

*Comhairle na nDámhachtainí Ardoideachais agus Oiliúna*  
Higher Education and Training Awards Council

**PANEL OF EXPERTS REPORT**

**PART I**

**GENERAL INFORMATION**

**PROVIDER**

**Carlow College**

**DATE OF VISITATION**

Tuesday, 17 February 2009

**PROGRAMME EVALUATED**

Bachelor of Arts(Honours) in Citizenship and  
Community Studies  
Bachelor of Arts in Citizenship and Community  
Studies  
Higher Certificate in Arts in Citizenship and  
Community Studies  
Certificate in Advocacy Skills, Level 6, 35 ECTS  
Credits

**PROGRAMME  
RECOMMENDED FOR  
APPROVAL**

Bachelor of Arts(Honours) in Citizenship and  
Community Studies  
Bachelor of Arts in Citizenship and Community  
Studies  
Higher Certificate in Arts in Citizenship and  
Community Studies  
Certificate in Advocacy Skills, Level 6, 35 ECTS  
Credits

**PANEL OF EXPERTS**

Dr. Perry Share, Head of Department, Institute of  
Technology Sligo - **Chairperson**

Dr. Colm O'Doherty, Senior Lecturer, Institute of  
Technology Tralee

Ms. Joan O Flynn, Combat Poverty Agency

Dr. Fred Powell, Professor of Social Policy & Head  
of Department, University College Cork

**In attendance** – Mr Joe Cox, HETAC

**COLLEGE STAFF**

**Fr. Caomhín Ó Néill, President**

**Dr. Thoms McGrath, Registrar**

**Mr. John McHugh, Co-ordinator, Social Studies**

**Ms. Helen Maher, Lecturer**

**Ms. Pádraigín Caesar, Lecturer**

**Ms. Susan Murphy, Lecturer**

**Mr. Mr Chris Chapman, Lecturer**

**Dr. Ann Coakley, Lecturer**

**Mr. Stephanie McDermot, Lecturer**

**Ms. Clare Scully, Lecturer**

**Ms. Sarah Otten, Lecturer**

## **PART II**

## **FINDINGS OF PANEL OF EXPERTS**

### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

Built before the French Revolution, Carlow College is one of Ireland's oldest educational institutions. It first opened its doors to students in 1793, five years before the insurrection of 1798. From the beginning the college was both a lay college and a seminary for the education of the clergy. The Humanities were at the core of the academic curriculum. In 1840 Carlow College was accredited by the University of London and over the succeeding decades students of the college sat the examinations for primary degrees in Arts and Law from London. In 1892 the college became a seminary exclusively. One hundred years later, in 1990, it reclaimed its original role and once again welcomes lay students from all over the country.

In the past decade Carlow College has established itself as a provider of courses in Humanities and Social Care with the particular remit of serving the South East Midlands region. It has built strong links with the local community in the region, with schools, local authorities, health service providers and cultural organisations.

Since 1997 the college has embarked on a building and renovation programme which has seen the development of new lecture halls, a new library and archive and a student resource centre.

As part of its development strategy the college donated a valuable site immediately adjacent to the college Carlow Local Authorities for the development of a €20 Arts centre and Theatre. This magnificent facility, now built, will open in September 2009 and will further establish Carlow's claim to be the Humanities hub for the region.

### **2.2 EXAMINATION OF THE PROGRAMME**

The panel met with academic staff of the College involved in the design of the programme, to examine the programme submission against the criteria for the validation of programmes as stipulated by the Council. The criteria address the requirements of the Act, provider quality assurance arrangements and specific arrangements, and specific features of programme design.

#### **2.2.1 Education and Training Requirements**

The panel was satisfied that the programme was consistent with the College's mission, that it does not constitute redundant provision and that it makes efficient use of resources. The panel was also satisfied with the College's case on the rationale for the programme and the research undertaken, including the consultation with industry, before the programme was proposed to HETAC.

The College, in its submission document indicated the evidence of consultation with the community, policy development organisations and education bodies.

The programme is aimed at producing graduates suitable for employment in the Community Development area and is seen as a complementary to the emphasis on Humanities within the College

### **2.2.2 Protection of Learners**

The Council will not validate any programme of education and training pursuant to Section 25 of the Act, such programme being of a duration of three months or more, unless it is satisfied that the provider concerned has arrangements in place, as specified under Section 43 of the Act, which make provision for learners where that provider ceases to provide the programme concerned. The panel was satisfied that this provision was not applicable to the programme in question, as the College did not intend providing the programme on a basis as set out in Section 43 (1) (b) of the Act.

### **2.2.3 Quality Assurance**

The panel heard how the submission had been developed and approved internally as a result of the application of the College's quality assurance procedures. The panel was satisfied that those procedures had been applied to the development of the proposed programme and that quality assurance mechanisms are in place to ensure its provision, monitoring and review.

### **2.2.4 Programme Titles and Award Titles**

Following discussion, the panel was satisfied that the title of the programme is clear, accurate and fit for the purpose of informing prospective learners and other stakeholders. The panel was satisfied that the proposed title of the programme also encompasses the Council's related named award title.

### **2.2.5 Ethics**

It is expected that providers will have procedures in place to ensure that any teaching and learning or research activity at any level shall be conducted in a manner that is morally and professionally ethical. The panel is satisfied that this occurs.

A module on General Ethics is also included. The panel requires that this should be more specifically included in the module, Leadership and Management in the Non-Profit Sector.

The College has created a Research Ethics Committee

### **2.2.6 Particular aspects of proposed programmes**

**With regard to the following, the panel found:**

- **Unity**

The programme design is consistent with the Council's Policy on Accumulation of Credits and Certification of Subjects. The programme has an underlying unifying theme and the modules are bonded by linkages which are either implicit or explicit. It was also clear how the standards of knowledge, skill and

competence, determined by the Council for the named award to which the programme proposes to lead, evolve throughout the programme as a whole.

The College has indicated the development of the specific themes:

- Citizenships
- Social Analysis
- Community Work Skills
- Research and Practice
- Placements

Throughout the four years of the programme and it has also indicated the horizontal links between these themes

### • **Teaching and Learning**

The programme is delivered by a combination of:

- Lectures
- Tutorials
- Workshops
- Field Trips

The panel of experts considered the streams of study and the individual modules in detail and is of the opinion that the content is appropriate to the proposed programme.

The college is committed to a policy on modularisation and many of the modules for this programme have already been offered and tested on existing programmes.

### • **Teacher-Learner Dialogue**

The submission document identified learner support services including

- Counselling
- Campus ministry
- Student health services
- Academic support services
- Academic resource office
- Student union

### • **Standards**

The learning outcomes of the programme were stated in such a way that the compliance with the interim standards determined by the Council for the award of:

Bachelor of Arts(Honours) in Citizenship and Community Studies Bachelor of Arts in Citizenship and Community Studies Higher Certificate in Arts in Citizenship and Community Studies Certificate in Advocacy Skills, Level 6, 35 ECTS Credits
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This standard was demonstrated to the panel's satisfaction on the occasion of the visit.

- **Learner Assessment**

The programme's learner assessment methods are elaborated and consistent with the Council's policy on fair and consistent assessment. The assessment methods are generally capable, amongst other things, of demonstrating attainment of the standards of knowledge, skill or competence, determined by the Council, for the related award.

The panel is of the opinion that the approach to assessment is traditional and makes use of terminal examinations to too high an extent. The panel requests that the assessment methodologies shall be reviewed and that learning outcomes should be clearly linked to assessment. This might be best achieved using the matrix linking learning outcomes to module content to assessment and that this can result in a more varied and innovative approach to assessment.

- **Access, Transfer and Progression**

The programme incorporates the procedures for access, transfer and progression that have been established by the Authority. The programme is in line with the requirements of the Act and the operational principles of the Authority, and accommodates a variety of access and entry requirements from applicants with expertise related discipline areas and from applicants who demonstrate extensive experiential learning in this field of study.

Application for entry to the first year of the programmes is through the CAO system and for commencement on the honours degree programmes the learner must have a minimum of C3 on two higher level papers.

The submission document also identifies policies and procedures for the admissions of learners on the basis of recognition of prior learning and of prior experiential learning

- **Staffing and Physical Resources**

The panel was satisfied that the necessary staffing levels will be in place and were generally satisfied with the level of qualifications and competence of the staff concerned.

Senior staff at the College indicated the necessary staff are available for the successful delivery of the first year programme and that staff with the required qualifications will be available for further years of the programme.

The panel was also informed of the experience of existing staff in the supervision of research programmes at level 8

The panel visited the College facilities including:

- Lecture theatres
- Library
- IT facilities

The experts were particularly impressed with the library which is available to all learners.

### **PART III RECOMMENDATION/COMMENT**

#### **FOR THE ATTENTION OF THE ACADEMIC COMMITTEE OF COUNCIL**

##### **3.1 Recommendations:**

The panel of experts recommend the validation of the programmes:

Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Citizenship and Community Studies  
Bachelor of Arts in Citizenship and Community Studies  
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Certificate in Advocacy Skills, Level 6, 35 ECTS Credits

for the purposes of the award of:

Bachelor of Arts (Honours)  
Bachelor of Arts  
Higher Certificate in Arts  
Certificates, Level 6, 35 ECTS Credits

Subject to: Council's general conditions of approval

##### **3.2 Conditions**

The panel of experts require that the College should take note of the following conditions and that a satisfactory response to those conditions shall be received before the validation is considered by the Academic Committee of Council.

1. An individual programme schedule shall be prepared for each of the eight semesters of the programme
2. The reading lists shall be reviewed and rewritten with a more realistic number of texts cited in each of the modules and electronic sources of information shall also be included
3. A matrix shall be provided linking learning outcomes of the programme to module content and to assessment and this should lead to a review of the assessment methodologies in individual modules which should include a re-allocation to the elements of assessment and the use of innovative modes of assessment
4. The module descriptors should be revised in order that they capture the
  - totality of the learning experience
  - detail of the assessment processes used
5. A greater emphasis on Law shall be included in the Minor Award Certificate in Advocacy

##### **Recommendation**

1. Management of the College shall encourage research and consultancy among staff involved in the delivery of the programme and the college should also

include in the submission document details on existing activities by staff in research and consultancy