availability options. Requests for materials can also be submitted to other academic libraries in Ireland.

The library uses the British Library system to source books, and buys requested articles straight from the publisher. This service is available to academic staff and postgraduate students. Undergraduates can avail of the service where a case is made that the individual has exhausted all other means to obtain the item. In most cases this is a free service, but a fee may be charge depending on the price of the item in question.

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### 7.10.4 Journal Depositories, E-Books and Online Databases

The library has twenty online platforms, which contain up to forty-five individual databases. The content of these databases cover the primary subject areas of the college, including computing, business, H.R.M., accounting, psychology and education. Particular database providers include Emerald, I.E.E.E., Ebsco and Proquest. Four e-book collections are also available. A discovery tool is provided to students to assist with searches of these online resources. In addition, NCI also has an online repository containing the research publications of staff and students and a database of past exam papers.

Online databases are now a key learning resource and information source as they enlarge **the scope of the Library's collection and allow for greater equitable access for all cohorts of learners**, in particular improving off-campus accessibility.

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#### 7.10.5 Services to Learners with Additional Needs

The library offers a number of services to students who have additional needs and have been assessed as eligible by the Disability Officer. These include

- Special borrowing privileges: Undergraduate, diploma and certificate students with special borrowing privileges are offered an extended loan period of six weeks.
- Alternative formatting: Students with certain needs sometimes cannot make full use of traditional print material. In these circumstances the library will try to acquire any core texts in an accessible, electronic format for students.
- The provision of adapted study desks for students who have physical disabilities

As the additional needs of learners with a disability or mental/health difficulty can be multifaceted, the library liaises closely with the Disability Officer to ensure the most suitable combination of supports is provided.

##### 7.10.5.1 Texts in Alternative Formats

One of the most common requests from learners with additional needs is providing access to learning resources in alternative formats, in particular electronic versions that are compatible with portable reading devices and in formats that are compatible with assistive reading and annotation software. The library liaises directly with publishers to obtain copies of its print materials in suitable alternative formats.

##### 7.10.5.2 Assistive Technology Centre

As part of the fully-integrated supports offered to learners with a disability or **learning/health difficulty**, NCI Library is the location of the **College's Assistive Technology (AT) Centre**. **The AT Centre is testament to NCI's commitment to widening participation in higher and further education** as the additional needs of eligible learners can be met so that they have equal access to the learning resources relevant to their programmes. This space allows the library to accommodate the individual requirements and additional needs of learners with a disability or mental/health difficulty in respectful and conscientious manner.

Cooperation between the library, the Disability Support Service and the Assistive Technology Support Service is crucial to the successful management of the AT Centre. Please refer to Section 7.8 above for full details about the AT services by NCI.

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#### 7.10.6 Off-Campus Service

Off-campus students are those students who attend classes at a range of centres around the country, and are not based at the main NCI building. During programme orientation, off-campus students are informed of the role of Library and Information Services, in particular the services available to them and how these can be accessed remotely.

Off-Campus students have full borrowing rights to the NCI Library. Students may request materials and communicate with the library staff via telephone, email or post. Off-Campus students can order copies of relevant journal articles or reprints held by the library and can request photocopies of journal articles. All print materials must be returned to the NCI Library and return postage is payable by the student. Students also have full remote access **to the library's subject portals**, journal repositories and online databases.

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#### 7.10.7 User Education

NCI Library is actively involved in a number of information and education initiatives, each of which is intended to enhance the experience of a particular group of users. As users often have varying degrees of experience of accessing library and information services, it is important that the individual requirements of each user are taken into consideration at the initial point of contact.

The Library Help Centre was also established to assist students and academic staff with information literacy. The staff of this centre run library induction sessions for new students, group sessions for classes and one-to-one sessions for learners on online resource searching, academic writing, referencing, the literature review process, etc. The centre is also involved in the production of online and multimedia guides to the resources available to view on the library webpages. Academic staff may also avail of aspects of this service.

The library website is the primary source of information for all service users. As such, it provides a wide range of instructional guides and information documents on how to access the library and information services, how to reference correctly and how to undertake independent research. The website also contains subject resource guides, which direct learners to the learning resources most relevant to their programme.

The library helpdesk assists learners with practical issues related to accessing library and information services, i.e. locating books/journals, conducting relevant searches of online databases and journal depositories, copying learning resources for personal in accordance with copyright legislation, etc.

##### 7.10.7.1 Student Education

**As part of students' orientation programme**, the library provides an induction session to all learners during the first half of their first semester. This induction session addresses the following:

- Accessing the Library
- Introduction to the borrowing service and brief explanation of the collections
- Demonstration of photocopying/printing services
- Brief outline of plagiarism policies and best-practices regarding referencing
- Library rules and regulations
- Distribution of user guides

The library also offers classroom-based sessions at the request of Programme Directors and/or Coordinators. These sessions are often used to address the subject-specific requirements of learners on particular programmes and to provide practical demonstrations on accessing particular library or information services.

The Learning Support Service (LSS) also facilitates student education. Learning Support Tutors provide tutorials on library and information resources as part of their programmes for developing independent learning skills and effective research techniques. Please refer to Section 7.4 above for further details about the integrated, cross-college supports offered by LSS.

#### 7.10.7.2 Staff Education

All of the information and education initiatives aimed at learners can also be accessed by staff at NCI. In addition, staff can request specialist training in library and information **technology as part of the College's professional development programme. This training is designed to encourage staff to utilise items from the case studies collection as part of their modules' teaching and learning strategies. Staff are also encouraged to direct learners to particular resources within the library as part of the independent learning activities and/or assessments for their modules.**

### 7.11 CAREER DEVELOPMENT AND EMPLOYABILITY CENTRE

The Career Development and Employability Centre (CDEC) is committed to providing a confidential, student-centred career counselling, guidance and information service to NCI students. The CDEC:

- leverages an individual-first approach to create a unique student experience
- connects students to opportunities and networks
- unlocks student potential through careers education and tailored skills development

The CDEC operates according to the following principles:

- **Employable students are NCI's best ambassadors**
  - **Students' employability is most effectively enhanced through collaboration between the Careers Service, faculty, student services and support; and through student engagement with graduate recruiters and involvement in extracurricular activities or work experience;**
  - Learners can be empowered to manage their own careers effectively through effective careers education and guidance, and by facilitating independent learning and skills development
  - The quantity, quality and diversity of opportunities available to learners can be increased by developing long-term collaborative relationships with, and by providing an excellent service to, employers
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The service is focused on supporting students in developing and implementing realistic, informed career plans and facilitating the recruitment process for students and employers.

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### 7.11.1 Working with Learners

The Career Development and Employability Centre (CDEC) provides a high quality, comprehensive careers education, information, guidance and job search consultancy for learners both whilst at College and in the 9 months following graduation, and will assist learners in areas including self-awareness, career exploration, career decision-making, and achieving career goals. The service focuses primarily on full time students.

The CDEC supports learners:

- assisting them with identifying their personal career goals and plans for further study through accredited career management skills modules offered as an elective in the School of Business, one-to-one, online small group and classroom workshops.
- assisting them in marketing themselves to employers and universities through professional skills training sessions on:
  - Writing CVS and Cover Letters
  - Preparing for Aptitude and Psychometric Tests
  - Completing Application Forms
  - Career Research and Choice
  - Interview Skills
  - Networking
- assisting learners who are interested in experiential learning opportunities to secure a work placement or internship as appropriate.
- proactively targeting and maintaining links with new and established employers.
- maintaining a comprehensive Careers Library online via moodle containing up to date information.

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### 7.11.2 Working with Academics

The CDEC proactively works with Academic Staff and Faculty to enable them to make effective use of labour market information and graduate destination information in their academic planning and to integrate careers education into the curriculum.

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### 7.11.3 Working with Employers

The CDEC maintains existing and develops new with employers to facilitate graduate recruitment, internships and the recruitment of experienced professionals by:

- delivering employer event programs, including on-campus presentations and recruitment, interview days, career breakfasts and careers fairs
- Enhancing the visibility of employers by marketing them to the college community, i.e. learners, alumni and faculty
- Assisting employers in advertising graduate opportunities, internships and opportunities for experienced professionals.

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#### 7.11.4 Work Placement Programme

NCI operates a Work Placement Programme for selected programmes. Programmes which include the Work Placement Programme, provide learners with the opportunity to integrate their theoretical studies with practical experience in the work environment.

In addition, the placement offers learners:

- The opportunity to gain a better understanding of the professional, commercial or industrial world
- Increased knowledge and ability to make realistic career decisions
- Support in developing of confidence, maturity and personal transferable skills

#### 7.12 INTERNATIONAL OFFICE

The International Support team is made up of the International Officer, Assistant International Officer and International Peer Mentors. International Peer Mentors are NCI international students who work part-time in a paid role, to help with the Welcome Programme and to organise social activities with students during the academic year.

**We want International students' experience at NCI to be as exciting, inclusive and as successful as possible.** We encourage students to join as many events as possible to make friends and to get to know their new home.

The International Peer Mentors organise a wide range of events and outings during the academic year to bring international together and help them explore everything Dublin has to offer. It is an opportunity for students to share their cultures with each other, learn about new customs and get more familiar with Ireland at the same time.

The International Peer Mentors coordinate the International Society to deliver student events and International Festivals such as Diwali, Chinese New Year, Holi and International Culture Day.

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##### 7.12.1 Pre-Arrival Communications and Support

To help students prepare for their journey to NCI and Ireland we communicate with them by email, social media and webinars three months prior to the start of their studies.

###### 1. Welcome Email

This email is the first step in the student's journey in preparing to travel to NCI. We ask them to join our NCI International Freshers group for their intake, read the preparation guide, consider their accommodation and we also give a little information on Student visas.

###### 2. Accommodation Email

This email gives more information on Accommodation and we will ask that students read the accommodation guide. We will also introduce the booking process for NCI On Campus accommodation and advise students to read the On Campus booking guide that is published on the website.

### 3. Careers Email

This email introduces the Careers service to students and the purpose of the email is to give students an overview of the service and the support they will can expect to receive.

### 4. Webinars

To support the email communications with students we offer Webinars that are scheduled in the three months prior to students arriving. The webinars allow students to get some more detailed information and ask questions about Accommodation, Careers and any Pre-Departure queries they may have. The webinars are repeated several.

### 5. Social Media

We invite students to join a Facebook Group for their intake as this allows students to connect with other new students and the international office prior to their arrival.

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## 7.12.2 Welcome Programme

All new international students attend a Welcome Programme that is designed to give them the important information they need as a new student along with the opportunity for social events to help them settle into their new life in Ireland.

### 1. Airport Pick Up

Students who book the service are met by a driver at the arrivals hall in the Airport and brought directly to their accommodation in Dublin. The driver gives the Student a map and a letter confirming the date and time of their Welcome Meeting at NCI.

### 2. Welcome Meeting

The Welcome meeting is pre-scheduled for all students and compulsory to attend. It is led by an International Peer Mentor with a group of up to 15 new students. At this meeting students are given a Welcome Pack which includes letters they need as a new student. The welcome meeting includes a Campus tour and an optional city tour.

### 3. Induction Meeting

The induction meeting is pre-scheduled for all students and compulsory to attend. It is delivered by the International officer with a group of up to 60 students. At this meeting with cover all the information students need to help them succeed at their studies and to settle into their new life in Ireland.

### 4. The Essentials Meeting

The Essentials meeting is pre-scheduled for all students and compulsory to attend. It is delivered by the International Officer and Assistant international officer for up to 60

students. It covers the essential information international students need for their Student Visa, Bank Account, PPSN, re-entry visa and working in Ireland. We issue registered students their Student Visa letter at this meeting.

#### 5. Accommodation Information Meeting

This meeting is optional and for students who are searching for Off Campus accommodation. It gives students information and tips for their search and the opportunity to meet other students who are also searching for accommodation.

#### 6. Social Activities

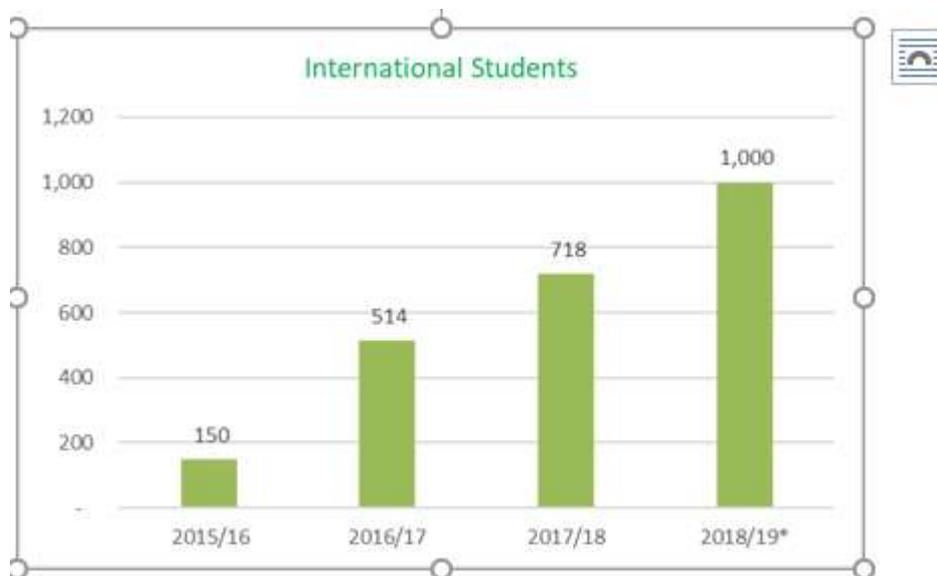
A wide range of social are offered during the Welcome Programme and they include;

- Coffee & Chat
- Icebreaker Games
- Trips to areas in Dublin such as Howth, Pheonix Park, Portmarnock, Malahide and Glendalough
- International Student Freshers Night

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### 7.12.3 Supporting International Students

The number of international students has grown significantly since 2015 with large intakes of new students in September and January each year.



**Fig 4 – Growth in international student numbers**

The International Office supports students with their queries and letters to support their visa during the academic year. This service is offered with;

1. Drop-in service at the International Office

Students can drop in to the office Monday to Friday from 10am to 12noon and 2pm to 4pm.

## 2. Email

Students can also email their queries to [Internationalsupport@ncirl.ie](mailto:Internationalsupport@ncirl.ie)

## 3. Appointment

Students can arrange an appointment with the International Office for queries that require more time.

### 7.13 STUDENT EXPERIENCE

As well as providing academic supports to learners, NCI is committed to supporting the **overall wellbeing of its students. A student's social life, physical health and mental health** are all intrinsic elements that contribute to a positive experience while studying at NCI. Creating a well-rounded student experience necessitates providing and promoting an innovative and participative service based on holistic supports and extra-curricular opportunities for the entire student body

The purpose of the Student Support and Recreation service at NCI is to, creating a well-rounded college experience. The role of the service is to encourage all students to get actively involved in extra-curricular activities.

NCI recognises values healthy lifestyles and recognises that positive wellbeing can impact the quality of the student experience. Therefore, the College believes a student-centred approach to wellbeing is the most effective and can be achieved through personal development and welfare initiatives designed to engage students in the college community and to reach out to the necessary services.

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#### 7.13.1 Sports Services

**The college promotes the Wellness Concept which values a student's social, physical, psychological and spiritual wellbeing while at College.**

##### 7.13.1.1 Facilities

The college has links with a number of local sports and recreation facilities that students can avail of. Students should contact the Student Experience & Sport department. For details of how to book these facilities.

##### 7.13.1.2 Gym

NCI links with a local gym in order to provide fitness options for students. Annual membership costs and conditions of membership may vary annually and can be **confirmed with the Students' Union or** Student Experience and Sport department.

### 7.13.1.3 Active Events

The college holds a number of events throughout the year to promote health and fitness. Events range from talks and charity events to a student/staff sports day. All students are welcome to participate in these events.

### 7.13.1.4 Mascot

**The college mascot is the NCI Panther and takes the persona of “Paddy the Panther”.**

The mascot represents all students and staff in the college and is symbolic of valour, **courage and power. The accompanying motto “Strong As One”** is designed to embody the nature of NCI; representing staff, faculty and students, coming together to achieve the goal of a great education and positive college experience.

### 7.13.1.5 Awards

The annual Clubs & Societies Awards is held in semester 2. The awards recognise the achievements of the students throughout the year. Categories include (but are not limited to). Best New or Improved Club, Best New or Improved Society, Best Civic Contribution, Fresher of the Year, Best Athlete, Club Event of the Year, Society Event of the Year, Society Individual of the Year, Club Person of the Year, Society of the Year, **Club of the Year, President’s Award.**

**Nomination forms are provided by the Students’ Union Clubs & Societies officer and the Student Experience and Sport department.** Nomination deadline dates vary each year. Winners are selected based on a scoring system for the nomination form and **interview. The Awards Committee’s decision is final.**

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## 7.13.2 Orientation

The college holds varying orientation sessions for new students. Students should refer to communications from the college and the college website for information on these sessions.

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## 7.13.3 Student Leaders (Peer Mentors)

Each year, a number of NCI students are trained to provide support for the student body. The Student Leaders are available throughout the year to aid students in any issues they have and direct them to the appropriate support. All Student Leaders are Garda vetted and required to sign a confidentiality agreement prior to starting their role.

## 7.14 RECREATION SERVICE

The Recreation Service (RS) is responsible for supporting and encouraging the growth and development of Clubs and Societies in partnership with the NCI Students' Union Clubs and Societies Officer. Clubs and Societies are at the forefront of student life on campus, and NCI is affiliated with National Governing Bodies such as FAI, IRFU, GAA, and the Board of Irish College Societies. RS represents all societies and encourages their nomination for the

National Awards, which celebrate and reward the individuals who provide a brilliant quality of society activity.

**NCI is also affiliated with the Student Sport Ireland (SSI). RS's external involvement with SSI encourages all Clubs and students to compete in domestic leagues and intercollegiate competitions. RS's involvement with industry peers provides opportunities for clubs and societies to participate at a higher level, which positively increases the College's profile.**

To ensure that the College provides access to a range of sport and recreation facilities, the service has created a number of external relationships. SV Fitness is a key external stakeholder in providing gym and health club facilities for full time and part time students and the Dublin City Council and Dublin sports and recreation centres externally provide Clubs and Societies facilities for extra-curricular activity. Clubs and Societies have access to the NCI bus, which is booked by the service internally through the NCI Facilities Office. Additionally, Clubs and Societies have access to internal class rooms, theatre rooms, atrium, and external quad area, which is booked by the service through the NCI Commercial Office.

RS also recognises students' academic and sporting excellence through the Sports Scholarship Programme and Academic Wall of Excellence. The Wall of Fame also celebrates student leaders and achievers who have demonstrated innovation and determination while studying at NCI.

## 7.15 STUDENTS' UNION

**The Students' Union represents the interests of and provides a source or support and guidance for all NCI students.** The executive team is made up of 5 roles (President, Vice Presidents, Clubs & Societies Officer, Entertainments Officer, Communications Officer) and an Administrative assistant.

**The Students' Union organises a number of events to promote the social college experience for students.** Events are open to all students of the college. Any student experiencing **difficulty with the Students' Union** can report it to the Student Experience department.

## 7.16 LEARNER REPRESENTATIVES

NCI is fully committed **to ensuring that learners' views on academic matters are heard** and responded to. The College relies on Class Representatives to ensure we continually listen to and engage with learners to improve teaching, learning and assessment provisions, in addition to reviewing and enhancing the quality of the student experience at both the local School and larger institutional levels.

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### 7.16.1 Terms of Reference

Representatives work in partnership with staff to improve the student experience for both current and future learners, while also ensuring that academic and support staff are continually listening to, engaging with and constructively responding to the views of learners.

In particular, Class Representatives have the following responsibilities:

- **Consideration and referral of issues relating to the programme to the Programme Committee when necessary**

- Referral of suggestions for specific changes to the programme to the Programme Committee for consideration
- Dissemination of information affecting learners within the scope of the Programme.
- Provision of responses to issues previously referred to the Programme Committee or School Committee

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Through its Class Representative Liaison procedure, Class Representatives have the opportunity to directly discuss issues raised by learners with Programme Directors and Programme Coordinators. More complex or systemic issues can they be raised through the reporting structure outlined in Chapter 2 (2.7.6).

**Each class year within a programme shall elect two representatives who will meet with the Dean of School and all relevant academic and support staff for consultations about learner views relating to programme content, delivery, assessment and development and to identify areas of concern for their respective class groups. This liaison will take place at least once a semester or more often as required. The election of the Class Representative is facilitated by the Student Services department.**

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#### 7.16.2 Nomination and Election Process

Learner Services, in conjunction with National College of Ireland Students Union (NCISU), oversees the election and appointment of 2 Class Representatives for each full-time and part-time programme. The nomination and election of Class Representatives usually takes place between weeks 4 and 6 of the academic year.

Learners can be nominated in the following 3 ways:

1. A learner can nominate themselves
2. A learner can nominate a fellow learner with their prior consent
3. A member of staff can nominate a learner with their prior consent

Nominations are made by completing a nomination form, which outlines the roles & responsibilities of a Class Representative and the process for election. Nomination forms are available on the internet and from both Learner Services and NCISU.

The following conditions apply to the nomination process:

- The source of a nomination must remain confidential.
- A fellow learner must be aware that they are being nominated.
- All nominees will be asked to speak to the class briefly on why they would make a good Class Representative.

Learners then vote for their preferred Class Representative. The two individuals who receive the most votes are then elected to the position.

All Class Representatives receive training from the NCISU, which is supported by the Union of Students in Ireland (USI) and Student Partnership in Quality Scotland (sparqs). This training provides Class Representatives with information regarding the governance structures in NCI at the programme, school and college levels, and outlines their responsibilities in terms of reporting forward to the appropriate staff member or committee and reporting back to their fellow learners.

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### 7.16.3 Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement

Class Representatives are the foundation of learner representation at NCI and perform a crucial role in realising **the College's long-term** ambition of engaging students and staff as partners in learning and teaching. To ensure that Class Representatives play an active role in **NCI's quality assurance and enhancement activities, they work closely with:**

- Programme Directors to ensure that all relevant issues relating to the teaching, learning and assessment strategies of the programme are listened to and appropriate remedies promptly actioned.

AND

- Programme Coordinators to ensure that all feedback is formally reported and recorded, and all issues escalated to the relevant staff member as appropriate.

Class Representatives can also escalate issues to be discussed at Programme Committee, **the central unit in each School's quality assurance system. Issues raised here that are impacting on the quality of a programme's teaching, learning and assessment provisions** or that require immediate attention to ensure the continued quality enhancement of a programme can be referred to School Committee and, as appropriate, Academic Council.

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### 7.16.4 Student Engagement

As one of the pilot institutions in the National Student Engagement Programme (NStEP), NCI places huge importance on improving student engagement and is committed to the long-term objective of installing students as partners in the development, delivery and evaluation of its education programmes. The primary aim of NStEP is to develop student capabilities to engage in quality assurance and quality enhancement within higher education institutions, and to design practical guidelines and resources to assist all higher and further education institutions in building effective engagement practices. NStEP identified 5 key outputs and **NCI is the project lead for developing national guidelines on the "Role and Recruitment of Class representatives"**. **NCI's involvement in NStEP and its lead role in the above project is** testament to the importance it places on the Class Representative Liaison mechanism within its own quality assurance and enhancement system. Please refer to Chapter 5 (5.2.1) for **further information about Student Engagement at NCI and the College's involvement in NStEP.**

**Learner feedback features prominently in NCI's quality assurance and enhancement mechanisms.** In particular, learner feedback forms a crucial component in programme reviews, both the annual iterations conducted by the School and those conducted as part of **QQI's programme revalidation process.** To obtain appropriate learner feedback regarding the teaching, learning and assessment strategies of its programmes, and the facilities and support services provided to learners, NCI operates an anonymous survey system. This system supplements the feedback provided via the Class Representative Liaison mechanism discussed in Chapter 2 (2.7.7). Please also refer to Chapter 3 (3.1.3.3) for further information about the role of learner feedback in Programme Reviews and in enhancing teaching, learning and assessment strategies at the school and college levels.

Services evaluations are carried out using our anonymous survey system in Week 3 of Semester 2. The primary objective of these evaluations is to provide each Service Unit with both quantitative and qualitative feedback from learners, which can be used to inform annual reports, conduct reviews and to develop action plans to address emerging and/or recurrent issues. Evaluations are carried out for:

- Student Services
- Library and Information Services
- IT Services
- Catering
- Facilities

The survey system is managed by the Quality Assurance and Statistical Services Office. Any feedback provided by learners is anonymised and aggregated, and compiled in a report that is forwarded directly to the Head of the Service Unit in question. As feedback is sought from all learners, i.e. full-time, part-time, distance, block-delivery, etc. the survey questionnaire is altered appropriate to each cohort's circumstances.