11. Support for Learners

Policy Title	**Support for Learners**
Date Approved	17/12/2018
Effective From	02/01/2019
Monitor	Dean of Academic Affairs / QA Committee
Summary	This policy provides an overview of the policies directly related to the supports that the College has in place for its learners. These supports cover both academic and non-academic issues and are intended for a diverse learner body.
Related Policies	
Revision History &	Version 1 – 2019
Commencement Date & Date of Next Review	Commencement Date (Version 1): 02/01/2020
	Date of Next Review: Following Independent Assessment from Re-engagement process
Purpose	The purpose of this policy is to provide an overview of the learning supports that are made available by the College and the standards with which the College should maintain in this regard. It also is intended to outline how the learner perspective is incorporated in the College's management and operations, as well as the responsibilities of learners.
Scope	This policy applies to all learners on FET and HET programmes of Dorset College.
Policy Statement	Dorset College recognises that it has a duty to support its learners in a fair and reasonable manner. It also acknowledges that the College must ensure that its support provision is transparent, that learners are informed of these, and that the learner perspective is taken into account. Furthermore, the College also recognises the importance of outlining to learners how it expects its learners to conduct themselves. The policies in this section are intended to provide detail and clarity to these areas.

11.1. Academic Learning Supports

The College has in place a variety of academic learning supports for its learners to assist them during their programme(s). These academic learning supports include:

- Swift response to miscellaneous academic queries through liaison with the programme leader and/or Academic Operations Lead.
- Study support skills.
- English language support.
- Library services support.
- Work experience support.
- IT support.

Given the disperse nature of the supports on offer, the College recognises the importance of ensuring that the supports are integrated and that learners are regularly informed of these supports. To ensure this cohesion and information, the academic learning supports are coordinated by the QA Officer. Having a single person in charge of the coordination of these learning supports helps ensure a clarity for learners as to where to request any support and a cohesion of the supports that are offered. Furthermore, the College is committed to ensuring its learners are fully informed of these supports and will promote these through the College induction and VLE MOODLE, as well as through its learner handbook.

11.2. Study support skills

The College commits to the continued provision of study support sessions regularly during the academic year. These sessions are free for all learners to attend and cover areas such as: Academic Writing, Referencing, Essay writing, Research skills, in-class note taking, study skills, and examination preparation techniques. The provision of these sessions is coordinated by the College Librarian who ensures that learners are aware of these sessions and monitors who is attending them. They will also follow up with the attendees to assess if learners felt they benefited from the sessions and if learners would like other specific topics covered in future sessions.

11.3. English language support

The provision of English language support is facilitated by the College's English language school. However, should a learner wish to avail of such supports, they need to first discuss with the QA Officer who will liaise with the Director of Studies in the College's English Language School. These English language supports are not intended to compensate for learners who do not have the minimum required level of English language competency necessary for admission onto a programme – these must always be met. Instead, these support sessions are intended to provide specific supports that a non-native English speaker may need when undertaking an academic programme. These would include: an explanation of technical jargon specific to the cognate area of the programme being studied, clarification of assessment terminology, understanding of the meaning of examination questions.

11.4. Library services support

The library services support is facilitated by the College librarian, who provides regular information on the library facilities. These sessions cover: library resources available to learners, how to access information in the library, e-Resources available to learners. These sessions are open to all learners. The College Librarian will liaise with the QA Officer to assess attendance levels at sessions and with learners to get their feedback on sessions and what they would like in future sessions.

11.5. Work based learning support

The College will have a dedicated liaison person who will support learners who avail of the work-based learning modules, where they are offered on programmes. This will ordinarily be a member of the College's teaching faculty. This person will be the point of contact for the learner for any work-based learning queries they may have. They will also provide support for the learner during their work-based learning and will inform the Programme Manager if a learner is experiencing difficulty during their work-based learning experience.

11.6. IT Support

The College has dedicated ICT personnel who provide technical support for learners. This technical support is available as a drop-in service, or learners can make an appointment with the College's IT staff through Moodle. The IT support covers all aspects of how learners interact with their programme through the use of technology. This would include support for the use of IT hardware provided by the College, access issues that the learner may experience when trying to logon from their IT equipment to eResources provided by the College, downloading and use of software related to the programmes that they are studying in the College.

12. Non-Academic Learning Supports

To supplement the Academic Learning Supports outlined previously, the College also has an array of Non-Academic Learning Supports. Dorset College is committed to providing holistic support for each learner and through the Student Experience Leader ensures there is an array of academic and non-academic learning supports, which are set out earlier in the QAM and include:

- Learning Enhancement
- Pastoral Care
- Counselling service
- Careers Support Service
- Learners with additional learning needs or disabilities
- Class Representative support
- International Learners
- Healthcare

Given the diverse nature of the supports on offer, the College recognises the importance of ensuring that the supports are integrated and that learners are regularly informed of these supports. To ensure this cohesion and information, the academic learning supports are co-ordinated by the Admissions Lead and the Quality Assurance Lead. Having a single person in charge of the co-ordination of these learning supports helps ensure a clarity for learners as to where to request any

support and a cohesion of the supports that are offered. Furthermore, the College is committed to ensuring its learners are fully informed of these supports and will promote these through the College induction and VLE, as well as through its learner handbook.

12.1. Pastoral Care

The College is aware of the adjustment that learners can face in transitioning into a further or higher education programme, whether they are coming from secondary school, returning to education or transitioning to the Irish education system from another country.

Furthermore, learners may also struggle during their academic career as their coursework proves challenging or personal circumstances impede their ability to complete their academic tasks as competently as possible.

Therefore, the College has in place pastoral care support, which assists the learner with their transition to further or higher education, as well as supporting learners during their studies with the College.

12.2. Counselling Service

The College has a fully qualified counsellor on its staff who fulfils the role of learner counsellor, in addition to other roles. Should a learner wish to avail of this service, or if a member of staff recommends that a learner avail of the College's counselling service, they should liaise with the QA Officer who will arrange a session in conjunction with the learner.

The College provides up to four fully subsidised counselling sessions, and an additional four sessions are partially subsidised. Should a learner wish to avail of further counselling sessions, the College would consider further subsidising on a case-by-case basis.

12.3. Learners with Additional Learning Needs or Disabilities

The College is committed to ensuring access to its programmes are not restrictive to learners with additional learning needs or disabilities, and that all learners are supported during their studies. Therefore, once a learner has demonstrable evidence that minimum entry requirements have been met, the College will provide assistance to learners to support their achievement on their programme.

Central to how it facilitates learners is the College's adherence to the principles of Universal Design, as set out by Ahead. The College is committed to ensuring that these are embedded across its Teaching, Learning and Assessment.

Dorset College is committed to enhancing the learning experience for all learners and to this end has appointed our Head Librarian as Head of Enhancement.

12.4. Teaching:

- The College will ensure that course notes are made available to learners in a format appropriate for them.
- The College will provide CPD training for faculty on teaching in accessible formats.
- The College will support faculty to integrate the 7 principles of universal design into their teaching methodology.

12.5. Learning:

- The College will provide study skills sessions for all learners including masterclasses on academic referencing and writing, and specific sessions on study skills for learners with disabilities.
- The College will encourage learners to bring any additional academic needs to their attention at the earliest possible instance (ideally at registration).

12.6. Assessment:

- The College will provide all reasonable accommodations required for the assessment of its learners.
- The College will provide clear information on the assessments, and expected criteria, that it will use.
- The College will facilitate, if possible, alternative assessment instruments to be used, where required.

As the College premises consists of listed buildings, the ability of the College to provide accessible infrastructure is limited. However, the College does try to ensure its premises are as accessible as possible, whilst working within these restrictions.

12.7. Class Representative Support

The College recognises the important role that class representatives perform in ensuring that the learner experience is as positive as possible. They can often act as a vital link between the College's management and administrative staff and its learners and ensure that issues that arise for learners can be resolved in a timely manner. Each year a class representative is elected by their peers and facilitated by the Student Experience Leader.

One meeting per semester is arranged with the relevant programme leader with the Student Experience Leader acting as Secretary.

The College recognises that class representatives need to be informed and supported in the role that they are undertaking. To support its class representatives, the College provides class representative training that is aligned to the NStEP programme. This covers the following areas:

- The Class Rep role
- The Student Learning Experience
- Gathering Learner Opinion
- Effective Feedback
- Developing Solutions
- Making Change Happen
- Closing the Loop

It is also the College's intention to become part of the NStEP programme.

12.8. Student Governance

Dorset College is committed to collaborating with the wider learning community and to this end has empowered the learners to set up a Student Council to discuss matters; academic and non-academic which impact on their learner journey and to work in partnership with the College. The Student Council meets every six weeks and works to an agreed agenda and is in addition to the Class Representative System.

The Student Experience Leader facilitates this process and acts as secretary and administrative support for example booking rooms and minuting their meetings, which are agreed by the Student Council.

12.8.1. Membership
- Chair
- Secretary (non-active)
- Head Representative
- Class Representatives

12.8.2. Terms of Reference
- A Head Representative is elected by a simple majority of all present.
- Representatives vote on the agreed issues; academic and non-academic.
- Issues which are voted on by majority are brought by the Head Representative to the Senior Management Group (facilitated by the Student Experience Leader) for actions to be agreed.

12.9. International Learners

The College recognises that international learners (For the purposes of this policy, international learners' refers to non-EEA learners) may need dedicated supports. It also recognises and commits fulfilling all of its obligations in line with QQI's Code of Practice for Provision of Programmes of Education and Training to International Learners. The College endeavours to follow the principles of learner integration, transparent and up-to-date information provision and facilitating feedback mechanisms that are embedded within the QQI Code of Conduct.

12.9.1. Protection of Enrolled Learners (PEL)

- Ensure Protection for Learners arrangements are in place for all programmes that International learners enrol on and that learner are aware of such arrangements.
- Publicise its refund policy and make this available to all learners and potential learners.
- Ensure that the information provided to international learners prior to enrolment, such as that in its marketing material, is clear, transparent and accurate. It will also provide details of who an international learner may contact for more information prior to enrolment, if they so wish.
- Provide programme specific information to international learners prior to the commencement of their programme, such as programme start dates, attendance policy etc.

- Ensure learners are aware of all costs associated with a programme prior to commencing on that programme. This would include medical insurance costs and other auxiliary costs.
- Ensure that learners are aware of how the College collects fees and the schedule for this.
- Engage in due diligence to ensure that it works with reputable international recruitment agencies.
- Provide clear details of the entry requirements for its programmes to international learners.
- Provide any necessary supports for international learners who may need assistance transitioning to Irish society or the Irish education system.

NOTE:
The list above is not intended as a replacement for the obligations of the College as set out in *QQI's Code of Practice for Provision of Programmes of Education and Training to International Learners*. The College is fully committed to the obligations of the Code of Practice.

12.10. Healthcare

Should a learner wish to avail of healthcare services, the College has an agreement in place with a local GP, who will provide their services to learners of Dorset College at a reduced rate. Information on this is made available to learners through a range of communications.

12.11. Personal Mitigating Circumstances Procedure

	Procedure Stage	Responsibility	Evidence
1	**Inform College:** If a learner foresees their absence from an assessment, they should inform the Quality Assurance Lead who will request the learner to complete a Personal Mitigating Circumstances (PMCs) form, and any supporting documentation. This form will be found in the Learner Handbook and on Moodle.	Learner Quality Assurance Lead	Personal Mitigating Circumstances form
2	**Review of Personal Mitigating Circumstances request:** All PMCs are reviewed by the Academic Management Committee, who will make a decision to grant or reject an extension or deferral based on the details of the PMC and the weight of supporting documentation	Academic Management Group	Minutes of AMG

supporting this. Ordinarily, a deferral will only be granted when there are significant personal circumstances that impede a learner from submitted or sitting for, an assessment on the set date. Such circumstances may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Death of a family member.
- Illness to themselves or close family member where a doctor has recommended that the learner not attend, or is incapable of submitting, an assessment or sitting an exam.

3	Response to Learner:	Academic Management Committee	Email to learner

3   Response to Learner:

The learner will be notified by email of the decision of the AMG, with reasons for the decision. Should a deferral be approved, the learner will be advised of a new assessment submission or sitting date.

If the deferral is not approved, the learner will be advised that they are required to submit or sit for the assessment at the previously agreed date.

12.12. Attendance Policy

The College recognises the importance of attendance and the correlation that this is shown to have on assessment performance. It also recognises the obligations that it has with regards fulfilling the learner visa requirements of its non-EEA learners. Therefore, the College is committed to ensuring it maintains accurate and detailed records of the attendance of learners.

In the blended learning environment, attendance is equally important, for student engagement and learning. The student handbook contains the Zoom Etiquette policy, which specifies what is expected from students online. This handbook is given to each student at the beginning of their course.

The College uses its VLE to record attendance. It also records attendance through an attendance register that learners must also sign during class. This allows for a learner's attendance to be "live" and fully accessible to the learner when they login to Moodle. The signed attendance sheets allow the College to be able to cross-reference the validity of a learner's attendance.

- Learners may be allowed to enter the classroom up to 15 minutes after the starting time, if the lecturer permits. If a learner is regularly late, the lecturer can refuse entry to the class or ask the learner to wait until the break.

- Learners are responsible for all material covered in their absences, and they are responsible for the academic consequences of their absences. The lecturer does not have to save class material for a learner.
- If a learner is sick, they are expected to inform the College by phone or email in a timely manner and to present a sick certificate, if applicable, on their return. This sick certificate will be kept on the learner's file.
- If a learner knows that they will be absent for a foreseeable reason, such as a dentist or hospital appointment, they should inform the College beforehand.
- Learners who have student/learner visas are required by G.N.I.B. to attend a minimum of 85% of classes per semester and/or academic year.
- Any absences must be reported and explained to the College, if possible beforehand.
- The GNIB will be advised by the College about any learner who leaves before the end of their course.
- It is not possible for students/learners to change class times from those originally presented to the GNIB at the point of registration.
- Any learner who misses more than 50% of classes over a six-week period will get a warning from the College.
- If the learner continues to be absent, they will get a second warning letter two weeks subsequent to the first warning letter.
- If attendance has not improved in in the subsequent 2 weeks, GNIB will be informed and the learner will be removed from the programme.
- Should a discrepancy be found in a learner's attendance, such as the learner being marked present when they are in fact absent, the College will treat this as a serious disciplinary matter and will follow the appropriate disciplinary process.