

Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy



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Introduction

For over 20 years, Hibernia College has been exploring new and innovative ways to enhance how students of the College learn in virtual and physical spaces. Our academic programmes are based on a philosophy of education that seeks to combine advanced digital expertise with the development of the broader professional and academic skills that are required of graduates for success in contemporary society.

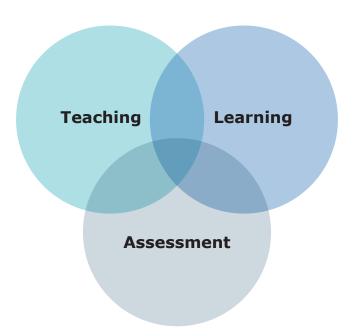
The creation of this Teaching, Learning and Assessment (TLA) Strategy comes at a time of great societal change. Across the globe, TLA in higher education has been transformed.

Context

The Hibernia College Quality Framework (HCQF) was approved in 2019 as part of the College's reengagement with Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI). It comprises an infrastructure of strategies, policies and procedures complemented with documentary resources, which include forms, guidelines and handbooks. Together, these documents inform and support decision-making and day-to-day activity in the College.

The Teaching, Learning and Assessment Committee (TLAC) is a subcommittee of the Academic Board as set out in the *Governance and Management Policy* of the College.

The TLAC guides the Academic Board and the College community in strategy, policy and approach to TLA for all programmes. A particular function of the TLAC is to promote innovation and excellence in TLA in Hibernia College, including the development and ongoing review of the College's TLA Strategy.



In 2020, the TLAC undertook a revision of the College's existing strategy. This strategy document now sets out the framework and mechanisms for the continued development of both academic excellence and digital architecture in the area of TLA. It identifies priorities to support innovation and excellence in the field of education and positions the College to retain and grow its technological expertise. Its ultimate aim is to strengthen the experiences of current and future students.

Role of technology in College programmes

Hibernia College has been a pioneer in the use of technology in education for the past 20 years. In that time, the College has maintained a continuously active blended learning community of staff, faculty and students. The term blended learning has been applied to a variety of educational contexts exhibiting significant variation in the extent of the mix between online and face-to-face activities. QQI's *Statutory quality assurance guidelines for providers of blended learning programmes* utilise Garrison and Kanuka's (2004, p.96) definition of blended learning as 'the integration of classroom face-to-face learning experiences with online learning experiences'. As they explain, blended learning is not just about using useful technologies or opening up access to learning; rather, it represents 'a fundamental reconceptualization and reorganisation of the teaching and learning dynamic' (ibid., p.97).

The learning environment for learners at Hibernia College is designed to ensure that the virtual and physical spaces operate as an integrated ecosystem within which a symbiotic relationship exists between:

- Asynchronous online content
- Online discussion forums
- Synchronous online lectures, tutorials and webinars
- Face-to-face lectures, tutorials and practical workshops

This ecosystem ensures that there is a robust constructive alignment between the programme content, the learning and teaching activities, and the assessment and feedback processes implemented across programmes.

The College recognises that technology can play a powerful role in a number of areas and uses it, for example, to:

- Increase access to educational opportunities
- Increase the personalisation of educational experiences
- Increase the variety of educational experiences presented to students
- Enhance collaborative learning and research activities
- Help to forge community when students are geographically separate
- Ease the administrative burden of programmes

Further to this, the European Framework for the Digital Competence of Educators (DigCompEdu) is scientifically sound and provides a framework for understanding what it means to be a digitally competent educator at all levels of education, from early childhood to higher and adult education, including general and vocational training, special needs education and non-formal learning contexts. This Framework will provide context for the future development of digital competencies in the College.

Inclusive curriculum design

Hibernia College is committed to ensuring an inclusive learning environment that supports a diverse learning community. Learners are diverse in terms of learning styles, learning proficiency and learning ability, and so, blended learning can provide opportunities for both individualised and self-regulated learning to happen.

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) aims to assist learners with a diversity of learning needs who wish to achieve on a programme that may have forseeable challenges. In accordance with CAST guidelines (CAST, 2018), the blended learning model at Hibernia College adheres to the principles of UDL by incorporating multiple means of engagement, representation, and action and expression into our teaching, learning and assessment. Hibernia College adopts the principles of UDL in all of its programmes so that a diversity of learners are engaged across the lifecycle of the programmes and their needs are anticipated.

Engagement

Representation

Action & Expression

Graduate attributes

The transformation of Irish society, its economy and the resultant cultural and social diversity has created a more diverse student body as the number of people entering the system grows and the student profile changes. Unemployment and changing patterns of work place a greater emphasis on lifelong learning and upskilling. The importance of high-quality research to an institution's teaching mission and to underpinning socio-economic development has grown significantly (Higher Education Strategy Group, 2011). In a time of rapidly changing technological possibilities and increased demands in terms of quality, accountability, success rates and progression into employment, we are cognisant of the importance of developing high-quality graduates with transferable skills.

The College has developed a Hibernia College Graduate Profile. The Graduate Profile has an associated range of graduate attributes. Graduate attributes are the qualities, skills and understandings that the College community agrees its learners should develop during their time with the institution. These attributes include, but go beyond, the disciplinary expertise or technical knowledge that has traditionally formed the core of most College courses. They are qualities that also prepare graduates as agents of social good in an unknown future (Bowden et al., 2000).

The Hibernia College Graduate Profile explicitly lays out the shared expectations of learners for their learning at both institutional and programme levels. The Profile is, therefore, a guiding document for more specific, disciplinary-based learning outcome statements and curriculum design. The role of faculty is to design the curriculum, the teaching methods and strategies, the pedagogy and the educational opportunities that intentionally promote these shared expectations (Maki, 2004).



Hibernia College Graduate Profile

Professional	Hibernia College graduates are responsible, caring and ethical professionals. They are self-directed, empathetic and confident. They are judicious, operating with integrity and equity.	
Knowledgeable	Hibernia College graduates are highly competent and capable. They have extensive specialist knowledge in their chosen field. They display a wealth of emotional intelligence as well as cognitive ability. They appreciate that education is a transformative, never-ending process and embrace continuous, lifelong learning.	
Agent of Change	Hibernia College graduates are curious and display a questioning disposition. They are reflective, responsive and proactive. As individuals, they are enabling, pioneering and adaptable.	
Innovative	Hibernia College graduates are creative and resilient. A critical thinker, the Hibernia College graduate is a positive individual who can use their skills to problem-solve.	
Collaborative	Hibernia College graduates are collegial and cooperative and they work well as part of a team. They display high levels of both interpersonal and intrapersonal skills and are inclusive and respectful in their dealings with others. They are open-minded with a restorative attitude when working with others. They are receptive to feedback.	
Digitally Competent	Hibernia College graduates are digitally competent and ready for the 21 st -century workforce. Broadly defined as the confident, critical and creative use of ICT to achieve goals related to work, employability, learning, leisure, inclusion and/or participation in society, digital competency is the set of knowledge, skills and attitudes (thus including abilities, strategies, values and awareness) that are required when using ICT and digital media to perform tasks; solve problems; communicate; manage information; collaborate; create and share content; and build knowledge effectively, efficiently, appropriately, critically, creatively, autonomously, flexibly, ethically, and reflectively for work, leisure, participation, learning, socialising, consuming, and empowerment (Ferrari, 2012).	

Our strategic goals

This TLA Strategy enhances existing strengths and commitments as outlined in the Hibernia College *Strategic Plan 2020* and builds on the College's mission to 'be a leading high quality educational institution of national, and international importance, delivering distinctive technology enhanced educational opportunities for our learners in order to prepare them for complex professional roles in a rapidly changing technological world'.

The goals identified within this strategy document are designed to achieve progress, in line with the HCQF, by:

Goal 1	Enhancing and sustaining high-quality teaching and learning pedagogies to ensure outstanding student experience
Goal 2	Developing processes to ensure appropriate and consistent standards of quality across all programmes in the area of assessment
Goal 3	Significantly developing the digital architecture to support the student learning experience
Goal 4	Building capacity amongst faculty and adjunct faculty that is underpinned by current research in teaching, learning and assessment
Goal 5	Ensuring that evidence-based research informs programme design

Goal 1: Enhancing and sustaining high-quality teaching and learning pedagogies to ensure outstanding student experience

Current context

Hibernia College is committed to delivering outstanding learning experiences for our students. Programme content is relevant, cutting edge and responsive to the needs of a contemporary society. It is evidence based, meeting all required professional and academic standards. The learning environment for those studying at Hibernia College is currently designed so that the virtual and physical spaces operate as an integrated ecosystem; a symbiotic relationship exists between online content, online discussion forums, online synchronous tutorials and face-to-face on-site workshops. This ensures that there is a robust constructive alignment between content, teaching and learning strategies and the assessment processes implemented across the programmes. This approach to teaching and learning is achieved through the blended design of programmes wherein learners are provided with the scaffolds to become self-directed, reflective learners in a mixture of online, face-to-face and professional practice contexts.

The table below highlights the approach taken to the development of modules across all programmes:

Core Competency

Identifying the intended learning outcomes of each teaching episode

Effective Teaching

Learning outcomes are explicitly stated at the outset affording learners an opportunity to visualise an intended outcome in the process. Assessment tasks and other assessment criteria reflect the module syllabus in proportion. Assessment tasks are clearly communicated to students. Conceptual understanding and not simply the reproduction of facts will be the focus of assessments.

Evidence

There is clear identification of minimum intended learning outcomes. Each assessment task is aligned with the appropriate section on the syllabus. If a particular section in an assessment task has a higher weighting, learners will be informed of this and the assessment will reflect this. Project content, submission dates and marking schemes are clearly communicated to students.

Core Competency	Effective Teaching	Evidence
Organisation for student learning	The objectives of each teaching episode are matched with appropriate readings, assessment tasks and other resources. Each teaching episode is linked thematically with the central theme of value creation across modules.	The organisation of the programme is designed with the idea of linking the modules together. All electronic resources are presented in a way that advances student understanding.
Communication	Clear explanations and all presentations are structured pedagogically. Real-world examples are presented via case study material. Learners are asked appropriate questions and respect is given to all answers. Good listening skills are required on the part of the tutor. Tutorials are designed and planned to maximise student interaction.	The presentation of the material is professional and structured. Online tutorials are used to get feedback and opinions on the programme or module. Learners are encouraged to raise issues of concern they may have about the programme or individual module.
Active learning	This includes cooperative learning, group work, differentiated tasks and role play as well as questions and problems requiring active student participation to investigate some topics in detail. Discussion and professional discourse will be a key component in asynchronous and synchronous sessions.	Examples are the case studies used in a variety of modules that make up the programme. Additionally, learners will be required to use their own work setting as a case study for the application of learning. Much of this work will be presented to the class for discussion and feedback.

Core Competency	Effective Teaching	Evidence
Providing feedback to students	Underpinned by guiding principles of Assessment for Learning and Assessment of Learning, feedback will be provided at two levels — formative and summative. All feedback will indicate to learners where they have been successful and where they have not met the learning outcomes. Feedback will include direction and advice about how to improve in the future.	The assessment marking scheme will be detailed and succinct.
Identifying and catering for learning difficulties	Reasonable accommodations will be undertaken to facilitate the engagement of learners with special educational needs.	Special educational needs will be catered for. Individual support will be provided, where necessary, via tutorials for students. The College currently operates under its Code of Practice for Reasonable Accommodation Policy in Assessment.

- Promote high-quality teaching and pedagogies that encourage active and collaborative learning
- Ensure students experience a range of teaching and learning methods across their programme of study
- Continuously review the effectiveness of the range of teaching and learning methods deployed in programmes
- Engage with learners through feedback questionnaires and surveys

Goal 2: Developing processes to ensure appropriate and consistent standards of quality across all programmes in the area of assessment

Current context

Assessment practices in higher education programmes must be robustly aligned with the teaching and learning strategy being cultivated. Hibernia College adopts assessment practices and assessment criteria that reflect and reward students' responses to uncertain and ill-defined contexts, as well as their ability to consider ambiguity and uncertainty as part of teaching and learning. A number of assessment types are used to determine the achievement of learning outcomes and the awarding of grades in each of the modules. Assessments include, but are not limited to, essays, reflective journals, presentations, practical demonstrations, learning logs, placements, research projects, written and oral examinations, and portfolio submissions. Aligning the teaching methods, learning outcomes and assessment criteria throughout the programmes are consistent programme paradigms that are transparent and effective in promoting the achievement of learning outcomes. Teaching methods in all modules are determined by the assessment type that learners will undertake during and at the conclusion of the module. Assessment tasks require learners to undertake assessments that reflect the genuine, day-to-day professional activities.

Assessment as, of and for Learning

As part of the College's aim to help students to develop as self-regulated learners, the College integrates principles of Assessment as, of and for Learning in its design of programmes (National Forum, 2017). Summative assessment normally occurs at the end of a period of learning and consists of graded assessment. It can also be referred to as Assessment of Learning. Summative assessment can be either 'low-stakes' or 'high-stakes' depending on the weighting an assessment gets towards overall module results and whether it has significant consequences for progression.

Formative assessment is often synonymous with 'feedback' on learning. Assessment for Learning emphasises the importance of learning as a result of feedback.

It also emphasises the importance of dialogic feedback where teaching staff also receive feedback on their teaching (Nicol, 2010). To be impactful on the student learning experience, feedback needs to be timely, actionable and understandable.

Assessment as Learning refers to empowering students to self-regulate and critically evaluate their own learning and performance (Earl and Katz, 2006; Sadler, 2010). Self-regulation has been identified as a key attribute for student-centred learning approaches that are typically employed in online and blended learning (Dabbagh and Kitsantes, 2004).

In summative assessment, the teacher is the key decision maker, giving them the ultimate power for assessment. Self-regulated learning requires learners to conceptualise learning as something that they are responsible for rather than as something that happens to them (Mahon and Crowley, 2013). When students are empowered as partners through both Assessment for and as Learning, their responsibility for their own assessment increases and they become key decision makers in their own learning. This journey from extrinsic to intrinsically motivated assessment practices is outlined in the National Forum (2017) illustration included in Figure 1.

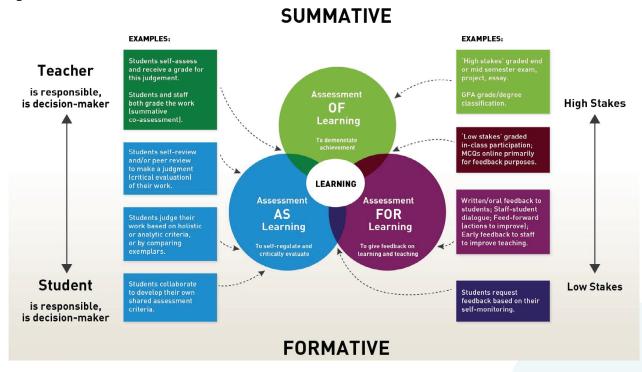


Figure 1. National Understanding of Assessment of, for and as Learning

The overall aim of these workshops is to facilitate the development of a cohesive, engaging set of activities, which place the student very much at the centre and are supported throughout by tutors, mentors and supervisors.

The College assesses learners to:

- Promote and enhance student learning
- Enable learners to understand how they have achieved and can assess their own level of performance
- Appropriately acknowledge learner achievement at varying levels
- Fulfil a variety of quality assurance requirements related to maintaining the educational effectiveness and standards of provision
- Ensure that learners have achieved learning outcomes
- Demonstrate that learners are ready to progress to a more advanced level of study

In doing so, the College provides the highest quality control procedures to ensure that:

- All learning outcomes are measured and assessed
- All assessments provide clear and concise explanations of how module objectives are met
- There is no ambiguity in assessment procedures or questions
- All learners have a fair and equal chance of performing to their maximum ability in all assessments
- Examination papers are consistent with the teaching philosophy
- Assessments are consistently structured with clear instructions and marking schemes identified

- Create more coherence in the curriculum with aligned assessments
- Provide context and a broad learning framework, which enables learners to understand and articulate the attributes and capabilities that they are developing
- Explore and develop a family of analytic tools and methodologies to support the mapping of knowledge and the creation of learning outcomes
- Provide targeted support for faculty to enable strategic teaching initiatives, including new programmes and curriculum development

Goal 3: Significantly developing the digital architecture to support the student learning experience

Current context

The ever-expanding range of digital technologies continues to impact on methods of engaging with learners and on creating and providing high-quality digitally based learning environments. These environments are also increasingly personalised, interactive and media-rich. New pedagogies can be combined with digital technologies to make approaches to blended education possible and support research-informed excellence in teaching. Hibernia College is widely known for its leadership and excellence in these areas, and its blended learning education programmes have contributed to national and international educational initiatives.

MyHELMS is the learners' virtual campus. The College has invested significantly in making MyHELMS as secure, user-friendly and interactive as possible. It combines all the benefits of accessibility and flexibility inherent in digital education and allows learners to interact with their lecturers and fellow learners through webinars, online group activities and discussion forums. MyHELMS online activities may take place synchronously with every student logged in and cooperating in real time, or asynchronously with students participating at their convenience following a flexible timeline. As well as hosting the highly interactive digital learning content, it features a comprehensive digital library and personalised calendars and announcements, providing learners with a sense of campus community.

MyHELMS allows staff and faculty to monitor student progress closely, providing detailed reports on engagement with digital learning content and attendance at live events. It offers a fully secured online learning environment that ensures user confidence and adheres to national and international data protection standards.

A vibrant online community based on the Community of Inquiry framework (Garrison, Anderson and Archer, 2000) is a key element of all Hibernia College blended programmes.

The College recognises that such a community is a key source of help and support for learners and invests considerable effort in ensuring that College lecturers possess the knowledge and skills to effectively facilitate online discussion and community building. All academic staff undergo comprehensive training in online teaching and facilitation, and tutor presence is engendered through prompt communication and the extensive use of videos and photos. While many learners are already very familiar with this type of interaction via social media, for most, applying these skills in an education context is a new experience.

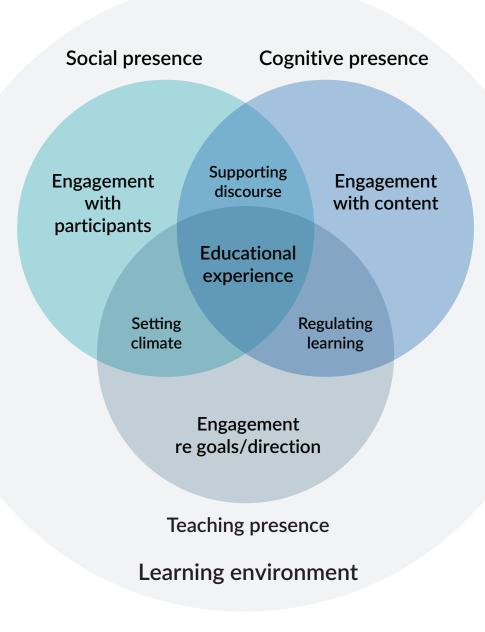


Figure 2. Community of Inquiry framework

To ease the transition, the College places a strong emphasis on helping learners build online friendship and support networks during the face-to-face and online orientation processes. The goal is to create a learning experience that leverages the strengths of both face-to-face instruction and web-based learning delivery to provide a positive and effective learning experience for learners.

Online tutorials are held in Zoom, a virtual meeting application that allows learners and lecturers to:

- Communicate via audio and video
- Present slides, videos, images and other educational materials
- Write and draw on a virtual whiteboard
- Conduct polls and quizzes
- Share applications
- Display websites

To facilitate good discussion, learners can also be split into smaller virtual breakout rooms to allow them to collaborate and discuss topics in-depth before returning to the larger tutorial group with their findings.

- Progressively enhance resourcing for the development of excellence in teaching in digital spaces
- Select an effective suite of core digital learning tools that support innovation and research activities
- Develop coordinated and systematic support for learners
- Seek to embed the European Framework for the Digital Competence of Educators (DigCompEdu) in its practices
- Commit to ongoing research and development to monitor advances in digital learning in order to maintain currency and excellence

Goal 4: Building capacity amongst faculty and adjunct faculty that is underpinned by current research in teaching, learning and assessment

Current context

The College employs a rigorous recruitment and selection policy that ensures the appropriate appointment of faculty who not only have the relevant qualifications and experience, but who have the necessary attributes and skills to facilitate and support learners undertaking professional qualifications through a blended learning medium. The College has a strong commitment to professional development and devises and implements a dedicated training and development programme for all faculty on an annual basis.



Hibernia College recognises that effective training and development offers benefits to the individual and the College as a whole, which ultimately contribute to the achievement of the College's objectives. These benefits include the:

- Sharing of ideas and dissemination of best practice
- Effective management and implementation of change across modules and programmes
- Encouragement of innovation and creativity in the design of learning experiences

- Equip all employees with the necessary skills, knowledge and experience to perform their jobs effectively and to meet individual objectives
- Aim to achieve a positive, innovative working environment where employees are encouraged to improve their skills
- Explore opportunities to embed the National Professional Development
 Framework in its professional development practices

Goal 5: Ensuring that evidence-based research informs programme design

Current context

Hibernia College's TLA Strategy is based on its commitment to excellence in continuing professional development across all its courses. It stems from a belief in the importance of using evidence-based research to improve practice in education and training, and from the College's mission to use the most innovative technology to help meet the needs of the Knowledge Age by extending access to high-quality, flexible and affordable adult and professional education and training.

This TLA Strategy aligns closely with the Hibernia College Research Strategy to foster and embed a research-rich culture among students, staff, faculty and adjunct faculty. More specifically, the College aims to develop high-quality research, using evidence-based practice, to both support the College's mission statement and to contribute to the wider research community within its areas of research focus. The College is committed to ensuring a pedagogy-first and evidence-based approach to programme development and enhancement.

- Employ pedagogy-first approaches to programme development
- Provide technology-enhanced learning experiences
- Use programme approaches to teaching, learning and assessment
- Engage in scholarship of teaching and learning
- Cultivate a culture of academic integrity
- Seek, act upon and close the feedback loop from students

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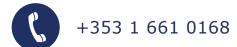
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Further Information







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