Covid-19 Contingency Plan

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CONSIDERATIONS

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The purpose of this contingency plan is to ensure the uninterrupted continued service to our learners while maintaining quality standards regarding teaching and learning, support and assessment.

"Nobody signed up for this." This phrase has been used time and again in relation to the new world we find ourselves in. With this in mind we will endeavour to navigate this period in time relying on our values to guide us.

Our values are important to us, we are a small organisation who are always striving to improve. Our values reflect how we act towards one another, towards our learners and stakeholders especially at this time.

1. **Put people first** – At Forus we put the needs and the voices of people who use and work in our training services at the centre of all of its work.

1. **Be fair and objective** – At Forus we strive to be fair and objective in its dealings with people and organisations, and undertake its work without fear or favour.**Be open and accountable** – At Forus we share information about the nature and outcomes of its work, and accept full responsibility for its actions.

2. **Be committed to excellence** – At Forus we seek to continually improve and strive for excellence in its work.

3. **Work together** – At Forus we engage with those funding, planning, providing and using our training services in developing all aspects of its work.

2. INTRODUCTION

Forus Training is in a position to maintain educational continuity using distance and online learning methods, and we are implementing these options with effect from March 12th 2020.

We strive to ensure our reputation for quality and integrity can be sustained where all stakeholders commit to academic integrity.

It is important to maintain assessment reliability and credibility of resulting awards at this time.

This document has been developed by Forus Training's management Team as a response to the Covid-19 Emergency Restrictions and is informed by QQI's Guiding Principles for Alternative Assessment (March, 2020) and the documents referenced therein.

3. SCOPE

This policy applies to all Forus Training QQI validated programmes, Alternative methods of assessment are being used strictly on an exceptional basis in relation to the current movement limitations (COVID19). It should be noted that these contingency arrangements will not apply in the future once restrictions have been lifted.

3. CONSIDERATIONS

Forus Training's primary duties are:

- To protect employees and information until normal business operations are resumed,

- To ensure that a viable capability and capacity exists to respond to maintaining standards and working within government guidelines,

- To manage all response, resumption, recovery, and restoration activities,

- To support and communicate with employees, learners, trainers and grantors,

- To rapidly and efficiently resume business operations, IT, and functional support areas,

- To ensure regulatory requirements are satisfied.

Forus Training recognises the sweeping changes in learners habits at this time. This includes daily routine, confinement to home, and, perhaps, increased responsibilities with regard to childcare and for family members cocooning. They may be directly impacted by the virus where they or a member of their household are ill. Their economic circumstances may have changed.

It is important that we check that we are delivering value at each stage of this economic cycle so as to understand what we can do for learners and support them accordingly. We need to ensure that we can think about learners who are struggling to adapt and offer them a new way of engaging with their learning experience.

The "New Normal" now means that our learner's needs may have changed. Maslow's Hierarchy of needs is a useful framework for us as an organisation to consider how our learner's needs may have shifted. In this time of crisis people move down the hierarchy, the current crisis may mean that our learners may be motivated by more basic needs than they were before this pandemic. Due to the fact that many people's employment situations have changed, meeting basic needs might now be more of a priority than it was before.

Learners may now be concerned about meeting their basic physiological needs during this crisis, and are now motivated to achieve safety. In addition, some learners may and so, they may be striving to meet this safety need throughout the crisis.

There may be learners who do not have digital access, and their ability to participate in a virtual or on-line learning may be compromised.

4. POLICY STATEMENT

During this period where provision has had to limit the conduct of planned programmes in tier intended

Forus Training commits to promoting a positive solution-oriented approach that will support all learners to achieve, to learn and to progress in their studies through;

- Taking a consultative approach in developing alternative assessment. Where appropriate, we will seek the guidance and advice of professionals in the Further Education field in line with our policy on Externality. This includes stakeholders such as trainers, external authenticators and other competent experts across the scope of provision,

- Quality assuring all assessment processes;

  - Ensure that learners have the opportunity to complete their course by successfully evidencing their skills, knowledge and competencies that they have gained through their engagement and effort,

  - Offer a fair and equitable alternative assessment to the standard which is detailed in the validated programme,

  - Accommodate learners with special requirements in line with policy.

- Ensuring that the assessment of all skills, knowledge and competencies are criterion referenced and that any new assessment technique introduced maintains the same weighting as the original assessment, and reflects the validated programme,

- Ensuring that all changes to the assessment technique are approved within Forus Training's governance structures,

- Clearly and timely communicating all relevant information to assist in the changes to assessment.

5. PROCEDURES AND PRACTICES

Staff Training

Internally we have set up webinars and instructional documents to share best practice. This is to ensure that all migration to on-line forats is carried out to a reliable high standard.

- P10 S1.1 - Standards for On-line Training - Setting up the content,
- P10 S1.2 - Standards for On-line Training - Slide Set-up, Formatting and Illustration,
- P10 S2 - Standards for On-line Training - Setting up the Assessment,
- P10 S3 - Standards for On-line Training - Narration and Video Guidelines,
- P10 S4 - Standards for On-line Training - Quizzes and Formative Assessment,
- P10 S5 - Standards for On-line Training - Uploading to Administrate,
- P10 S6 - Standards for On-line Training - Running Webinars.

Communication:

All staff have been furnished with a mobile phone and office lines are now being answered by staff through call forwarding. There is clear messaging on our website outlining the steps we are taking to accommodate learners in the new landscape.

We have put in place a full-time trainer to support learners with queries and to give them feedback on drafts of their work. This trainer actively calls learners who are struggling to engage with the course or who are not engaging at all.

In our communication to learners we have strived to move online with equity in mind. We are mindful of learner anxiety. E-mail communication sends out templates that have been created and tailored to each individual and to provide a clear roadmap to learner support, logins and completion;

- Important Information regarding the learner course - Coronavirus (COVID-19),
- Important Information regarding the course the trainer is tutoring - Coronavirus (COVID-19),
- On-line Special Needs Assisting Course - going online - Coronavirus (COVID-19),
- Important Information regarding the chosen course going online - Coronavirus (COVID-19),

- Alternative to Skills Demonstration for those awaiting workplace placements (Covid -19 Contingency),
- P9 S20 Online Submission of Assignments.

Teaching and Learning

Forus Training has a cloud based Learning Management System to make content available to learners.

As outlined above, we have provided training to our trainers to create eLearning content in the familiar PowerPoint environment. Trainers can author courses, tests, and simulations immediately instead of spending time learning the interface. Our LMS is compatible with SCORM 2004.

We acknowledge that it's one thing for learners to move to online when they started off from that premise, yet this is quite a different scenario when our learners have not. We are concerned about how this may affect their emotional and psychological well-being as well and the ways in which crises like this affect learners' ability to learn.

We want to employ the simplest and most effective methods for our learners to achieve the outcome that they are working towards. Below are some of the positive comments we have received from learners who have continued with their training module online.

- "The webinars really helped me to complete the course as I was very unsure about online learning",
- "The sessions with Aisling and Helen really helped me. I learnt so much in an hour!",
- "I'm glad I attended the webinars as they helped me complete the assignment."

We have provided alternate methods of delivering content - by USB / post should the learner not have access to the internet. We have encouraged trainers not to rely too heavily on synchronous video-conferencing so as not to disadvantage learners whose internet infrastructure is not fast enough to participate, or who use a shared device at home, or who have other family members who need the internet bandwidth for other activities. We also record webinars so learners can 'catch-up' with them at a time that is convenient for them.

Learners can now connect with trainers and the support team through virtual means such as Zoom, group chats, and we can positively offer a mix of ways that our learners can engage and participate.

Technology and our use and understanding of technology has had to adapt to the new reality. The usual *S-curve* of adoption has been sped-up in relation to adopting new technologies in a matter of weeks. Zoom has become an easy to use tool to implement for all involved.

There is now an expectation of seeing people in their real-life natural settings in their homes. Learners and Trainers have new ways of connecting and we can meet the expectation of and benefits seeing people's faces on screen.

The response from Forus Training with regards to continuity has been agile, pre Covid-19 we had the technology and systems in place to deliver on-line learning but had not yet reached the stage to coordinate it. We were using a blended learning model to on-board trainers only.

We have mobilised and organised to deliver learning experiences to people in their homes. Flexibility and adaptation, response to change and resilience will assist us greatly. We have found that we need to embrace technology, speed up decision making and test assumptions with regards to learners circumstances.

6. RELATED DOCUMENTS

A.   RELATED PUBLICATIONS - REFERENCE MATERIAL

BUILDING CONFIDENCE: SUPPORTS AND ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE TERTIARY EDUCATION SYSTEM

https://www.qqi.ie/Downloads/Building%20Confidence%20-%20Tertiary%20Education%20System.pdf

GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENTS (DEVISED IN RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 EMERGENCY RESTRICTIONS)

https://www.qqi.ie/Downloads/Guiding%20Principles%20for%20Alternative%20Assessment%20%28COVID-19%29.pdf

MEASURES TO MITIGATE IMPACT OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON PROGRAMMES LEADING TO QQI AWARDS

 https://www.qqi.ie/Downloads/Mitigating%20Impact%20on%20QQI%20Awards.pdf

National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, "10 Ways to Ensure Online Assessment is Accessible and Inclusive," in teachingandlearning.ie, Published March 24, 2020, Last Accessed May 5, 2020, https://www.teachingandlearning.ie/resource/10-ways-to-ensure-online-assessment-is-accessible-and-inclusive/.

http://www.ucd.ie/teaching/t4media/alternative_assessment_methods.pdf

https://www.qqi.ie/Articles/Pages/Academic-Integrity.aspx

B.   LEGISLATION / STANDARDS

1.   Qualifications & Quality Assurance (Education & Training) Act 2012

2. Further Education & Training Act 2013

3. QQI Insights: Quality in Irish Further Education & Training – September 2019

4. Implementing Contingency Arrangements For Alternative Assessment and Authentication Processes: Guidance for Further Education & Training Providers - April 2020

7. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Trainers

In collaboration with the Head of Centre, Forus Training Trainers identify where there is a need for an alternative assessment.

Trainers will draft an alternative assessment and through the support of an external authenticator and collaboration with programme leaders, the draft assessment is *'assessed'* for credibility, integrity and level against the NFQ Grid of Level Indicators.

The reliability and validity are revised until the following objectives are achieved:

- The module learning outcomes and the teaching and learning approaches are aligned with the proposed alternative assessment. For example, if the exam question is framed in terms of learner discussing a topic/concept then the alternative assessment should also require this outcome and the teaching and learning approaches used in the module should be similarly aligned,
- There are samples of alternative assignments at the end of this document before and after revision,
- Learners are able to follow the revised instructions laid out,
- Assessors are able to follow the marking guidelines,
- Marking schemes accurately reflect any alterations (further break down of marks where applicable),
- There is indication of knowing when to defer assessment rather than take unacceptably high risks to academic integrity (e.g. problems with fairness, validity, reliability, or cheating) with unfamiliar methods.

Inform learners and other stakeholders regarding the replacement of the current assessment technique with the alternative technique:

- Learners are given clear comprehensive instructions on all aspects of the operation and completion of the online assessment including such information as the required file formats and the number of attempts allowed for that assessment component for which they have the responsibility for submitting online,

- Learners are informed, at the very earliest opportunity of all changes to assessment methods,

- Communicated alternative arrangements to learners are done so in a timely and efficient manner to ensure learners have sufficient time and resources to adequately and confidently engage with alternative assessments,

- Proactively contact learners to ensure they have all the support needed to complete the alternate assessment. Accommodations where necessary, are made - the assessment may need to be posted, we may need to accept handwritten submissions as learners may not have access to a workstation/laptop,

- Follow our data protection policy making sure not to send group communication where learners may have access to each other's personal data,

- Preparation of a presentation* outlining the revised assessment to be uploaded and shared to the learners on the learning management system,

  *This presentation can also be viewed by the Quality Assurance & Academic Governance Council (QAAGC), Head of Certification and EA in due course in line with their meeting and assessment schedule.

Assessors

- When assessments are submitted, allocate marks and grade in accordance with the assessment rubric/marking scheme,

- Ensure that learners have completed a Learner Declaration and Authorship Statement verifying that the work is their own,

- Once the marking is complete, the internal verification and authentication process will apply where possible i.e., portfolios will be internally verified, externally authenticated and results submitted for approval to the Results Approval Committee,

- We have moved to horizontal grading where all assessments for the same module are being assessed by an experienced assessor whose work has been commended by the process of External Authentication to be fair and consistent in terms of their marking and feedback to learners,

- Conduct integrity checks and follow-ups with learners via Zoom to talk through at least one of their assessment responses. If the learner can talk about the assessment and, how they know what they know, this can indicate that they completed the assessment with integrity,

- Inform learners and trainers about the new laws in relation to provision of *cheating* and academic integrity; https://www.qqi.ie/Articles/Pages/Academic-Integrity.aspx,

- Consider how requirements to record and store assessments in new formats may be met; this may be particularly pertinent for formats such as video which are storage space intensive,

- Consult with QQI and other relevant stakeholders as necessary, including professional and regulatory bodies, and notify them when the alternative assessment arrangements have been agreed and published,

- Whilst these are exceptional circumstances, the amendments made to assessment at this time should be evaluated at a later stage in order to help inform whether they were successful and can lead to long term system learning and enhancement. Highlight any weaknesses that might arise, for example, in the context of learner appeals,

- The need to provide increased special consideration during this time of uncertainty is fundamental.

Programme Leaders

- Conduct a review of current assessment status of courses to ensure that there are no gaps,
- Support trainers in designing alternative assessment techniques.

Course Coordinator

- Liaise with learners and ensure adequate supports are available to ensure that they can avail of the alternative assessment technique,
- Ensure that Forus Training's policies and procedures in relation to submission deadlines - and Quality Assurance procedures are followed.

Head of Certification

- Support trainers in the identification of where alternative assessments are required,

- Support trainers to develop the alternative assessment briefs,

- Conduct the Internal Verification process,

- Arrange the External Authentication process where required,

- Collate results for submission to the RAP Committee,

- Facilitate any learner appeals.

Head of Centre - Managing Director

- Amend this contingency plan in line with advice,

- Ensure resources and supports (equipment, training, mentoring) are available to trainers and assessors to implement alternative assessment techniques, as required,

- Provide reasonable accommodation to learners where they have a lack of facilities resources,

- Publicly state via the provider's website what alternative arrangements are being put in place and how the integrity of these assessments is being assured. In so doing, provide sufficient detail to support confidence in the validity and reliability of the alternative approaches adopted,

- Maintain open and active communication channels with all stakeholders, particularly learners.

Appendix 1 - Sample Assessment before the changes

CODE: 6N1957 Special Needs Assisting

Assessment Brief

QQI AWARD

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Centre Number
Forus Training (38181S)

Skills Demonstration; Total Marks Available: 50 Marks or 50%

Skills Demonstration Details		PLEASE USE BLOCK CAPITALS
Skills DemonstrationTitle:	**Special Needs Assisting Skills Demonstration**	Due Date:

This brief requires you to produce evidence that demonstrates an understanding and application of a range of specific learning outcomes from the module. Read the entire brief before you start.

Skills Demonstration Part 1	50 marks

50%

Skills Demonstration

Learning Outcomes Assessed: 5, 7, 9, 11, 12

You are required to conduct a needs/strength analysis on a child. You will then recommend and carry out two activity plans based on a thorough analysis of the child's needs.

Introduction (10 marks)
- **COMPREHENSIVE BACKGROUND PROFILE** of the focus child, clear evidence of consultation with relevant persons including written consent (4 marks)
- **OBSERVATIONAL REPORT** (observations -physical, intellectual, language, emotional, social) including detailed interventions /recommendations (6 marks)

Activity Plans (20 marks) *(2 Separate Activity Plans)*
Clear evidence of a comprehensive overview of the activities to include:
- **AIM, OBJECTIVES AND RATIONALE** of each activity/ how the activity will meet the key areas i.e. health and wellbeing and education (7 marks)
- **DETAILED PLAN** for each activity identifying resources/ material and equipment (8 marks)
- **DESCRIPTION**of how the specific needs of the child will be met (2 marks)
- **EVIDENCE** of learner's ability to carry out each activity efficiently – observations (3 marks)

CODE: 6N1957 Special Needs Assisting

Assessment Brief

QQI AWARD

Centre Number
Forus Training (38181S)

Evaluation of the Intervention (10 marks)

Clear evidence of a comprehensive evaluation of the activity with a critical reflection on:

- **IDENTIFICATION** of achievement/ non-achievement of the aims and objectives of each activity were key support areas (health & wellbeing and education) met and the specific needs of the individual addressed (4 marks)
- **APPROPRIATENESS** of the chosen resources and health and safety measures (2 marks)
- **IDENTIFICATION** of challenges encountered during the implementation process including recommendations/ changes or extensions of the planned activities (4 marks)

Critical Reflection (10 marks)

Clear evidence of a critical reflection on the learner's performance as follows:

- **COMMUNICATION** Effective communication promoted throughout the activity with adherence to confidentiality addressed during each activity (4 marks)
- **IDENTIFICATION** of key learning points during the process with acknowledgement of the learner's key strengths and weaknesses/ recommendations on how to improve future work practice as an SNA (6 marks)

(approximately 2,500 words)

Evidence for this assessment technique may take the form of written, oral, graphic, audio, visual or any combination of these. Any audio, video or digital evidence must be provided in a suitable format.

Appendix B - Alternate Assessment

Skills Demonstration; Total Marks Available: 50 Marks or 50%

Skills Demonstration Details		PLEASE USE BLOCK CAPITALS
Skills Demonstration Title:	**Special Needs Assisting Skills Demonstration**	Due Date:

This brief requires you to produce evidence that demonstrates an understanding and application of a range of specific learning outcomes from the module. Read the entire brief before you start.

Skills Demonstration Part 1	50 marks

50%
Skills Demonstration
Learning Outcomes Assessed: 5, 7, 9, 11, 12

You are required to conduct an analysis on a child with special needs.

*You will then recommend and carry out **two** activity plans based on the child.*

If you do not have access to a child we welcome you to use "Harry" page 299 of your learner manual. Also Please look at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DO_sneeTZDQ Playing with Toys | Real Look Autism | Babble (Pretend Marcus is Harry!, he is a very similar little boy and may give you a more realistic feel for his abilities)

Introduction (10 marks)

- **COMPREHENSIVE BACKGROUND PROFILE** of the focus child. In this section you will provide a clear description of the child and his/her background to include their likes, dislikes, personality, education, family life and all relevant information to form a full picture of the child and their day to day life. (4 marks)
- **OBSERVATIONAL REPORT** to include physical, intellectual, language, emotional, social. A paragraph on each is required. (6 marks)

Activity Plans (20 marks) (2 Separate Activity Plans)

- **ACTIVITY PLANS** clear evidence of activities. *Please follow the template provided page 351 – 355 of your learner manual. Use all headings in the template.*
- **AIM, OBJECTIVE AND RATIONALE OF EACH ACTIVITY**. Information from your observational report will guide you in this area. (7 marks)
- Include a **DESCRIPTION** of how the specific needs of the child will be met (2 marks)
- **DETAILED PLAN**, please see template for structure and guidance. **Follow all headings**. If using Harry please refer to all information and implementation plan in future tense. (8 marks)
- **EVIDENCE** of learner's ability to plan the activity efficiently (3 marks)

CODE: 6N1957 Special Needs Assisting

Assessment Brief

Project 50%

QQI AWARD

Centre Number
Forus Training (38181S)

Evaluation of the Intervention (10 marks)

TIP. You will need to figure out, give an educated guess as to what will be achieved with Harry, the video will help you with this.

Clear evidence of a comprehensive evaluation of the activity with a critical reflection on:

- **IDENTIFY** achievement/ non achievement of the aims and objectives of each activity knowing the specific needs Harry (1 mark)
- **APPROPRIATENESS** of the chosen activity, resources and health and safety measures (2 marks)
- **IDENTIFY** challenges that may arise/arouse during the implementation process. (2 marks)
- **INCLUDE** recommendations/ changes of the activity (2 marks)
- **PROVIDE** information on the child/children's learning (1 marks)
- **PROVIDE** information on your own personal and professional learning (2 marks)

Critical Reflection (10 marks)

Clear evidence of a critical reflection on the **learner's** performance as follows. *This section is based on the **two** activities.*

- **COMMUNICATION:** effective communication promoted throughout the activity (2 marks)
- **CONFIDENTIALITY** addressed throughout the observation and activity stages (2 marks)
- **IDENTIFICATION** of key learning point to include the learner's strengths and weaknesses (3 marks)
- **RECOMMENDATIONS** on how to improve future work practice going forward as an SNA (3 marks)

(approximately 2,500 words)
Evidence for this assessment technique may take the form of written, oral, graphic, audio, visual or any combination of these. Any audio, video or digital evidence must be provided in a suitable format.

10. CONTACT INFORMATION

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