

6.1 Access and Admissions Policy

The purpose of this policy is to define ICD's approach to access and admissions, to ensure:

- ICD follows all regulatory guidelines and legal requirements (e.g. QQI's (2015b) 'Criteria for access, transfer and progression for providers of further and higher education'; and the Quality Assurance and Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 2012)
- ICD provides an inclusive and equal opportunities approach to educational access for all learners

The key owners of this policy are:

- The admissions office who, under supervision of the Registrar, implement this policy in assessing all applicants who wish to access ICD's programmes
- The Management Team who are a key participant in ICD's marketing and learner recruitment activities
- The Academic Council who continuously review and enhance ICD's policy and procedures on access and admissions
- Governing Body who continuously review ICD's educational provision

Access refers to "the process by which learners may commence a programme of education and training having received recognition for knowledge, skill or competence required" (QQI 2019b). ICD is acutely aware of how challenging it is for many people to access higher education across the world. Therefore, ICD's access policy is equally focused on providing access to higher education and qualifications for both traditional learners and non-traditional learners. As an institution, ICD will continuously enhance its access and admissions process to minimise (and ideally remove, where possible) barriers to entry to education, whether these barriers are:

- unnecessarily complex application processes
- prohibitively expensive fees structures
- social/cultural barriers

ICD will continuously enhance its approach to access and admissions to ensure it is optimally responding “to the need for institutional change if non-traditional students are to thrive within a system that purports to be directed towards widening participation” (Bowl 2001 p. 141). Research into educational access opportunities “reveals the non-traditional student as a frustrated participant in an unresponsive institutional context” (ibid). Research highlights “the financial and institutional barriers experienced by mature minority ethnic students” in particular (ibid).

ICD’s access and admissions policy is to follow ICD’s Principles of Access and Admissions (PAA) to promote access to its programmes to learners from a diverse range of backgrounds.

PAA1. To provide an affordable education: This requires providing lower tuition/registration fees than may be found at many other HEIs. This is a direct response to research, which highlights how for many students “lack of money was identified as the most pressing difficulty in their studies” (Bowl 2001 p. 155).

PAA2. To provide an access system that is international student friendly: This requires ensuring:

- i. **A continuous focus on building a culturally diverse staff and learner community** at ICD to provide a welcoming environment to international learners
- ii. **Continuously training staff and learners** (e.g. in training workshops and seminars) about the benefits of cultural diversity and to provide staff and learners with skills to operate respectfully and successfully in culturally diverse environments This is a direct response to research carried out with international students, which finds that “their arrival in the English school system left them feeling inadequate and different from their classmates on the basis of their background language and culture” and this can lead to a “sense of marginalization from school ethos and aims” as a result of being “viewed with caution and distance by their teachers” (Bowl 2001 p. 152).
- iii. **A continuously enhancing system of pastoral supports** (e.g. counselling, induction training, English language supports) for international students. This is a response to research which finds that for international students and students from ethnic minorities, “university can be traumatic and isolating in ways not experienced by white working-class students” (Bowl 2001 p. 143).
- iv. **Maintaining a relationship with external partners for English language supports** (e.g. CES (Centre of English Studies, Dublin)). Education research finds that non-native English speakers

on educational programmes often experience “being treated differently from other pupils because of differences in language” (Bowl 2001 p. 148), but it is ICD’s policy to provide all the language supports necessary to help ensure learner success and to ensure inclusivity of access

- v. **That all learners who are admitted to ICD programmes as non-native English speakers will meet the minimum English proficiency requirements** before entry to the programme to optimise their opportunity to complete the programme successfully
- vi. **Diverse assessments methodologies are used** (e.g. both written and verbal assessments) to cater for learners’ diverse educational backgrounds
- vii. **Following visa (GNIB/INIS) and regulatory (e.g. QQI) guidelines** when processing all international applicants

PAA3. To provide equal access to traditional and non-traditional learners. ICD must continuously enhance its access and admissions policies and procedures to ensure an access and admissions culture which avoids, wherever possible, “systemic and institutional factors which act to exclude certain sections of the population...[where] the institution has little interest in the life circumstances of non-traditional students” (Bowl 2001 p. 157). This requires a continuously improving approach to access and admissions that provides:

- i. **Access to ICD through the CAO (traditional learners):** Information about ICD’s programmes is made available through the CAO. Applications to the first year of ICD’s undergraduate programmes are processed by the Central Admissions Office (CAO).
- ii. **A mature student friendly access and admissions system (non-traditional learners):**
 - i. A mature student is defined as any person who has reached the age of 23 years on the first day of January in the year in which she/he is admitted to a course leading to a QQI award.
 - ii. ICD will ensure an effective system for processing applications from mature students including a holistic, but rigorous, RPL/APL/APEL applications system
- iii. **Advanced stage entry (non-traditional learners):** ICD must continue to enhance:
 - i. Its applications system for advanced stage entry onto programmes to ensure that it is both rigorous and also effective in recognising, and providing credit for, applicants who may have substantial prior learning and/or experience relevant to a programme’s/module’s learning outcomes
 - ii. The information provided on the ICD website about advanced entry into stages two or later of ICD’s undergraduate programmes

- iv. **Access to students with disabilities:** This requires:
 - a. Ensuring ICD continuously enhances the accessibility of its physical facilities (e.g. wheelchair accessibility)
 - b. Ensuring prospective and enrolled learners have access to all reasonable accommodations possible in the teaching, learning, and assessment environment to ensure equal opportunity for all learners to achieve, and demonstrate achievement of, learning outcomes
- v. **An admissions system and teaching and learning environment that is female student and family situation friendly:**
 - a. In recognition of the fact that, traditionally, “women have been systematically disadvantaged by educational and occupational structures...[and] barriers which relate to their gender position – as mothers” (Bowl 2001 p. 143), ICD will ensure that it provides equal opportunities for all genders to access its programmes
 - b. ICD will provide all learners with an educational student support system that continuously improves its supports and reasonable accommodations available to respond to family situations (e.g. a student becoming a parent and needing to defer a stage or assessment on a programme).

PAA4. To ensure all prospective and enrolled learners are fully informed about all programmes at ICD by providing clear, transparent, and up to date information about all its programmes using accessible media channels. This requires:

- i. Ensuring that clear and transparent entry requirements are developed for all programmes
- ii. Ensuring that all programme information is made available to all prospective and enrolled learners, and that it is clear, transparent, and up to date

The Application Process Access Interviews:

All prospective learners must be interviewed by ICD staff and must fill out the application form and provide supporting documentation (e.g. prior learning awards certificates) before being offered a place. The purpose of the access interview is to:

- **Ensure all of the information pertaining to the respective course is given to learners -and explained**
- **Ensure all applicants are clear about entry requirements (e.g. prior learning and skills) for the programme.** Requirements for prior learning – and information about RPEL procedures - are also provided as part of the application process interview.
- **Inform applicants about language requirements for access**
- **Assess applicant’s English language proficiency:** Formal interviews are used to assess the applicant’s English language proficiency and suitability for the programme.
- **Provide a holistic approach to applicant assessment:** Access interviews at ICD will focus on past performance and future potential. ICD will use interviews to provide a more holistic entry process than simply using paper or electronic applications systems alone. This is a response to education research that finds that, particularly non-traditional learners such as students from minority ethnic groups and people over 21 years of age are often “screened out of further academic opportunities because of assumptions made about their perceived failure, rather than an assessment of their abilities and potential...the doors which should have opened for them remained closed...[creating] a sense that higher education was ‘not for the likes of them’” (Bowl 2001 p. 153-4). ICD will continuously pursue the principle that access to higher education should be accessible to all students wherever practical and beneficial to the learner educationally, provided entry requirements are met.

Assessing non-EU applicants:

All applicants for ICD’s programmes who present with non-EU school-leaving qualifications apply directly to the college and will be assessed by the admissions team on an individual basis. Examinations taken must be judged to be of a standard equivalent to the Irish Leaving Certificate (if the applicant is applying to enter the first stage of an undergraduate programme). In all cases, applicants will be asked to present with original copies of their examination transcripts, with ICD reserving the right to contact the relevant examining body/entity for further information and verification.

All prospective learners who do not qualify by the CAO route, and where English is a second language, must have an IELTS minimum score of 6.0. Equivalent English Language tests (Cambridge, TOEFL, Pearson and QQI's TIE are also considered).

Evidence sought:

All applicants are asked to provide original copies of their results from the relevant English language testing body or educational institution. Applicants are also required to attend an interview in which the college's admissions staff informally assess their English language speaking competence.