

Quality Assurance Manual	
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Section 1. Governance and Management of Quality (CG1)

1.1 Brigit's Garden profile

Brigit's Garden is an innovative social enterprise and a registered charity located in Roscahill, Co. Galway on an 11-acre site. Brigit's Garden opened in 2004 and has grown and developed each year.

The Main Object in our Memorandum and Articles of Association is 'To advance education and raise awareness in relation to all aspects of the environment and nature conservation'.

Our Mission is to offer Brigit's Garden as a place of connection with nature, beauty and Celtic heritage, and as a resource for education, reflection and creativity.

Brigit's Garden is largely self-funding with a number of income streams. These include garden admissions, café and gift shop sales, course and workshop fees, room rentals and special events. We have received grant aid for capital developments from LEADER on four occasions and received grants for special projects from Galway County Council, WorldWise Global Schools, the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland, Science Foundation Ireland, the Heritage Council and other organisations.

We have excellent indoor and outdoor facilities: outdoors we offer unique Celtic gardens, a range of natural habitats, a sustainability zone with renewable energy installations, nature walks and trails; indoors, we have a visitor centre with group/teaching rooms, a café and gift shop, a Roundhouse with a group room, and a permanent marquee.

Brigit's Garden's governing body is the **Board of Trustees**. Trustees serve in a voluntary capacity. The Board is responsible for strategic development and for ensuring that Brigit's Garden is compliant with legal, financial and charities legislation and regulations.

The **Education Board** is a sub-committee of the Board of Trustees and has full responsibility for educational decision-making independent from the Board of Trustees.

Our mission with respect to education is to provide innovative, high quality education and training programmes relating to all aspects of the environment, sustainability and nature conservation.

Our education aims are:

- To develop and offer programmes and workshops that reflect the Mission and Main Object of Brigit's Garden in relation to nature and the environment.
- To offer learners a high-quality learning experience which enables them to develop their skills, understanding and personal effectiveness within an inspiring and supportive learning environment.
- To offer a range of programmes for different age groups:
 - Engaging environmental programmes for young people: primary and secondary schools; pre-schools; and youth groups.
 - Programmes for adults that are validated on the National Framework for Qualifications, as well as workshops and short courses offered as community education.

Values of Brigit's Garden

These values guide all that we do and how we do it.

Integrity

- We operate ethical business and educational practices
- We show fairness, courtesy and mutual respect at all times and expect others to do the same

Excellence and quality

- We aspire to excellence in everything we do
- The quality of our teaching and learning is the key to our success
- Quality is everyone's responsibility

Spirit of Service

- We provide a supportive, respectful and encouraging environment in which staff and learners can flourish
- We place the learner at the heart of all we do

Respecting Nature

- We enable a mutually beneficial connection between people and nature
- We promote best practice in relation to biodiversity, nature conservation and sustainability

Brigit's Garden legal status

Brigit's Garden CLG is a Company Limited by Guarantee, Company Number 378284, tax reference number 63982845.

Brigit's Garden is a registered charity in Ireland, CHY 15512.

The registered office of Brigit's Garden CLG is at Pollagh, Roscahill, Co. Galway H91 CC90.

1.2 Governance

The **Board of Trustees** is the highest level of governance in Brigit's Garden and ensures that the organisation is governed effectively and responsibly. It is responsible for:

- Ensuring that the governance of Brigit's Garden is compliant with the Charities Governance Code and meets the standards set out by the Charities Regulator for managing and controlling a charity
- Ensuring compliance with the legal, financial and other regulations relevant to Brigit's Garden's status as a Company Limited by Guarantee
- Undertaking strategic planning, and approving business plans and annual budgets

The Board of Trustees operates according to the Trustees Handbook. This is updated regularly with all updates approved by the Board. Meetings are held in accordance with the Trustees Handbook and the Memorandum and Articles of Association and proper records are maintained. The Board ensures that all activities, systems and processes are consistent with the overall direction of the organisation and our Memorandum and Articles of Association.

The Board of Trustees' roles and responsibilities are detailed in the [Terms of Reference for the Board of Trustees](#) which references the [Trustees Handbook](#). The organisational structure is shown in the [Brigit's Garden Organisational Chart](#).

The Board of Trustees delegates responsibility for the management and operation of Brigit's Garden to the **Senior Management Team**, which is comprised of the Operations Director, the Education Coordinator, the Visitor Centre Coordinator (administration and accounts) and the Hospitality Coordinator. This team is responsible for the day to day running of Brigit's Garden and for the implementation of annual business plans and budgets. The Senior Management Team reports to the Board of Trustees through the Operations Director. Full responsibilities and reporting requirements are outlined in the Senior Management Team [Terms of Reference](#).

The **Education Board** is a sub-committee of the Board of Trustees. It has responsibility for the oversight of academic and quality assurance matters and reports to the Board of Trustees through its Chair. The Education Board is responsible for:

- Academic decision-making
- Protecting learner interests
- Programme approval
- Self-evaluation

Details and responsibilities are laid out in the Education Board [Terms of Reference](#).

The governance structure of Brigit's Garden is designed to ensure that academic and commercial areas are governed separately, and that academic decision-making is independent of commercial considerations or the undue influence of the Board of Trustees. This is ensured through:

1. A clear separation of the Terms of Reference for the Board of Trustees, which is responsible for overall governance, and the Terms of Reference for the Education Board, which maintains academic oversight.
2. The use of independent, external oversight of a) significant decisions that impact academic and quality matters and b) internal and external monitoring and reviews. External oversight helps us resolve any conflict that may arise between commercial and academic decisions. External oversight is provided for in the Education Board Terms of Reference for the Education Board and in the external input into assessment procedures (see section 6).

1.3 Collaborative provision

Policy statement

Collaborative provision refers to any situation where we involve another party in the delivery of a programme. We are open to collaborating with other education and training providers who are experts in our sector with a view to making our programmes more widely available. In any collaboration we enter into we are the first provider and as such we own the validated programme and are fully responsible for:

- Managing the relationship with the second provider and with QQI as the awarding body
- Ensuring the quality of all aspects the programme including tutor performance
- Ensuring that the obligations arising from QQI's Policies and Criteria for Validation of Programmes are fully met in relation to the programme

Before we enter into any collaborative provision arrangement, the following steps are taken:

1. The Operations Director brings a proposal to the Board of Trustees which approves the collaboration in principle.
2. The Operations Director drafts a detailed **Memorandum of Agreement** using the Memorandum of Agreement template, which is discussed and agreed with a senior official of the collaborating provider
3. The Memorandum of Agreement is reviewed by the Education Board and signed off by the Chair of the Education Board

The respective responsibilities of both parties are set out formally in the Memorandum of Agreement which must be signed by both parties. This includes details of how tutor management and development is quality assured. The Memorandum of Agreement is reviewed and evaluated before each rollout of a programme and edited accordingly. Changes and edits are agreed and signed by both parties.

The Operations Director is responsible for managing the relationship with the second provider and the Education Coordinator is responsible for monitoring the implementation of the agreed arrangements.

1.4 Risk policy and management

Policy statement

Brigit's Garden's policy is to assess, monitor and minimise risks to the organisation on an ongoing basis under the following categories:

- Governance and financial risks
- Operational risks
- Education and programme-related risks

Procedures for risk management are as follows, and further details are given in the Management of Risk procedure:

- Risks and related control measures are recorded and monitored in the Risk Register, which can be reviewed quickly and easily and which provides an effective summary of risk status
- Risk is a standing item on the agenda for meetings of the Board of Trustees, which also carries out a thorough annual review of all risks.
- Risk is also a standing item on the agendas of the Education Board, the Senior Management Team and the Results Approval Panel, all of whom take responsibility for monitoring risks for which they are the owner and identifying changes or additions to the Risk Register as a result of input from staff, tutors, learners and stakeholders.
- The Risk Register details risks in each category and records the following information for each risk:
 - Nature of the risk
 - Potential impact of the risk
 - Risk controls in place or needed
 - The risk owner
 - Monitoring frequency

- The risk level: Low, Medium or High. This is calculated from the likelihood, the impact and the effectiveness of the controls, and is acted on by the risk owner as required.

Risk Level	Risk Score	Action / Response
High	25+	Act immediately using outside expertise if necessary.
Medium	13 – 24	Put as a standing agenda item and plan to improve over a 12-month time scale
Low	0 – 12	Monitor on an annual basis

1.5 Health and Safety

Policy statement

Brigit's Garden's policy is to ensure the health, safety and welfare of staff, tutors, visitors, learners and all personnel in all areas of activity as far as is practicable. We operate a comprehensive system to ensure health and safety is prioritised, monitored and to the forefront of all activities:

- Our Safety Statement is contained in Brigit's Garden Policies Handbook and is updated on a regular basis by the Board of Trustees.
- Safety audits are carried out in different areas by nominated staff according to an agreed schedule. The results are recorded, any safety measures or maintenance required are noted and are passed to the relevant staff for implementation.
- An independent health and safety professional is contracted on a biennial basis to review our Safety Statement and procedures, to carry out a site inspection and to recommend improvements and changes.
- The Hazard Schedule lists all potential hazards for each area on site, with control measures and responsibilities listed clearly.
- Risk Assessments are drawn up for specific activities, from school groups to family events.
- The Approval and Monitoring of Training Venues procedure includes a comprehensive Venue Checklist used to inspect and assess the suitability and safety of indoor and outdoor areas, both onsite and offsite, for teaching or group activities. Only venues that are deemed suitable and have proper safety policies and procedures in place will be used.
- Staff induction covers health and safety. Ongoing training for staff in first aid, fire safety, manual handling and other topics is arranged as required and as needs are identified through safety audits.
- Tutor and learner induction highlights health and safety and the measures in place to minimise hazards.
- Specific safety measures apply to online learning.

1.6 Equality and diversity

Policy statement

Brigit's Garden's policy is to promote diversity, inclusivity and equality of opportunity as well as dignity at work for staff, tutors, learners and all involved in the organisation. This is laid out in our Equality and Diversity Policy and is achieved by ensuring that all employment, work practices, services and educational provision operate on the basis of the appropriate merits, qualifications, abilities and potential of individuals.

- Ensuring that no person is treated less favourably or discriminated against due to their gender, race, marital status or any of the nine recognised grounds for discrimination.
- Creating a working and learning environment free of bullying, harassment, victimisation and unlawful discrimination, that promotes dignity and respect for all.
- Valuing and recognising individual differences and contributions and actively promoting equality of access and opportunity across the organisation.

Strategies to promote equality and diversity include:

- Embedding the principles of quality and diversity into procedures for the employment of staff, appointment of tutors, recruitment of learners and workplace practices.
- Covering the principles of equality and diversity, and guidance on applying them in practice, in staff, tutor and learner induction. This includes definitions of bullying, harassment, victimisation and unlawful discrimination, procedures for lodging a complaint and how these complaints are dealt with under our grievance and disciplinary procedures. It also includes special considerations for blended learning.
- The Board of Trustees regularly review their activities with regard to equality and diversity and prioritise this in the appointment of new trustees.
- We have a documented procedure for Managing Reasonable Accommodation for learners with particular learning needs. This is referenced in our Tutor and Learner Handbooks, on our website and highlighted at tutor and learner induction.

The Board of Trustees has overall responsibility for ensuring diversity and equality of opportunity throughout Brigit's Garden. In addition, all staff, tutors and learners have a personal responsibility for ensuring they adhere to our Equality and Diversity Policy.

1.7 Data protection

Brigit's Garden's Data Protection Policy is in place to manage and protect data for efficient, safe and legally compliant operations. It ensures that:

- Brigit's Garden is compliant with requirements of current legislation and the eight rules of data protection required by the Data Protection Commissioner
- Data protection rights of all relevant individuals are safeguarded

The policy applies to the storage and processing of any personal data, including sensitive data relating to reasonable accommodation and requests for assessment evidence, held in digital or printed form in relation to employees, contract staff and tutors, learners, interns, volunteers, trustees, donors, members and customers.

Further details can be found in Section 8.

1.8 Management of quality

Policy statement

From the start Brigit's Garden has demonstrated a genuine commitment to quality throughout the organisation. Striving for excellence in all we do is central to our ethos as a charity offering a wide range of services to the community. We are committed to maintaining our reputation for high standards in all areas of our work. This commitment is evidenced through our customer focus, the enthusiasm and loyalty of the staff team, our attention to detail and our use of evaluation and feedback as tools for ongoing change and improvement.

UNESCO defines quality assurance as “...an ongoing, continuous process of evaluating (assessing, monitoring, guaranteeing, maintaining and improving) the quality of ... [an] education system, institution or program”. Quality assurance enables us to offer high quality, learner-centred experiences which encourage and empower learners to develop their skills, understanding and personal effectiveness within an inspiring and supportive course structure. This involves both individual and collective effort throughout the organisation to implement the wide range of policies and procedures that constitute our Quality Assurance System, and a commitment to making continuous improvements.

- We are responsible for assuring the quality of our programmes and supports through our Quality Assurance System
- We commit to ownership of the Quality Assurance System and to implementing it on a day-to-day basis to support and underpin quality provision
- We continually improve our programmes and supports with our primary focus on the welfare and progress of learners
- We have designed our Quality Assurance System to be context-specific, fit-for-purpose, user-friendly and accessible to all who use it

Embedding a quality culture

Our aim is to create and maintain a culture where continuous quality improvement is seamlessly embedded into all our activities. There are many aspects to this:

- Board of Trustees, the Education Board and senior staff provide leadership by modelling a culture of quality and encouraging and supporting all staff and tutors
- Building an effective staff team with clear induction and ongoing communications and training
- Accessibility of information to all stakeholders
- Ensuring high standards across the organisation
- A commitment to excellent customer service
- Continuous feedback and evaluation that is discussed and acted upon
- Operating a clear, well-managed Quality Assurance System

A copy of the Quality Assurance Manual is available to all staff members and tutors in shared online folders, and to other stakeholders and the general public on our website. The role of each staff member and tutor in assuring quality is set out in their role description. This is addressed at induction and in ongoing meetings and staff training.

Scope of the Quality Assurance System

Our Quality Assurance System applies to all activities associated with education and training, and to the work of our governance units, staff, tutors, external advisors, learners, and other stakeholders involved in training for or on behalf of Brigit's Garden. The system is designed to quality assure all training and education programme; those designed to lead to awards on the NFQ and non-accredited programmes.

The following legislation applies to Brigit's Garden:

- Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012
- Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) (Amendment) 2019
- General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) 2018 and Data Protection Act 2018
- Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005
- Employment Equality Acts 1998–2015
- Equal Status Acts 200-2015
- Children First Act 2015

The Quality Assurance System is informed by and designed to ensure compliance with

- Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines developed by QQI for use by all Providers April 2016/QG1-V1
- Sector - specific Quality Assurance Guidelines-Independent/Private Providers
- Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Blended Learning Programmes March 2018/QG8-V1

Aims of the Quality Assurance System

The Quality Assurance System provides:

- A road map for staff and tutors, and providing confidence for learners that we aim to be a centre of excellence
- A guide, to ensure compliance with QQI and other requirements
- Clear policies and procedures that are easy to understand and implement
- A way of assessing and measuring how successful we are and informing a culture of continuous feedback and improvement
- Confidence that Brigit's Garden strives to be a centre of excellence
- Accountancy and transparency for all users

Responsibility for managing and monitoring the Quality Assurance System

- The Board of Trustees has ultimate responsibility for the Quality Assurance System
- The Education Board is responsible for oversight of its implementation
- The Education Coordinator coordinates the implementation of the system on a day-to-day basis, maintains quality assurance documents and reports to the Education Board in relation to its effectiveness
- Tutors have a defined responsibility for implementing the Quality Assurance System. This is written into their role description, highlighted at induction and addressed at team meetings

The Quality Assurance System is monitored on an ongoing basis as detailed in Section 10. This covers regular evaluation and review as well as more formal reviews involving all our stakeholders and independent experts.

The learner voice in quality assurance

We view our learners as key contributors to ensuring a culture of quality in Brigit's Garden. We make it as easy as possible for them to let us know what they think and what we could do better, both collectively and individually. We are committed to acting on their feedback in a meaningful and transparent way. We do this through having a learner as a member of our Education Board, maintaining appeals and complaints registers, gathering and acting on feedback following programme delivery, programme review and evaluation, keeping in contact with class representatives and other forms of learner consultation and feedback.

Section 2. A Documented Approach to Quality Assurance (CG2)

2.1 Documenting the Quality Assurance System

Policy statement

Brigit's Garden's Quality Assurance System is fully documented and is maintained in digital format in cloud-based folders. The documents which make up the system are linked through a series of hyperlinks that give users one-click access to other Quality Assurance documents. The use of hyperlinks provides easy access to users without repeating the same information on different documents.

These documents are essential guides for staff and learners when implementing quality assurance processes and are made available across the organisation. Documents are also categorised and listed in our [Document Register](#) to facilitate ease of access.

Policies and procedures are typically documents but may also be manuals, webpages and forms. Visuals in the form of charts, diagrams, or photographs are used as appropriate to clarify and support written documents.

We design our policies and procedures to be learner-focused, reader-friendly and concise. We are committed to using plain language, following the [Plain English Guidelines](#) from the National Adult Literacy Agency. This means writing with the user in mind and presenting information clearly and accurately. We use everyday words in short, clear sentences and as far as possible avoid the use of jargon and technical terms. These Guidelines form part of staff and tutor induction.

The Operations Director and the Education Coordinator have editing rights for quality assurance documents to implement changes identified during feedback and evaluation processes; all other users have viewing rights only.

The effectiveness, ease-of-use and changes needed to quality assurance documents is discussed at Education Board meetings and copies are available for reference at meetings.

Distinction between policies and procedures

Our quality assurance documentation makes a clear distinction between policies and procedures. The relevant definitions and best practice are laid out in the supporting document on [Policies and Procedures](#).

Document control and version control

We recognise the importance of effective document control. Our system involves three related elements.

1. The cloud-based document storage system enables:
 - Ease of use and access, with documents available at points of use
 - Easier application of standard revision and version control procedures (see point iii. below)
 - Automated and reliable backups

- Easier information retrieval with a search function. This makes compliance with procedures easier for all users and enables more efficient decision-making
 - Increased document security and control through the use of passwords as required, and through reduced need to distribute documents via email
 - Facilitates collaboration, for example through the use of the online Tutor Folder
 - Easier removal of obsolete documents and online archiving
 - More sustainable practices through much reduced use of paper
 - Lower document management and archiving costs
 - Facilitates compliance with GDPR as access can be limited to those who need it and also learner records can be archived and only made available to necessary personnel
2. Each document specifies the following information to enable a transparent, organised and traceable method of review and update:
 - The body in the Organisational Structure that signed off on the document, with the date and frequency of formal review by that body
 - The version number of the document
 - The Document Owner, who is responsible for ongoing review and updating
 3. Our Document Version Control procedure is the means by which we manage different versions and drafts of a document. It is designed to
 - Provide an audit trail for the revision and update of documents
 - Specify a standard procedure for naming and distinguishing between a series of draft documents and a final version
 - Specify a procedure for making further amendments

2.2 Elements of the Quality Assurance System

The system comprises ten categories of documents:

1. Quality Assurance Manual

This Manual is organised in sections (of which this is section 2) based on the chapters in Section 2 of QQI's Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines. Each section outlines policies and procedures, with clear links to supporting documents.

2. Terms of Reference

These are given for the committees and other bodies involved in the Quality Assurance System.

3. Role Descriptions

These are provided for all relevant staff and for tutors.

4. Handbooks

There are separate handbooks for learners, tutors and staff.

5. Risk Register

This has sections for governance and financial risk, operational risk, and educational and programme-related risk.

6. Supporting documents

These include Brigit's Garden Policies Handbook, Brigit's Garden Trustees Handbook, checklists, forms and templates.

A complete list of documents can be found in the [Document Register](#).

7. Reference documents

These provide pertinent documents for consultation such as guidelines from QQI and other organisations, details of relevant statutes and regulations.

8. Graphics

These include Brigit's Garden organisational structure and Brigit's Garden's Quality Assurance Schema.

9. Quality Assurance System document register

An Excel document listing all the above documents in an easy to consult format.

10. Glossary

An alphabetical list of terms we use with the definitions for those terms.

Section 3. Programmes of Education and Training (CG3)

3.1 Programme design and development

Policy statement

Education and training exist principally for the purpose of enabling people to learn and, accordingly, programmes of education and training should be designed, implemented and evaluated with learning outcomes in mind. QQI Policy on Quality Assurance Guidelines April 2016.

Brigit's Garden's programmes are at the heart of our mission to provide inspiring and relevant learning opportunities for learners in relation to the environment. We approach programme design and development with the same commitment to high quality and attention to detail that is reflected throughout our Quality Assurance System.

- Programmes must be aligned with our aim of providing education in the areas of environment, nature and sustainability and be consistent with the values of Brigit's Garden as outlined in 1.1.
- Programmes must be consistent with the strategic priorities identified by the Education Board.
- Initial proposals for new programmes are based on evidence of a) a specific need and b) interest among potential learners. This may be established by formal and informal research, focus groups and networking with relevant organisations and individuals.
- Programme development must be properly resourced and address the evidenced need of the learner profile(s).
- Programme proposals must:
 - Demonstrate that they are learner-focused and based on the learning outcomes
 - Reflect our teaching and learning culture and the principles of Universal Design for Learning, as outlined in section 5.1
 - Be aligned with relevant standards and, where QQI validation will be applied for, the requirements of the proposed level of award on the National Framework of Qualifications.
- A programme proposal must also consider:
 - Accommodation of diversity through the removal of barriers, accessibility of the programme and measures for reasonable accommodation
 - Admission requirements and recognition of prior learning, for admission and for granting exemptions
 - Opportunities for access, transfer and progression, which may involve consultation with other providers

Scope

All programmes and courses.

Responsibilities

Full details of responsibilities are given in the [Programme Design, Development and Approval procedure](#).

Operations Director

- Assesses the viability of proposals for new programmes, recommends and presents potentially viable programmes to the Education Board.
- When the Board of Trustees approves a new programme proposal, appoints a Programme Team with a Lead Tutor
- Signs and submits a new programme agreed by the Education Board to QQI

Education Board

- Considers proposals for new programmes and makes recommendations to the Board of Trustees
- Considers a Programme Descriptor and details of a new programme submitted by a Programme Design Team; recommends edits or changes as required; sign and submits application for programme validation to QQI

Board of Trustees

- Decides on whether to approve a new programme proposal, ensures resources and a timeframe are in place

Programme Design Team

- Develops and designs the curriculum, the teaching, learning and assessment strategy and all other aspects of the programme

Needs identification and programme proposal

Ideas for new programmes come from a variety of sources including discussions with past and current learners and staff, through networking and sector contacts. Any member of the Senior Management Team or Education Board, member of staff or tutor can propose a new programme. To do so, they must complete and submit a [Programme Proposal form](#) which includes a section on needs identification. The proposal must include data that supports the proposal and evidences the need for the programme. The proposer must also demonstrate that they have considered the resources, facilities and staff expertise needed to develop, deliver, assess and evaluate the programme.

Procedure for programme design, development and approval

The design, development and approval of new programmes involves a nine-step procedure which is detailed in the [Programme Design, Development and Approval procedure](#), which includes a flowchart of the steps.

Following needs identification, the proposer submits the Programme Proposal form to the Operations Director, who presents it to the Senior Management Team. The Senior Management Team considers the rationale for the programme and the associated financial, time and human resource costs before agreeing to submit the proposal to the Education Board. The Education Board must approve the proposal before it is progressed to the next step of the procedure.

3.2 Programme validation and re-validation

'Validation is a quality assurance process intended to ensure that a proposed programme can enable a learner to acquire and demonstrate the necessary knowledge, skill or competence to justify the award(s) being offered in respect of that programme.'

Brigit's Garden understands that a provider who wishes to offer a programme leading to a QQI award on the National Framework of Qualification must have the programme validated by QQI before it is offered to learners.

- The Programme Design Team must ensure that the programme is consistent with the QQI award standard and is in line with QQI validation processes, and that an application for validation is based on the most recent QQI policies, procedures and guidelines such as the current (2021) *'Core Policies and Criteria for the Validation by QQI of Programmes of Education and Training'*. This is checked through the QQI website.
- We contact QQI when we are considering submitting an application for validation to get QQI's views and advice on the submission.
- We use the application templates provided by QQI to help us present our applications and programmes consistently and systematically, taking care to ensure that all the criteria are addressed and all template sections are complete.

Further details are given in the [Programme Validation and Revalidation Procedure](#). We understand that a validated programme may be reviewed by QQI at any time and we facilitate such reviews.

Validated programme are subject to ongoing evaluation and review as well as a comprehensive review every two years as detailed in Section 10.

Revalidation

We arrange for the revalidation of continuing programmes every 5 years (or in accordance with the expiry of the duration of the validation if different) noting that validation is for a maximum of five years and then automatically lapses unless renewed through re-validation.

3.3 Transfer and progression

We facilitate learners to transfer and progress inwards and outwards from our programmes.

- Graduates of our programmes have the option of transferring or progressing to other providers or to further or higher education institutes that offer programmes leading to awards on the National Framework of Qualification in related areas.
- Transfer and progression options are researched at the programme design stage and may involve consulting with other providers. They are written into the Programme Descriptor which is agreed with QQI as part of the validation process.
- Information on transfer and progression routes is given in programme brochures, on our website, in the Learner Handbook and at induction for learners.
- Tutors encourage learners to meet them on a one-to-one basis to discuss their specific queries and plans in relation to transfer and progression.

- We facilitate and support learners who are applying for entry to other programmes by providing academic references or a provisional statement of results/predicted results for the purposes of satisfying entry or interview requirements.

3.4 Admissions

We have a fair and consistent approach to learner entry and selection. We welcome all applicants as long as:

- They meet the minimum entry requirements or are admitted through Recognition of Prior Learning (see 3.5 below)
- We can accommodate them if they have specific needs

All learners are given comprehensive and up-to-date information on the programme, the entry criteria and the admissions process before they apply for a place. Details are provided on our website and via brochures, open days and sector events. We reply promptly to all queries and encourage anyone interested in applying for a place to talk the details through with us before they apply. We clearly outline the entry criteria and the level of commitment and time involved.

The Programme Application Form includes questions about previous education and work experience and applicants are required to confirm at the application stage that they meet the entry requirements.

The Lead Tutor reviews the completed application forms. If there is any doubt about the suitability of the applicant, such as not meeting the entry requirements, s/he may interview the applicant to establish the suitability of the programme for the applicant and vice versa.

Further details are given in the Learner Applications, Selection and Registration Procedure and in the Learner Admission Appeals Procedure.

3.5 Recognition of Prior Learning for entry

Our policy is to offer two types of Recognition of Prior Learning, to enable a diverse range of learners to obtain access to and participate successfully in our programmes and to facilitate learners to gain exemptions on the basis of prior learning:

1. We offer the option of Recognition of Prior Learning to applicants who do not meet the minimum entry criteria but can demonstrate learning based on what they have achieved through their work, another programme of study or other learning experience. We aim to ensure that the applicants we admit have the potential and ability to achieve the learning outcomes of the programme.
2. We also offer Recognition of Prior Learning in the form of exemptions for learners who have achieved a similar award at the same or equivalent level to their chosen programme. To be granted an exemption the applicant must be able to demonstrate that they have the capacity to achieve the programme learning outcomes without attending or participating in the programme or part of the programme.

Scope

All applicants and learners.

Responsibilities

The Education Coordinator is responsible for ensuring the Recognition of Prior Learning policy and procedures are implemented correctly.

The Lead Tutor is responsible for assessing applications for Recognition of Prior Learning.

The Programme Design Team is responsible for drawing up any programme-specific guidelines for exemptions for approval by the Education Board.

Implementation of Recognition of Prior Learning

- Learners are notified of the option of applying for both types of Recognition of Prior Learning on our website and in programme brochures.
- Applications for both types of Recognition of Prior Learning are considered on a case-by-case basis. The Recognition of Prior Learning Procedure outlines the process of identifying, assessing and recognising prior learning and achievement with respect to learners and potential learners.
- Both types of Recognition of Prior Learning are considered at the design stage of a programme, detailing recommendations and arrangements.
- Where appropriate, the Programme Design Team draws up programme-specific Guidelines for Exemptions for learners with prior qualifications. These Guidelines are approved by the Education Board and then used by the Lead Tutor in making decisions on applications for exemptions.
- We retain records of prior learning and copies of certificates in learners' individual files.
- The Lead Tutor advises the Tutor at the pre-programme briefing:
 - Which, if any, of the learners have used the Recognition of Prior Learning route for entry. The tutor monitors their progress carefully and compares the assessment results of Recognition of Prior Learning applicants to those of standard applicants to ensure that our Recognition of Prior Learning procedure is working effectively.
 - Whether any exemptions have been granted under Recognition of Prior Learning, and revised assessment plans for the individual learners.
- This information is also highlighted to the external authenticator via a note in the internal verification report.

3.6 Programme Delivery

Policy statement

Brigit's Garden is committed to delivering all programmes in line with our values and in full compliance with our Quality Assurance System and the validated Programme Descriptors. Our aim is to support learners to achieve excellent outcomes for their academic achievements, their skills and also their levels of motivation and inspiration.

This is enabled by:

- A committed and well-resourced Programme Team
- Thorough and careful planning, supported by efficient administration

- Clear procedures and processes supported by tutor and staff induction and training
- Continuous monitoring of standards, with feedback and self-evaluation
- Effective coordination between the Lead Tutor, Tutors, Education Coordinator, Education Administrator and Operations Director

Scope

All programmes.

Programme delivery procedure and responsibilities

Once a programme is validated and the Operations Director has ensured that the necessary resources are in place, the steps to be taken to deliver the programme are detailed in the nine-step [Programme Delivery procedure](#).

The **Education Coordinator** is responsible for ensuring that the tutors are trained in the use of the Quality Assurance System and that it is implemented on a day-to-day basis by the Programme Team. They are also responsible for ensuring that the training facilities are fit-for-purpose, safe, well-equipped and conducive to learning and that they meet the needs of learners and tutors. If it is a blended programme, they confirm that the IT infrastructure and any additional learner supports are in place. Details are given in the [Education Coordinator Role Description](#).

The **Programme Team** is responsible for programme delivery in accordance with the Programme Descriptor and for implementing the Quality Assurance System on a day-to-day basis as detailed in the [Programme Team Terms of Reference](#). The Programme Team is led by the Lead Tutor as detailed in the [Lead Tutor Role Description](#).

The **Education Administrator** provides administrative support before, during and after a programme.

3.7 Deferrals

If a learner cannot complete a programme, we may allow them to defer their place until the next available programme, depending on the circumstances. The learner must complete and submit a [Request for Deferral form](#). This is reviewed by the Education Coordinator who communicates the decision to the applicant in writing and retains details on the learner record.

Section 4. Staff Recruitment, Management & Development (CG4)

4.1 Policy statement

Brigit's Garden recognises the essential role played by our staff and tutors. It is important to us to have a vibrant, engaged staff team that operates to a high standard. We aim to ensure that every individual is supported and encouraged to contribute to the organisation at many levels as well as to pursue their own personal and professional development. It is our policy to:

- Ensure that staff and tutors have the appropriate qualifications, skills, competencies and attitude to provide high quality training to our learners
- Support staff/tutors in developing their professional competencies to enable continuous improvement of the learning environment and individual programmes
- Promote the development of supportive and effective staff and tutor teams through encouragement and positive feedback, ensuring honest communications and acting quickly on concerns and issues raised

Our approach to employment is also guided by our Equality and Diversity Policy which aims to promote equality of opportunity within the organisation by ensuring that all employment and recruitment practices operate on the basis of the appropriate merits, qualifications, abilities and potential of individuals. This includes:

- Promoting equality of access and opportunity
- Ensuring dignity at work
- Ensuring no person is discriminated against because of any of the grounds listed in legislation

Responsibilities

- The Board of Trustees appoints senior staff and delegates responsibility for the management of staff to the Operations Director and the Senior Management Team
- The Education Board maintains oversight of staffing in relation to education and training provision and makes recommendations to the Board of Trustees
- The Education Coordinator is responsible for the recruitment and management of tutors

4.2 Recruitment of staff

- The Operations Director draws up job descriptions detailing the duties and responsibilities of the position, the necessary and desirable requirements in terms of qualifications, skills, experience and other competencies, and terms and conditions.
- Positions are advertised in as wide a variety of outlets as possible including our website and social media, local and national recruitment agencies and relevant community and environmental notice-board websites.
- The Board of Trustees appoints an interview panel for each staff appointment, normally made up of two trustees, the Operations Director and an independent external interviewer. Short-listing is carried out on a points system by two members of the interview panel, normally a trustee and the Operations Director. Short-listed candidates are invited to interview, which

may be on an individual and/or group basis. Second interviews for suitable candidates are normally held.

- The Board of Trustees approves the appointment based on the recommendation of the interview panel.
- The Board of Trustees may delegate some of these responsibilities to the Operations Director for part-time and seasonal positions.
- A contract of employment with agreed terms and conditions is provided to the successful candidate.

4.3 Recruitment of tutors

When a vacancy for a tutor arises, the Education Coordinator draws up a job description detailing the role and responsibilities of the position, the requirements in terms of qualifications, skills and experience as set out in the programme-specific statement of required qualifications, and terms and conditions.

- Applicants for tutor positions are interviewed by the Education Coordinator and the Lead Tutor. The interview panel may also include a member of the Education Board.
- Tutors who work with/have access to learners aged 18 or under or vulnerable adults must be Garda vetted and undergo safeguarding training in line with our Child and Vulnerable Adults Protection Policy.
- Tutors must submit evidence of qualifications and experience and must update their CVs and supporting documents annually.

4.4 Induction and training of staff and tutors

All staff and tutors managing, co-ordinating and delivering programmes leading to QQI certification must adhere to the Quality Assurance System. Induction, on-going training and team meetings ensure that this is the case and ensure maintenance of the highest possible standards.

Induction sessions are properly resourced with regard to time and staff input.

- The Operations Manager inducts staff and the Education Coordinator inducts tutors.
- Induction is thorough and includes the background and ethos of Brigit's Garden, the organisational structure and responsibilities, the team ground rules, and all aspects of the relevant job description. For tutors, induction topics are detailed in the Tutor Induction Checklist and include the Tutor Handbook and the Tutor Role Description, the importance and functions of the Quality Assurance System and the tutor's role in ensuring quality provision.
- Induction for tutors also includes the IT system and training in operating the various platforms including the Learning Management System. It also includes training in online teaching via Zoom.

Training for both staff and tutors is provided as required. Training may be provided both in-house by senior staff and by external training providers where appropriate.

- Training is provided to ensure staff and tutors are compliant with requirements in areas such as health and safety (including manual handling and first aid), equality and diversity, and data protection.
- Training is provided for staff and tutors on:
 - Keeping up to date with national and international development in relevant areas

- Developments in IT platforms and procedures
- Developments in online teaching and learning
- New or amended procedures across the organisation
- Refresher and update sessions on key working practices such as customer service, asking for and processing feedback, and our values and priorities
- In-house and/or external training is provided where a training need is identified as a result of staff appraisals, tutor self-evaluations, tutor observations and learner feedback.
- We maintain a Continuous Professional Development register for tutors and staff.

4.5 Staff and tutor professional development and supports

Brigit's Garden supports and encourages the on-going professional and personal development of staff and tutors as a key element in providing a rewarding working environment and high quality delivery of programmes.

- Staff and tutors are expected to maintain membership of relevant professional bodies, attend relevant seminars and conferences and to engage in professional networking.
- Staff and tutors are encouraged to be reflective and to assess their own performance and development needs, and to request additional training that will benefit their roles, the learners, and the development of the programmes.
- Staff (and tutors where appropriate) attend regular team meetings, engage in team-building workshops and activities, and attend training as detailed in 4.4 above.
- In addition to frequent informal communications with staff, the Operations Director carries out annual appraisals with each member of staff.
 - The Operations Director and member of staff fill in assessment and self-assessment forms respectively that become the basis for discussion
 - The appraisal is an opportunity to review the person's contribution and how they are getting on, discuss strengths and weaknesses and identify any training or up-skilling required
 - Action points are agreed with regard to changes, developments and further training
- Training and development needs for staff and tutors are also identified through learner and other feedback.
- We host an annual Continuous Professional Development Day for all members of our programme team. Teaching and assessment skills are a standing item for these upskilling events.
- We have a budget to cover training and conference costs. All training costs must be approved in advance.
- Brigit's Garden accesses training relevant to our sector through AONTAS, The Wheel, Carmichael, Galway County Council PPN, Fáilte Ireland and other organisations.

4.6 Tutor Handbook

The Tutor Handbook is a key quality assurance document. It is updated annually with the input of users and re-issued with a new version number and date. The previous version is removed and archived. The Handbook forms an important part of tutor induction. There is a copy of the Tutor Handbook in the shared online tutor folder.

The Tutor Handbook is designed to be user-friendly, easy to understand and as concise as possible, with hyperlinks to referenced documents. The handbook is in two parts:

Part 1 introduces the Quality Assurance System and points to the quality assurance policies and procedures of most relevance to tutors. It also gives information on Brigit's Garden, and covers training, equality and diversity, health and safety, dignity at work, terms and conditions, and disciplinary rules and procedures.

Part 2 contains

- Programme-specific information including lesson plans/assessment briefs etc
- Use and management of the Learner Management System, updating of materials and resources, evaluation and feedback, how the Programme Team operates, tutor support and online tutor communications
- Detailed role description and contract
- Induction
- Support role of Lead Tutor and Education Coordinator

4.7 Staff Handbook

Our [Staff Handbook](#) applies to all staff and is given to staff at induction. It covers employee rights and responsibilities, disciplinary and grievance procedures, procedures in relation to bullying, harassment and dignity at work, data protection and health and safety.

4.8 Monitoring tutor performance

The Education Coordinator appraises tutor performance on an ongoing basis. We regard performance appraisal as a vital tool for developing tutors' professional skills and confidence, and for quality enhancement.

We use the following metrics as indicators of the quality of tutor performance. This enables us to monitor whether tutors are performing to the required standards, to identify support and training needs and to take action in the case of poor performance.

- Learner attendance and drop-out rates
- Tutor observations (see below)
- Complaints and appeals registers
- Learner feedback on tutor performance
- Tutor feedback and self-reflection
- Class Representative feedback
- External Authenticator feedback
- Feedback from other stakeholders

Tutor observations

In-class and online tutor observations are designed to provide constructive feedback, facilitate the sharing of best practice techniques and highlight training needs.

- Tutor observations are carried out by the Lead Tutor or, if the tutor being observed is the programme leader, the Operations Director or the Education Coordinator.
- The process of tutor observation is referenced in the [Tutor Handbook](#) and is discussed at induction.

- Tutor observations are a requirement for new tutors at the early stages of their first programme and periodically thereafter. Observations of both face-to-face teaching and online teaching are carried out.
- Details of the procedure for setting up and carrying out tutor observations, and for follow-up with the tutor, are given in the Monitoring and Managing Tutor Performance Procedure.
- If there is concern about the quality of a tutor's performance, the Education Coordinator and/or the Lead Tutor discuss the issue with the tutor and agree on actions to address the issue.

4.9 Statement of required qualifications for tutors

Essential qualifications and experience

- Minimum of two years relevant professional experience with a qualification above the level of the award
- Experience in the practical application of the theory and the ability to draw on this experience in their training role
- A recognised training qualification (minimum Level 6 on the National Framework of Qualifications or equivalent)
- Excellent planning, prioritising, facilitation, presentation, writing, IT, interpersonal and communication skills
- Willing to avail of and engage in relevant professional development training and activities

Programme-specific qualifications and experience

There will be programme-specific requirements to ensure that tutors have the qualifications and experience required to meet the needs of the learner profile and the subject matter.

Desirable qualifications and experience

- Knowledge and appreciation of the theory of adult and community education
- Experience of online training delivery

4.10 The tutor voice

Brigit's Garden recognises that tutors play a key role in ensuring the quality of our programmes and supporting our learners and seek their input into programme monitoring and decision-making.

- We involve tutors in programme development and review processes and ask for their input in terms of setting the agendas, and at the end of each programme each tutor fills in a Tutor Feedback Form.
- We update our Tutor Handbook annually. The tutor handbook is a key resource for tutors and we always ask for tutor input into revisions.
- The Education Coordinator is in ongoing contact with members of the programme team while a programme is being delivered to review progress and discuss any areas of concern. S/her also organises programme team meetings which facilitate networking and sharing of learning among staff and tutors, sharing and collaborative development of programme resources, reviews and feedback and tutor training needs.

- We operate an open-door policy and issue an open invitation to tutors to spend time at Brigit's Garden and to attend events organised in the Garden.

4.11 Contingency plan for tutor absence

- We maintain a panel of suitable qualified tutors for each programme. Their work is scheduled by the Education Coordinator.
- In the case of unavoidable delay or absence, we expect tutors to give as much advance notice as possible by contacting the Education Coordinator by email and phone. If the Education Coordinator is not available they must contact the Operations Director.
- If possible, the Education Coordinator arranges for another tutor from our tutor panel to cover for the absence. If this is not possible, the Lead Tutor steps in.
- Where a programme is being delivered by a collaborative provider under a Memorandum of Agreement a contingency plan for tutor absence is included in this agreement.
- Training sessions are cancelled or rescheduled only as a last resort.

4.12 Community of practice

Our vision is to create a continuum of learning that offers tutors, learners and alumni the opportunity to develop their professional expertise and their relationships with each other and Brigit's Garden.

The aims of the Community of Practice are to:

- Facilitate informal learning and networking
- Allow access to broader community and learning resources
- Help to identify additional training needs
- Inform our programme review and evaluation processes

We will encourage active participation in our Community of Practice through:

- Facilitating continued access to the learner and tutors forums on the Learning Management System to encourage ongoing networking.
- The distribution of an e-newsletter to members of the Community of Practice with information on national and international developments in the subject area and related professions, new resources, training opportunities and other updates.
- On-site and online meetings; webinars with expert guest speakers; opportunities to share resources and best practice.

Section 5. Teaching and Learning (CG5)

5.1 Policy statement

Brigit's Garden is committed to a teaching and learning culture throughout the organisation that is learner-centred and which:

- Reflects our core values and our commitment to offering sustainable, high-quality programmes in relation to the environment.
- Is flexible, creative and inclusive for all learners and informed by the principles in *Universal Design for Learning, A Best Practice Guideline, AHEAD 2017*.
- Welcomes diversity and delivers an outstanding learning experience for all learners, including those with disabilities.
- Supports each learner to have equal opportunities to develop the skills, understandings and personal attributes they need to fulfil professional roles in a changing world.
- Acknowledges that our learners are mature adults that:
 - Are self-directed and motivated, and want to choose how they learn
 - Are practical, want relevant information and want to achieve personal goals
 - Use their life experience to support their learning
 - Are open to innovative ways of learning that suits their context

To achieve this culture, we design our teaching and learning to:

- Provide professional, high-quality teaching with multiple means of engagement to motivate and challenge adult learners.
- Offer a range of effective and engaging teaching methods within a blended learning model.
- Be flexible and responsive, to enable successful learning by learners with diverse backgrounds and needs. This includes:
 - Consideration of diversity, including removing barriers to participation and accommodating additional needs, at all stages of programme development starting with the original proposal
 - Seeing learners as partners in programme development and change, with robust monitoring, feedback and evaluation processes to ensure that learners' views and experiences are included throughout
 - Ensuring that our policies and procedures relating to equality and diversity and to reasonable accommodation for learners with additional needs are fully understood and implemented by all staff and tutors
- Maintain high achievement expectations for all learners, including those with disabilities
- Offer positive learning experiences that assist learners to develop their knowledge, skills, attitudes and competencies
- Ensure learners fully understand the learning outcomes of their programme
- Encourage the integration of learning within and across modules where applicable
- Utilise technologies and other resources to enhance the learning experience
- Offer high quality indoor and outdoor teaching and learning environments
- Maintain the same high standards for all models of delivery

- Facilitate a community of learning in which learners are supported and in which they can share learning experiences with each other

We recognise the importance of our staff and tutors in facilitating excellent learning experiences, so this policy links directly with the policy on Staff Recruitment, Management and Development in Section 4.

Responsibilities

- The **Education Board** maintains oversight of teaching and learning strategies, the quality of the learning experience, the adequacy of the teaching and learning environment and learner supports, as detailed in the [Education Board Terms of Reference](#)
- The **Education Coordinator** is responsible for ensuring the appropriate learner and tutor resources and supports are in place, as detailed in the [Education Coordinator Role Description](#)
- The **Lead Tutor** is responsible for ensuring that learning resources including lesson plans, curriculum content, assessment strategies and reading and resource lists are updated and expanded as necessary to enhance learning, as detailed in the [Lead Tutor Role Description](#)
- **Tutors** are responsible for the implementation of effective teaching and learning strategies in line with our documented strategy.

5.2 Teaching and learning strategies

Tutor-led learning approaches

Tutors employ a wide variety of training methodologies as required by the subject matter and as specified in the Programme Descriptor. Tutors modify methods and materials as required to maximise learner engagement, welcome diversity and accommodate learners' different learning styles as far as is possible within the programme framework. All programmes follow a blended learning model that includes both face-to-face and online teaching.

Methodologies include:

- Teaching sessions, tutorials and group discussions for smaller groups of learners, all tutor-led to enable learner participation and the exploration of issues and topics through discussion.
- Workshops and practical sessions to provide hands-on skills acquisition by learners. These may take place inside or, where appropriate, outdoors where the training location has been assessed as suitable.
- Creative use of the Zoom platform to facilitate a virtual classroom. To encourage learner engagement, tutors use the flipped classroom* approach in the virtual classroom giving learners assess and instructions via the Learning Management System, usually a video with notes. The classroom time is used for discussion and exploration of the content using the breakout rooms to facilitate small group work, group discussion and collaboration. Details of online content and methodologies are given in the Programme Descriptor.

*Flipped classroom is a *“pedagogical approach in which direct instruction moves from the group learning space to the individual learning space, and the resulting group space is transformed into a dynamic, interactive learning environment where the educator guides students as they apply concepts and engage creatively in the subject matter”* (The Flipped Learning Network, 2014)

- The face-to-face elements of the programme and the flipped classroom are supported and supplemented by one-to-one sessions between tutor and learner, either face-to-face or via Zoom, to answer queries, deliver formative assessment, discuss and resolve issues of individual concern, evaluate and monitor progress, and obtain feedback.

Self-directed learning

Methods of self-directed learning are specified in the Programme Descriptor and may include:

- Written assignments, presentations and reports, for formative and summative assessment
- Reading and online research
- Practical projects involving design and implementation
- Off-site observation sessions where the learner observes a particular skill or approach in action
- Practice sessions and projects set up by the learner off-site, supervised by the tutor
- Face-to-face group discussions
- Online group work via Zoom or via the learner chat-room

For learners to be successful in self-directed learning, they must be able to engage in self-reflection and self-evaluation of their learning goals and progress. To support this self-evaluation process, they should:

- Consult with the tutor regularly
- Seek feedback
- Design and implement a personal learning action plan, which can be done through the Learning Management System
- Engage in self-reflection of their achievements, writing up personal journals where appropriate:
 - How do I know I've learned?
 - Am I flexible in adapting and applying knowledge?
 - Do I have confidence in explaining material?
 - When do I know I've learned enough?
 - When is it time for self-reflection and when is it time for consultation with the tutor?

Learning materials

Learning materials take a variety of forms: module booklets, worksheets, information sheets, skills demonstrations, videos of presentations, recordings of online sessions, resource lists and assessment guidelines.

We aim for a paperless learning environment as far as possible. Tutors upload learning materials and resources to the Learning Management System where they are easily accessible to learners. The Learning Management System and its integration with the Zoom platform facilitates easy distribution of additional resources, information or advice from tutors.

Facilitating learner collaboration and communication

The methodologies used for environmental subjects, particularly for practical skills acquisition, are designed to encourage learner collaboration. In addition, each programme group has a dedicated online chat-room on the Learning Management System where learners can meet and interact.

Tutors encourage learners to set up study groups. These collaborations support learner engagement and provide social as well as academic support.

5.3 Learning environment

We recognise that an appropriate learning environment designed to meet the needs of the programme and the learners is a key component of a successful learning journey. A well-planned and well-resourced learning environment plays an important part in enabling learners to learn effectively, and in helping learners feel motivated, inspired and engaged. This in turn assists learners to achieve to their full potential.

The learning environment also needs to be flexible and adaptable as far as practicable to accommodate diverse learner needs.

Indoor and outdoor learning environment

Indoor learning facilities should be attractive, well-maintained and welcoming, supporting both formal and informal learning. Our on-site teaching facilities are wheelchair accessible with natural lighting and comfortable furniture that can be moved easily into different arrangements. They also have adjoining catering and toilet facilities.

Outdoor habitats and facilities suitable for outdoor teaching and learning are particularly important for programmes relating to nature and the environment. Outdoor facilities must provide the habitats and environmental elements required by the programme content. They must also meet required standards in relation to accessibility and safety.

Learners and tutors are asked for feedback on the learning environment as part of their programme feedback.

Assessment of on-site and off-site facilities

The Education Coordinator inspects indoor and outdoor facilities in advance of programme delivery using the Approval and Monitoring of Training Venues procedure with its Venue Checklist to ensure they are fit for purpose and meet the required standards of suitability, accessibility, health and safety.

Brigit's Garden may offer programmes in selected off-site locations. To ensure the learning environment meets our standards:

- The Education Coordinator and Lead Tutor visit the potential venue in advance to assess its suitability and benchmark it against our requirements. They assess both the indoor and outdoor facilities using the Venues Checklist and scoresheet.
- This assessment determines:
 - If the venue is suitable
 - If any modifications or changes are necessary, in which case they must be fully implemented before the venue is deemed suitable
- A named person must coordinate an off-site venue and act as contact person with Brigit's Garden

Technological infrastructure

Our integrated data management and information system and details of the platforms used is detailed in Section 8. For teaching and learning we use an online Learning Management System, integrated with Zoom, as a key resource. It enables streamlined and secure information exchange between tutors

and learners and between learners that is compliant with our [Data Protection Policy](#). It is easy to use and helps enable an effective learning community. The Learning Management System provides:

- An easily accessed single platform for all learning materials, assignments and communications
- A centralised point of contact for tutors and learners to share resources, messages, feedback, objectives and outcomes
- Integration with Zoom for online teaching sessions. Recordings are then available for learners to support their self-directed learning
- Facility for learners to input their personal learning objectives
- Group chat for learners, to build learner engagement
- A built-in calendar showing details of the programme timetable and assessment schedule
- A secure location where learners submit assignments and tutors return them after marking
- Assignment tracking for learners and tutors
- The facility to share pre-programme information and resources with learners, and enable learners to communicate online in advance of the programme

Procedures for the use of the Learning Management System and for safe, secure online teaching and learning are covered in tutor and learner induction and referenced in the [Learner](#) and [Tutor Handbooks](#).

5.4 Monitoring, feedback and evaluation of teaching and learning

Monitoring, feedback and evaluation processes are fundamental to ensuring that our programmes and our Quality Assurance System are fit for purpose and responsive to learners' needs. Our policy and procedures for monitoring, feedback and evaluation are detailed in Section 10 and shown in graphic form [Quality Assurance Schema](#).

5.5 Health, safety and welfare of learners and tutors

We comply with all relevant statutory provisions and take all practicable measures to minimise risk and ensure the health, safety or welfare of our learners and tutors.

- We address health, safety and welfare at induction and in our [Learner](#) and [Tutor Handbooks](#).
- The Programme Design Team undertakes a risk assessment at the design stage, covering risks to health, safety and welfare. This is reviewed and updated regularly during programme delivery.
- Our [Safety Statement](#) highlights our commitment to a safe and healthy teaching and learning environment and is available to all staff, tutors and learners. A copy is published on our website and is prominently displayed in our training facility.
- Our [Blended Learning Strategy Action Plan](#) references protocols and procedures to ensure the health and safety of learners and tutors in an online environment.
- The Venues Checklist which is used to inspect all venues prior to approval includes a thorough assessment with regards to health and safety for both indoor and outdoor facilities.
- We maintain adequate insurance cover for all aspects of the organisation and activities at all times.

Section 6. Assessment of Learners (CG6)

6.1 Policy statement

Brigit's Garden's policy is to ensure that all learners receive quality assured assessment that is fair, transparent, consistent and in line with QQI guidelines. This means that:

- The assessment strategy is carefully considered during programme development to ensure it is well-balanced and appropriate to the learner profile and the programme learning outcomes.
- The assessment strategy must:
 - Reflect the principles of Universal Design for Learning as outlined in section 5.1. Assessment should be context-free, value-free, fair and valid, with clear and unambiguous instructions and clear marking criteria.
 - Accommodate diversity and learners with additional needs by identifying and removing barriers to participation and offering a variety of assessment methods where possible.
- All stages of assessment are carefully monitored to ensure consistency, security and academic integrity.
- All aspects of the assessment process and requirements are well-explained and clear to learners.
- Procedures are in place to ensure that learners with justifiable reason can delay or repeat an assessment and appeal an assessment decision.
- Formative and summative feedback is essential for learners to achieve to their full potential and each programme must have clear strategies for both.
- Tutor induction covers all aspects of assessment including methods, marking schemes, using the Learning Management System, assignments with sample answers, use of formative and summative feedback.
- All assessment results are internally verified and externally authenticated before being approved by the Results Approval Panel in advance of submission of results to QQI.
- Programme assessment is subject to regular review and modification as a result of our feedback and self-evaluation procedures.

We design assessment to:

- Challenge the learner and involve them as partners throughout the assessment process
- Ensure transfer of knowledge
- Involve learners in planning, monitoring, evaluating and making changes to their own learning behaviours
- Involve an outcome in the form of a performance or product e.g. the design of practice handbook
- Give careful consideration to the assessment environment and assessment instruments
- Include opportunities for both learners and tutors to discuss and provide feedback

This is based on the criteria of Authentic Assessment as set out by the *National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education 2017*.

Responsibilities

- The Results Approval Panel maintains oversight of our assessment processes, approves results and make recommendations for corrective action to the Education Board.
- The Education Coordinator is responsible for internal verification.
- The Operations Director contracts the external authenticator and is the main point of contact with QQI.

6.2 Assessing individual and group work

We apply the basic principles of assessing individual learners' work to group work. However, assessing group work requires additional measures to ensure that group performance is translated into individual marks in a fair and equitable manner. We assess group work as follows:

- If both the outcome and the process are important, we assess both and ensure both are reflected in learners' grades. The weighting accorded to each depends on the learning outcomes for the programme and for the assignment. The grading criteria are communicated to learners in the assessment brief, explaining the inclusion of skills that learners may not be used to being evaluated on such as the ability to cooperate or resolve conflict.
- Learners self-assess their own contribution to the group's process through skills such as respectfully listening to and considering opposing views or a minority opinion, effectively managing conflict around differences in ideas or approaches, or keeping the group on track both during and between meetings.
- We assess individual contributions and understanding as well as group products and processes, to help motivate individual learners and discourage 'free-riding'. This can be done through observations by the tutor, weekly journal entries, content quizzes, or other individual assignments.
- We may require learners to evaluate their group's dynamics and the contributions of the other members of the group by asking them to complete an evaluation of group processes or by one-to-one interview. We bear in mind the limitations of this methodology as learners may feel social pressure to cover for one another.

6.3 Formative and summative feedback

Tutors are responsible for providing formative and summative feedback to learners. How and when this feedback is provided is decided at the programme design stage and is written into the assessment schedule. We ask the External Authenticator to comment in their report on the quality of the feedback provided and we ask learners for their views in the [Learner Feedback Form](#).

- The purpose of **formative assessment** is to enable tutors and learners to monitor learning and provide ongoing two-way feedback through, for example, in-class or online discussions, group work, quizzes and the draft stages of projects.
- The goal of **summative assessment** is to evaluate learning at the end of an instructional unit by comparing it against a standard or benchmark through, for example, exams, standardised tests, practical skill demonstrations, final projects, and final essays.

6.4 Stages of the assessment process

1. Initial assessment

- The programme design team devise assessment instruments, marking schemes and assessment criteria
- Learners upload assignments to the Learning Management System and the assessor, normally the tutor, marks them according to the agreed marking plan and sample answers
- The Education Coordinator records outcomes

2. Authentication

- The Education Coordinator verifies that all assessment procedures have been applied and monitors the outcome of the assessment process (Internal Verification, see 6.6)
- The Education Board approves the appointment of an External Authenticator, who moderates assessment results by sampling assessment evidence based on our documented sampling strategy and prepares a report for the Results Approval Panel (External Authentication, see 6.7)

3. Results Approval (see 6.8)

- The Education Board establishes a Results Approval Panel
- The Results Approval Panel reviews the report of the External Authenticator and approves and sign-off assessment results
- The Education Administrator makes the approved results available to learners

4. Request for Certification (see 6.9)

- The Education Administrator submits learner results to QQI via the Quality Business System

5. Appeals

- We allow a maximum of 10 days for learners to lodge an appeal, in line with our Assessment Recheck and Appeals procedure using the Assessment Appeal Application Form
- The Education Coordinator processes and investigates appeals

6.5 Assessment planning and design

The programme design team plan and design the assessment strategy at the programme design stage. They design the assessments to reflect the programme syllabus and are guided by the principles of our assessment policy and our teaching, learning and assessment strategy. They take into account:

- The assessment techniques and weightings specified in the QQI award specification, if applicable
- The assessment workload for the learners and tutors
- Learners who may need additional supports or reasonable accommodation

The Programme Design Team:

- Sets out clear and unambiguous instructions for learners on assessment briefs using the standard template

- Sets out the percentage of the overall marks assigned to each assessment
- Plan formative and summative assessment and feedback and how this is integrated into the programme
- Devise an indicative assessment timetable which aims to ensure an even spread of assessment throughout the duration of the programme and which schedules feedback as well as assessment deadlines

In advance of delivery, the Lead Tutor meets the tutor(s) for a pre-programme briefing to discuss all aspects of the programme including assessment. They confirm the assessment timetable and all assessment instruments and arrangements for reasonable accommodation (if any).

6.6 Information to learners

It is important that learners are well-informed and that they fully understand all aspects of the assessment process.

Learner induction addresses the following areas, which are also referenced in the [Learner Handbook](#):

- The stages of the assessment process and how it works
- Types of formative and summative assessment in the programme
- Details of their programme assignments including the type of assignment, the method of assessment and marking plan, and the schedule of assignments
- Assessment timetable and submission deadlines
- Guidelines for the presentation and submission of assignments
- Our approach to and procedures for reasonable accommodation for assessment
- Academic integrity and our approach to plagiarism, and how to reference
- Use of the online Learning Management System, including how to access their assignment schedule, use their assignment tracker and upload assignments
- Procedures for assessment deferrals, repeats and appeals

Assignment requirements and assessment details are covered in further detail at each stage of the programme, and tutors are available to learners both face-to-face and online to answer questions.

6.7 Internal verification

We have designed our internal verification process to meet the QQI guidelines set out in the 'Quality Assurance Assessment Guidelines for Providers 2013'. The Education Coordinator is responsible for verifying our assessment process and outcomes. The Operations Director is responsible for ensuring that the Education Coordinator has the expertise, resources, and time to complete internal verification to a high standard.

The Education Coordinator:

- Checks that tutors have adhered to our assessment procedures and applied them consistently across assessment activities
- Checks that the assessment results are recorded accurately
- Monitors any irregularities or deviations from the normal distribution of marks and brings any concerns to the attention of the Operations Director

- Takes corrective action if learner results and/or evidence are missing - contacting the tutor, rechecking assessments and/or evidence for mislaid items, reviewing attendance registers and submission logs to ensure evidence was received
- Ensures all assessment evidence is internally verified
- Documents the process by completing the Internal Verification report using our standard template, including observations and recommendations
- Signs the Internal Verification report and makes it available to the External Authenticator in advance of authentication and to members of the Results Approval Panel in advance of its meeting

The Education Coordinator is a member of the Results Approval Panel ex-officio and presents the Internal Verification report to the Panel, highlighting any concerns or issues documented in the report, particularly issues which may need be addressed with corrective action.

6.8 External authentication

The aims of external authentication are to:

- Check that the assessment evidence presented for authentication has been fairly and consistently assessed
- Confirm that the assessment processes are fair, consistent, and valid
- Verify that the results presented meet the national standards for the related award(s)

The Education Board approves the appointment of an External Authenticator who meets our selection criteria on the recommendation of the Operations Director, who is responsible for sourcing the authenticator and maintaining evidence of suitability. We do not contract the services of the same external authenticator for more than three successive certification periods.

The External Authenticator is selected using the following criteria:

- Technical/subject matter expertise in a relevant area
- Ability to confirm that we are implementing our quality assurance policies and procedures in relation to assessment
- Understanding and appreciation of our context, approach and learner profile
- Experience of external authentication and/or external examining
- Is independent of Brigit's Garden, the programme and the tutors

The Operations Director:

- Issues a contract to the External Authenticator setting out terms, conditions and expectations. This contract is signed by the Operations Director and the authenticator before authentication
- Liaises with the External Authenticator before, during and after his/her visit and ensures that the tutors are available if s/he needs to contact them during the process
- Invites the External Authenticator to attend the Results Approval Panel meeting to present their report

The External Authenticator:

- Authenticates the assessment results using our sampling strategy
- Completes and submits his/her External Authenticator report using the template supplied by us by an agreed date

The External Authenticator report is signed and dated by both the Authenticator and the Operations Director. It is stored securely in hard copy and electronically and maintained indefinitely.

6.9 Results approval

The purpose of our results approval process is to formally review and approve results data and to confirm the integrity of our assessment results before we submit them to QQI for certification and issue them to learners. This process ensures that appropriate decisions are taken regarding the outcome of our assessment and authentication processes.

- The Education Board establishes a Results Approval Panel, with members as outlined in the Results Approval Panel Terms of Reference
- The Results Approval Panel considers the Internal Verifier's and the External Authenticator's reports. It confirms that results are fully quality assured and makes the final decisions with regard to the outcomes of the assessment process. It also agrees corrective actions if needed. Details are given in the Results Approval Procedure.
- The Results Approval Panel report is formally signed off by the Chair prior to requesting certification by QQI.

6.10 Submission of results and issuing of award certificates

- When results are approved by the Results Approval Panel the Operations Director double-checks all data for certification for accuracy and reliability with the Education Administrator, who submits them to QQI for certification via the Quality Business System, QQI's secure online system. Details are given in the Returning Certification Data to QQI, Issuing of Results and Award Certificates Procedure.
- As soon as possible after results are approved the Education Coordinator makes the results available to learners by email by issuing them with a *Final Statement of Results* which is downloaded from the Quality Business System as soon as it becomes available. The covering letter which accompanies the results reminds the learner of our appeals policy.
- When the Education Administrator receives the award certificates from QQI s/he records a receipt, adds a scanned copy to the learner record and stores them in a locked press until she issues them to learners using registered post.
- If an award certificate is lost, QQI can provide either a Record of Awards or a Replacement Certificate. There is a €100 fee for a replacement certificate. Learners must apply online directly to QQI via the QQI website for a replacement certificate and must supply proof of identity.

6.11 Academic integrity

Policy statement

The *Academic Integrity Guidelines NAIN* define academic integrity as 'the commitment to and demonstration of honest and moral behaviour in an academic setting'. We are committed to high standards of academic integrity at all times as it applies to learners, tutors and staff.

This means:

- Advising, guiding and educating tutors, learners and all members of the programme team about the importance of upholding academic integrity and how to do so
- Prioritising the prevention of academic misconduct by addressing it in the Tutor and Learner Handbooks, at tutor and learner induction, on our Learning Management System and throughout the programme
- Having clear procedures for detecting and dealing with academic misconduct, as detailed in the [Dealing with Academic Misconduct](#) procedure
- A commitment to honest and trustworthy assessment so that the learner undergoes a fair assessment of their learning, and the expectation that our learners will produce work for assessment that is genuine, not plagiarised and properly referenced.

Practices that may breach academic integrity include:

- Academic misconduct by a tutor or assessor, including breaches of assessment regulations
- Academic misconduct by a learner such as cheating in assessment or projects
- Plagiarism, where a learner submits other peoples' work as their own by taking texts from websites or other sources, using essay banks, and presenting works or sections of works written by another person
- Submitting the same or similar work for more than one assessment (unless this is specifically provided for in the programme)
- Failing to reference sources of information or data appropriately

Responsibilities

The Education Coordinator:

- Guides and trains tutors and learners with regard to academic integrity
- Ensures that academic integrity is addressed at learner and tutor induction and in the documentation listed above
- Investigates alleged incidents of academic misconduct and plagiarism according to the [Dealing with Academic Misconduct](#) procedure
- Monitors the activities of the QQI National Academic Integrity Network (NAIN), attends events and references publications

Tutors:

- Are responsible for upholding high standards of academic integrity in all aspects of their work
- Act as the main source of guidance and information for learners regarding academic integrity, academic writing and how to reference correctly
- Must ensure that the training materials they use themselves are correctly referenced
- Must follow the advice in [Detecting Plagiarism – guidelines for tutors](#)
- If a tutor or other member of the programme team suspects an incident of academic misconduct, they must immediately bring the details and any evidence they have to the attention of the Education Coordinator, who follows the steps set out in our [Dealing with Academic Misconduct](#) procedure.

Learners

- Are expected to follow the advice and guidelines given in the Learner Charter, the [Learner Handbook](#) and [How to reference and avoid plagiarism – guidelines for learners](#)
- To take responsibility for their own high standards of academic integrity and to ensure that

all work submitted for assessment correctly acknowledges the source of any data which is not original to the learner

Programme Design Team

- Designs assessments which are valid, mitigate against cheating and reflect real learning progress or achievement, with a focus on designing authentic assessment which involves learners conducting 'real world' tasks in meaningful contexts where appropriate

Results Approval Panel

- The Chair of the Results Approval Panel adjudicates on any appeals regarding academic misconduct as detailed in the [Dealing with Academic Misconduct procedure](#).
- Considers any concerns, irregularities or malpractice with regard to assessment and makes recommendations to the Education Board for corrective action or changes

We regard academic misconduct by a tutor such as fabrication of evidence or interference with results as gross misconduct, which may be grounds for disciplinary action up to and including termination of their contract.

6.12 Reasonable accommodation in assessment

We adapt assessments to assist the learner and to help ensure that all learners in are assessed on an equitable basis. These adaptations of assessment or reasonable accommodation may include:

- Modified presentation of assignments/examination papers such as enlargements, use of specific fonts and use of different coloured paper
- Use of scribes/readers
- Rest periods
- Use of assistive technology
- Extra time

A full list is given in the [Managing Reasonable Accommodation procedure](#). The learner must complete and submit a [Reasonable Accommodation application form](#) supported by documentary or medical evidence. For pre-existing conditions we ask learners to inform us of the need for reasonable accommodation when they apply for a place, to allow us to plan for it.

6.13 Compassionate consideration

Learners may request a deferral of an assessment on the grounds of compassionate consideration such as illness, or bereavement, as outlined in the Compassionate Consideration procedure. They should fill in the Compassionate Consideration application form and may be required to submit supporting documentation or a medical certificate. These requests are reviewed and decided upon by the Education Coordinator.

6.14 Deferring or repeating assessments

We allow learners one opportunity to repeat an examination or resubmit an assignment if they fail to achieve a pass grade in the first attempt. We do not allow a learner to repeat to improve their grade. They must apply in writing to the Education Coordinator using the [Application to Repeat Assessment](#)

form. The Education Coordinator will decide on the request and, if granted, will agree a new submission date.

The resitting of an examination is dependent on timetabling and we may not always be able to facilitate the learner.

6.15 Rechecks and appeals

A learner who is dissatisfied with an assessment decision may activate the Assessment Recheck and Appeals procedure. Learners are informed about this procedure in the Learner Handbook, at induction and when they get their approved results.

We advise learners to contact the Education Coordinator in the first instance, who arranges for the assessor to speak to the learner and explain how the assessment was graded. The Education Coordinator and the tutor double check that:

- All assessment and examination materials have been marked
- All marks have been included in the final result
- There are no errors in the addition of marks
- The correct weightings have been applied where appropriate

If there is a change in grade as a result of the recheck the Education Coordinator informs the learner and QQI via the QBS.

If the learner is still not satisfied, they can formally appeal following the steps set out in our Assessment Recheck and Appeals procedure.

Section 7 Learner Supports (CG7)

7.1 Policy Statement

Brigit's Garden is committed to providing genuinely learner-centred programmes where learners are well-supported and empowered. In order to achieve this we put wide range of supports in place which are designed to meet the needs of the learners and the programme. Our supports are designed to:

- Motivate and enable each learner to achieve to their highest potential
- Ensure that learners are well-informed, with easy access to the information and resources they need
- Support and facilitate equality and diversity
- Enable and encourage learner feedback and the raising of concerns and complaints
- Facilitate collaboration and support between learners

Responsibility

- The Education Board maintains oversight of learner supports as outlined in the [Education Board Terms of Reference](#).
- The Education Coordinator is responsible for coordinating, monitoring and evaluating learner supports and works closely with the Lead Tutor, as detailed in the [Education Coordinator Role Description](#) and the [Lead Tutor Role Description](#).

Implementing and reviewing learner supports

- We consider learner supports at the programme design and review stages to ensure that they are and continue to be responsive to needs of the programme and our learners
- Programme-specific supports are detailed in the Programme Descriptor
- We update and expand learner supports as necessary to reflect up-to-date approaches and learner needs as identified through monitoring and feedback.
 - The [Learner Feedback Form](#) includes a question about the availability and adequacy of supports
 - Tutors advise the Education Coordinator if extra resources are needed and the Education Coordinator makes arrangements accordingly
 - Learner supports and resources are discussed at programme team meetings
 - Learner supports are considered at every stage of the feedback, evaluation and monitoring processes as outlined in Section 10 and in the [Quality Assurance Schema](#)

7.2 Learner information and communication

Learner Handbook

[The Learner Handbook](#) is a key quality assurance document and is made available to learners in advance of induction. The Learner Handbook:

- Gives comprehensive information about the structure, staffing and ethos of Brigit's Garden

- Points to the policies and procedures which are relevant to learners, with hyperlinks to the specified documents
- Gives detailed information on the programme
- Is welcoming, written in plain English and as short and concise as possible
- Is updated annually by the Education Coordinator with the input of users. Each update is reissued with a new version number and date and the previous version removed and archived.

Supports from the programme team

- Tutors are the first and primary source of support for learners throughout the programme. They are available in-person, by phone or via the Learning Management System to answer learner queries, deal with complaints and give as much one-to-one support as possible.
- The Education Coordinator
 - Provides support, advice and information at all stages of the programme
 - Advises learners on transfer and progression routes
 - Provides advice on possible funding sources such as Technical Support Grants and our instalment payment plan in place for applicants who need it (offered only in cases of financial hardship)
 - Advises learners on reasonable accommodation

Supports for blended learning

- Tutors are available for scheduled periods in the virtual classroom before and after training sessions if individual learners have any queries or need one-to-one support. These support sessions are timetabled into the programme.
- Training sessions delivered via Zoom are recorded and made available to learners to use as part of their self-directed learning.
- At induction tutors detail how the Learning Management System works. A list of Frequently Asked Questions about blended learning and the use of the Learning Management System is included as an appendix to the Learner Handbook.
- The Lead Tutor who supports the delivery of a blended learning programme must be familiar with blended learning delivery, the use of our Learning Management System and Zoom and be able to anticipate the likely concerns of learners and respond to learners' queries. Training is provided as required, with the input of an eLearning expert.

7.3 Learner concerns and complaints

We encourage learners to bring concerns and complaints about any aspect of the programme or supports to us at the earliest possible opportunity. We take all complaints and expression of dissatisfaction seriously. Issues raised and actions taken are reviewed as part of the continuous monitoring and evaluation that underpins our Quality Assurance System. We treat all complaints fairly, impartially and in confidence and are committed to ensuring that issues are resolved as quickly, directly and constructively as possible.

- Our [Learner Complaints Procedure](#) is signposted in the Learner Handbook, discussed at induction and available on the Learning Management System. It is also covered in induction for staff and tutors. It encourages sorting out complaints informally where possible, with a clear procedure for where this is not possible.

- Tutors and staff include learner concerns and complaints and actions taken in programme feedback and reviews.
- If a complaint is categorised as serious or the learner is not satisfied with how their complaint has been handled, the Education Coordinator escalates it to the Education Board who appoints an independent person to investigate.
- The Education Coordinator logs details in the Complaints Register and retains records of any correspondence. The Complaints Register is reviewed as part of our ongoing monitoring of quality and is available for review at Education Board meetings.
- Each class is encouraged to elect a Learner Representative to represent their collective interests to the Lead Tutor and the Education Coordinator.

7.4 Reasonable accommodation

We are committed, as far as practical, to facilitate all applicants as long as they meet the minimum entry requirements for a programme and we do our best to accommodate learners who need additional support. We deal with requests for reasonable accommodation on a case-by-case basis. We use *‘Teaching and Learning; Making learning accessible for learners with disabilities in further education’*, Ahead Educational Press 2011, as a guide and reference when making arrangements.

Learners are asked to disclose additional support needs and request reasonable accommodation when they are applying for a place and during their programme. We have a documented Managing Reasonable Accommodation procedure for which the Education Coordinator is responsible.

The list of supports we provide is given in the Managing Reasonable Accommodation procedure, referenced in the Learner Handbook and published on the Learning Management System. These include:

- Physical modifications to the training location such as seating arrangements or easier access
- Learning materials provided in accessible format
- Additional time, alternative formats and a reader/scribe for assessments (see 6.11)

This list is not exhaustive, and we do our best to accommodate all learners presenting with any other support need as far as is practicable for the programme.

We monitor reasonable accommodation as part of our part of our evaluation and review process by:

- Reviewing the numbers of requests granted and rejected
- Monitoring the implementation of arrangements for reasonable accommodation and asking for feedback from learners that have been accommodated
- Reviewing assessment outcomes in relation to reasonable accommodation and asking for feedback from the External Authenticator

This data is reviewed as part of the process outlined in Section 10 and the Quality Assurance Schema to facilitate changes and updates to the Reasonable Accommodation procedure, the Learner Handbook and other quality assurance documents.

Section 8 Information and data management (CG8)

8.1 Policy Statement

The efficient flow of information is essential to the effective operation of our Quality Assurance System. Our policy is to operate a data and information system that is:

- Designed to ensure the efficient, timely and thorough dissemination and gathering of information
- Well-designed and easy to operate
- Effective, with clear procedures
- Secure and compliant with data protection requirements

Information is disseminated from the Board of Trustees, the Education Board and the Senior Management Team to staff, tutors, learners and others in the form of policies, procedures, updates, changes to the Quality Assurance System, programme information, training opportunities etc.

Information flows up through the organisation in the form of feedback, evaluations, reports and data compiled in the course of operations and educational programmes. This information is essential to effective monitoring and evaluation, and for embedding continuous change and improvement throughout the organisation.

Details of information for evaluation and review are given in Section 10, and the information system is shown in graphic form in the [Quality Assurance Schema](#).

Responsibilities

- The Board of Trustees has overall responsibility for ensuring that all data are maintained and retained in accordance with legislation. The Brigit's Garden [Trustees Handbook](#) includes a [Data Protection Policy](#).
- The Board of Trustees elects a Data Protection Officer, responsible for monitoring and reporting on all aspects of information and data management.
- The Operations Director is responsible for the implementation of the policy.
- The Education Coordinator is responsible for the secure transfer of learner data to QQI and for the quality of this data.
- The Terms of Reference for each governance body details which reports they are responsible for and which reports they receive in order to carry out their responsibilities.
- Role Descriptions specify the reports the person is responsible for drafting, the reports the person presents on behalf of another body, and reports received.
- The Education Coordinator is responsible for ensuring that external reports are published on our website as required. This includes QQI Panel reports and external monitoring reports.

8.2 Information infrastructure

Brigit's Garden has a networked information and data management system with professional support and maintenance from an external IT company. It is backed up daily on the cloud and updated regularly

to ensure the security of all data. Staff are trained in safe data security working practices. We use the following platforms:

- Zoho Customer Relationship Management system - contains our database of contacts and bookings and the calendar for meetings, bookings and events. Each user has password-protected access rights appropriate to their role.
- Box – secure cloud storage of our files, photographs and data.
- MailChimp – platform for e-newsletters to various categories of customers and learners, integrated with Zoho.
- Website www.brigitsgarden.ie – with automated links for e-newsletter signups, memberships, donations etc.
- Learning Management System for tutors and learners with features detailed in 5.3, including integration with Zoom.
- Zoom – used for online meetings, webinars and classroom sessions.

8.3 Data Protection

Brigit's Garden manages and protects data for efficient, safe and legally compliant operations. Our [Data Protection Policy](#) specifies protocols and procedures for the storage and processing of personal data, held in digital or printed form, in relation to employees, contract staff and tutors, learners, interns, volunteers, trustees, donors, members and customers. It is designed to ensure that the data protection rights of all relevant individuals are safeguarded and that Brigit's Garden is compliant with requirements of the *Data Protection Acts*, the *General Data Protection Regulations 2018* and the eight rules of data protection required by the Data Protection Commissioner:

1. Obtain and process information fairly
2. Keep data only for specified, explicit and lawful purposes
3. Use and disclose data only in ways compatible with these purposes
4. Keep data safe and secure
5. Keep data accurate, complete and up-to-date
6. Ensure that data is adequate, relevant and not excessive
7. Retain data for no longer than is necessary for the purpose or purposes
8. Give a copy of personal data to an individual on request

Further details are given in [Data Protection: General Procedures](#) and [Managing a Data Breach Procedure](#).

Data protection implications for video recordings

We advise tutors and learners when we use video recordings, to whom we make the recordings available and for what purpose. We also retain the right to view recordings as part of our process for monitoring tutor performance. This is clearly stated in the tutor contract or [Memorandum of Agreement](#) and the [Tutor Handbook](#).

Virtual classroom sessions are recorded as a resource for learners. Video recordings may be used for assessment of skills demonstrations sessions by learners.

We prefer if learners keep their cameras on during virtual classroom sessions to facilitate a more social learning experience. However, we respect learners' right to privacy and we advise them that if they prefer or if they do not wish to have their image recorded to leave their cameras off by using the 'Stop

Video' function. This is stated in the [Learner Handbook](#) and the tutor emphasises it at the beginning of each virtual classroom session.

Learner records

Learner records and related programme and assessment information are stored in a password-protected cloud folder in accordance with our [Data Protection Policy](#). We store the data we collect:

- To generate reports on learner registration
- For course provision
- To monitor the performance of individual learners
- For internal quality control and for external regulatory requirements

In order to manage learner records effectively and safely:

- A unique identifier is used for each learner when they enrol on a programme for the first time
- The record includes details of their personal information including name, contact details, gender, date of birth, PPS Number (if available), emergency contact person, prior learning and any additional support needs
- Access is limited to named staff with individual passwords
- Individual learner records are linked to a general database on module outcomes

Data collected as indicators of quality

We collect qualitative and quantitative data on quality in order to evaluate success and for reporting to the governance units.

Qualitative indicators of quality

- Learner satisfaction
- Tutor satisfaction
- Input from other stakeholders
- External Authenticator feedback
- External evaluation feedback
- QQI monitoring feedback
- Testimonials and recommendations

Quantitative indicators of quality

- Enrolment rates (numbers per programme)
- Completion and drop-out rates
- Certification rates
- Attendance records
- Attendance and engagement statistics from virtual classroom
- Level of engagement with Learning Management System
- Assessment results
- Assessment results compared to the national standard (if available)
- Number of returning learners
- Number of complaints
- Numbers transferring and/or progressing to other programmes

Maintenance and retention of records

- In accordance with our [Data Protection Policy](#) we hold data that are relevant and necessary for the purpose for which they are held and only for that purpose.
- Personal data are only retained while it is necessary for the purposes for which the data was collected.
- In certain cases such as data on previous employees, we are required to retain the information for a number of years.
- The length of time for which different categories of data are held is specified in the [Retention Schedule](#). Categories include those which are specifically related to training provision, sensitive data relating to reasonable accommodation requests, assessment evidence that is defined as personal data, recordings of skills demonstrations, learner PPS numbers.
- Data that are no longer needed for specific purposes are deleted from databases and other relevant places and securely destroyed.

8.4 Submission of certification and learner data to QQI

We use the QQI Quality Business System to request certification and to access other QQI systems such as validation and Q-help.

- The Education Coordinator is responsible for entering learner data on the Quality Business System immediately following registration and for dealing and resolving any queries in relation to the data
- The Operations Director and the Education Coordinator double-check certification data for accuracy following the approval of results before it is submitted to QQI via the Quality Business System
- Access to the login to the Quality Business System is limited to Education Coordinator through a password-protected link.

Further details are given in the [Returning Certification Data to QQI, Issue of Results and Award Certificates Procedure](#).

Section 9 Public Information and Communication (CG9)

9.1 Policy statement

Brigit's Garden is committed to ensuring that its communications and dealings with staff, tutors, learners, volunteers, donors, visitors and other stakeholders are of the highest possible standard. We commit to open two-way communications with learners, tutors and staff to create an environment of trust, mutual respect and loyalty in which excellence is valued and encouraged. Our policy is to ensure that all information provided to stakeholders or published in any format is accurate, helpful and written with the reader in mind.

Responsibilities

- The Education Board maintains oversight of the programme and quality assurance information we publish
- The Education Coordinator approves programme information prior to publication and liaises with the Marketing Manager in relation to publication
- The Operations Director is responsible for communications with QQI

9.2 Information and communication

Brigit's Garden communicates with stakeholders through a diverse range of media including its website, emails, social media, e-newsletters, written documentation, marketing flyers and verbal communication.

Information for Applicants

We provide pre-entry information about the entry requirements, content, assessment and demands of the programme to enable applicants to make an informed choice about participation on our website and programme brochures in Pdf format downloadable from the website. We detail the resources and competencies applicants need to attend the virtual classroom and use the Learning Management System.

The Education Coordinator reviews and updates the website information on a monthly basis if there are changes.

We comply with the terms of Section 67 of the *Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 QQI* which requires provider institution to specify:

- Details of the award
- Name of the awarding body
- Title of the award
- Whether the award is recognised within the National Framework of Qualifications
- Level of that recognition
- Whether the award is a Major, Minor, Special Purpose or Supplemental
- If completion of a programme does **not** entitle the learner to an award

- A statement of the procedures for access, transfer and progression which apply to the programme

In addition we provide information under the following headings:

- Programme content
- Programme duration
- Workload/time commitment
- Mode of delivery – online/blended/face-to-face
- All fees
- Learner profile
- Application process and entry requirements, with options for recognition of prior learning
- Teaching, learning and assessment strategy

Our website is our primary vehicle for providing information about Brigit's Garden programmes, learner supports, QQI and the National Framework of Qualification to interested stakeholders. Visitors to the website can view our training calendar, access details of our programmes and supports and be guided through the steps to applying for a place on a programme, with signposting to support and guidance from staff as required.

We also publish/disseminate programme information via:

- E-newsletters and social media
- Relevant third party and partner websites
- Promoting our programmes at conferences and sectoral events
- Providing information to potential applicants and other interested parties

Information for Learners

The tutor is the primary point of contact and source of information for learners throughout the programme and responds to all requests for programme-related information. If the tutor is not able to respond, learners can redirect the query to the Education Coordinator, or in the case of administrative queries to the Education Administrator.

The following documents are provided to all learners, before or at the commencement of a programme:

- Learner Handbook
- A programme timetable and assessment schedule
- Details of appeals and complaints procedures
- Assessment briefs and assessment criteria

The tutor inducts the learners using our standard Learner Induction Checklist. The aim of induction is to ensure that learners have all the necessary information regarding the programme and supports to help ensure a successful outcome for them. Programme and assessment timetables are distributed and discussed at Induction. Induction also includes a tutorial on using the Learning Management System and accessing the virtual classroom.

Publication of Quality Assurance documents and evaluation reports

We are committed to publishing our Quality Assurance documents and key findings from Quality Assurance evaluation reports in an easily accessible format and location on our website as soon as practicable after the evaluation event and in line with QQI requirements.

We publish:

- Our Quality Assurance Manual
- Learner Handbook
- Awarding body reports to meet awarding body requirements
- Self-evaluation reports

9.3 Information related to QQI

As a provider recognised by QQI, we comply with QQI's requirements regarding the provision of QQI information. We are aware that if we provide enrolled learners with information which is false or misleading in any material respect we are committing an offence. We are committed to responding and addressing any concerns that QQI may bring to our attention as a matter of urgency. The Education Coordinator ensures that references to QQI and the National Framework of Qualifications that we publish are correct and accurate and that we use only the current versions of the National Framework of Qualifications graphic and the QQI award brand.

As part of our programme review process, we review the information contained on the QQI register of providers and the database of awards and programmes and update QQI with regard to any changes. We also review and update our Organisational Chart as required and inform QQI of any organisational changes that may impact on our relationship with QQI.

The Operations Director is the main point of contact with QQI and is responsible for the timely distribution of communications from QQI to other members of the programme team and governance units.

Section 10 Self-Evaluation, Monitoring and Review (CG11)

10.1 Policy Statement

Brigit's Garden is committed to continuous monitoring and evaluation of our programmes, supports and activities in order to assess our effectiveness in achieving consistent high quality and to identify opportunities for improvements and changes. Self-evaluation, ongoing monitoring and regular reviews are essential to ensure that we are meeting the requirements of learners, staff, tutors, other stakeholders and awarding bodies.

Our policies and procedures grow and adapt as our education and training provision grows. While the core elements of policy may stay the same, the details change with the needs of learners, the sector and the organisation, the requirements of our awarding body and developments in the further education landscape. Our review and evaluation processes are designed to facilitate continuous change and improvement, help us to reflect best practice in the further education and training sector and stay abreast of relevant developments.

To ensure effective and thorough self-evaluation and monitoring we are committed to involving learners, tutors, staff and other stakeholders and to engaging independent experts to contribute to objective and independent self-evaluation.

Responsibilities

- The Education Board is responsible for
 - Oversight of evaluation and monitoring processes
 - Ensuring that programmes are reviewed and evaluated effectively
 - Ensuring that feedback and evaluation data is acted on appropriately
- The Operations Director is responsible for ensuring that the resources are in place to implement the processes to a high standard
- The Education Coordinator is responsible for coordinating and implementing all feedback and monitoring processes
- The Lead Tutor is responsible for implementing the programme review and evaluation processes

10.2 Feedback, monitoring and self-evaluation processes

Brigit's Garden's Quality Assurance Schema shows how feedback, data and reports from learners, tutors, the assessment process and other stakeholders are monitored and acted on throughout the Quality Assurance System to ensure that changes and updates are made on an ongoing basis.

Monitoring of the teaching and learning environment

The Education Coordinator, supported by Education Administrator and other members of the programme team, monitors programmes, programme materials, learner supports, attendance

records, tutor performance and the overall quality of the learning experience on an ongoing basis and reports to each meeting of the Education Board. The tutor is responsible for monitoring the quality of the learning experience during delivery. Each rollout of a programme is reviewed following delivery.

The following sources of data feed into this monitoring:

i) Learner feedback and data

Data on application numbers, learner attendance and drop-out rates are gathered by the Education Coordinator, and we encourage continuous learner feedback:

- Learners complete a mid- and post-programme Learner Feedback Form. These forms are designed to elicit honest feedback about the programme content, tutors, teaching and learning methodologies, the venue and facilities, and any other matters of concern to the learner.
- Occasionally we invite learners to attend focus group meetings after delivery of a programme.
- Learners are encouraged to raise concerns and queries in the course of teaching and through one-to-one discussions, tutorials and forums. These are acted on in accordance with the Dealing with Learner Complaints procedure.
- The Complaints Register records serious complaints and actions taken.
- Class Representatives raise issues and provide feedback.
- There is direct input from learners to the Education Board via the learner who sits on the Board.

ii) Tutor feedback

- Tutors provide ongoing feedback to the Lead Tutor and at programme meetings on all aspects of the programme including learner queries and comments.
- Tutor observation sessions with follow-up discussions are undertaken regularly in accordance with the Managing and Monitoring Tutor Performance procedure.
- Tutors complete a Tutor Feedback Form with a self-assessment at the end of each Programme.

lii) Assessment feedback, reports and data

- The Results Approval Panel submits a report with recommendations for quality improvement to the Education Board.
- The Education Board benchmarks assessment tools with national standards by referring to relevant national data in relation to the level of learner activity and results.

iv) Other stakeholders

- Information and feedback is gleaned through our networks and memberships of professional organisations, for example the Irish Forest School Association (which supports the development of Forest School learning in Ireland) with regard to best national and international practice in our subject matter areas.
- We also plan to engage with a wider national and international community of practice through the establishment of our own Community of Practice.

Monitoring the physical and online learning environment

The learning environment is monitored as part of the feedback and evaluation process.

- Venue inspections are completed in advance of a programme starting using the Approval and Monitoring of Training Venues procedure
- Ongoing feedback from learners and tutors includes the learning environment
- Learner and Tutor Feedback Forms include questions about the physical learning environment and the online learning environment

10.3 Two-year programme reviews

In addition to on-going monitoring, each programme is subject to a full review by the Programme Team every two years.

- The Education Coordinator collates and analyses data from a range of sources and involves key stakeholders in the review as appropriate, as well as consulting with employers or sector representatives in respect of programme outcomes and content.
- The Programme Team produces a programme report which is submitted to the Education Board. The Education Board agrees changes and amendments to the programme within the bounds of validation (if applicable).
- As part of the review process the Lead Tutor deletes or archives old and obsolete programme content to ensure that all members of the programme team access only up-to-date materials and information.
- The Education Coordinator monitors the implementation of the agreed changes.

The following are reviewed as part of the programme review:

- Programme information and data
 - Programme content and materials
 - Quality assurance processes and procedures
 - Learning resources and facilities, physical and online
 - Published information
 - Application, attendance, completion, retention and progression rates
 - Learner supports
 - Facilitating diversity/reasonable accommodation
 - Transfer and progression
- Feedback and evaluation
 - From learners, tutors and stakeholders
 - Lead Tutor evaluation
 - Tutor and Learner Feedback forms
 - Appeals and complaints
- Assessment information
 - Assessment results
 - Certification reports
 - Comparison of award outcomes with other providers, nationally or internationally
- Improvement plans
- Programme team professional development

- Relevance of outcomes to the sector
- The information contained on the QQI register of providers and the database of awards and programmes

10.4 Two-year reviews of Quality Assurance System

We conduct a formal review of our Quality Assurance System and associated documentation every two years at a minimum with the input of an external quality assurance expert. This is to ensure that the system:

- Is working effectively in terms of ensuring quality provision
- Continues to be accessible and user-friendly and meet the standards of best practice
- Meets the needs of our evolving context
- Meets regulatory requirements and the needs of all stakeholders, particularly our awarding bodies and learners
- Is effective in ensuring continuous improvement in the quality of our programmes and supports.

The Operations Director appoints a suitable quality assurance expert for the review. A quality report which includes the external expert's recommendations is compiled by the Education Coordinator and presented to, and considered by, the Education Board. The recommendations approved by the Education Board are referred to the Education Coordinator for implementation.

10.5 Five-year self-evaluation programme reviews

"The self-evaluation by a provider of its programmes and services is a fundamental part of its quality assurance system. It is a way of developing the programme through constructive questioning leading to positive recommendations and improvement planning. It should be viewed as a process primarily for the benefit of the programme, its current and future learners and the staff working on it". QQI

Every five years we organise a major review with the input of an external evaluator. This is a comprehensive review of all aspects of a programme and the quality assurance processes that underpin it. It is forward-looking and is used to inform the development and future planning of the programme. The process aims to enhance the programme and focuses on identifying improvements to the programme content, policies, structures and processes.

The review considers the views of learners, graduates, tutors, collaborative providers, employers/industry and other stakeholders, all members of the programme teams and an independent evaluator. The self-evaluation process involves evaluation, reflection, reviewing and reporting on the quality and effectiveness of a programme using quality assurance data collated during the 5-year period. We publish our self-evaluation findings on our website.

Learner involvement in self-evaluation review

Feedback from learner focus group meetings and learner evaluations feed into self-evaluation. The external evaluator consults with both learners and graduates as part of the external evaluation process.

Role and selection criteria for external evaluator

The QQI QA guidelines state that the role of the external evaluator is to *'offer objective comparisons with similar programmes available elsewhere. This role of this person should be that of a 'critical friend', i.e. someone who can bring support, recognition and positive suggestions for improvement.'*

An external evaluator is appointed by the Education Board on the recommendation of the Education Coordinator, who is responsible for sourcing suitable candidates and maintaining evidence of their suitability. The person must have:

- An understanding of evaluation procedures and methodologies
- Subject matter expertise
- The experience to compare the quality of the programmes with that of similar programmes and give an informed view on the success of the programme
- No personal, professional or business interest in Brigit's Garden or any direct connections with our tutors or second providers
- Experience of training and development processes
- Experience of blended learning pedagogies and delivery (if a blended learning programme)

Report from self-evaluation review

The report from the self-evaluation review is presented to the Education Board by the Education Coordinator. The Education Board makes recommendations for changes to the Quality Assurance System based on this report.

- The Education Coordinator is responsible for implementing the changes, updating materials, procedures and Handbooks on the website and the Learning Management System and communicating changes to Programme Teams and the Education Administrator.
- The Operations Director is responsible for ensuring this is done correctly and in a timely manner.

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