



P7 S20 Learning Environment Policy

Ownership:	Managing Director, Academic Manager, QA Officer	
Author:	Managing Director	
Reviewed by:	Quality Assurance and Academic Governance Council (QAAGC)	
Effective From:	04/02/2020	Renew Date: 04/02/2022
Reviewed:	07/03/2022	Renew Date: 07/03/2024
Version:	001	

STRATEGY MISSION POLICY

Forus Training recognises the importance of fostering a safe, flexible and highly credible learning environment. This includes both the physical and virtual learning environments, in which learners can challenge themselves in a secure and mature space. This is especially important to learners who may have had negative experiences in traditional classroom environments.

Learners often describe supportive learning environments as expanding their 'sense of family' and enhancing their self-esteem, which, when combined with increased literacy skills, assisting them to take more chances in pursuing their goals. Forus Training endeavour to provide a learner centred learning environment at all times.

DEFINITION

Forus Training defines the learning environment as all of the physical surroundings, technical, psychological and/or emotional conditions and social or cultural influences affecting the growth and development of an adult engaged in an educational experience.

SCOPE OF POLICY

The scope of this document ranges from classroom teaching and learning to the most recent advances in digital learning, due to the Covid-19 pandemic and QQI alternative arrangements, namely the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE).

It is relevant to all Forus Training staff, trainers and learners.



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES AND ORGANISATIONAL PRACTICES

Forus Training is committed to the creation and sustainment of an established learning environment which supports a thriving learning culture. Forus Training aims to provide a positive learning environment where learners feel involved and responsible for their learning while being comfortable enough to fully participate in group and individual activities. Needless to say, when trainers foster a positive learning culture, learners are more likely to have higher motivation that leads to better and more promising learning outcomes.

The Physical Learning Environment (PLE)

The Forus Training Physical Learning Environment provides a real space in a real classroom whereby learning takes place face to face in real time. The term physical learning environment refers to the overall design and layout of the classroom as a learning centre. The physical space offered is designed by organising the furniture and physical materials in such a way as to maximise the learning opportunities and the engagement of the learner. NEEDS MORE.

The Forus Training Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) provides a strong digital infrastructure for the classroom. It allows our learners to familiarise themselves with a professional digital environment along with the potential to take the onerous administrative tasks away from the trainers', thus enabling a flexible personalised teaching and learning method to be deployed.

The Virtual Learning Environment (VLE)

Forus Training has employed a VLE approach that is adaptive, especially to the current challenges surrounding Covid-19, allowing for experimentation and fluidity when it comes to testing what teaching style suits each classroom best. At Forus Training we have been able to implement a number of different teaching methods such as flipped learning and blended learning, allowing classroom time to be allocated more effectively, so learners leave their lessons with a greater understanding of the subject. For example, with flipped learning, learners can be assigned a topic to research prior to the lesson, the VLE then provides a space for them to discuss, record and share ideas as well as their work. This means classroom time is saved for expanding their knowledge of the topic and sounding out any difficulties they may have had with the learning materials. This allows learners to leave class feeling more confident about their understanding of the topic. It also helps



support learners of varying abilities, as the trainer has the chance to provide the necessary one on ones that may be required, given that they are no longer tied into the traditional lecture style lessons that are so often delivered in the traditional classroom.

At Forus Training we have contracted a dedicated team of digital professionals, all with backgrounds in education, to support trainers and allow for ongoing training that prevents them from feeling overwhelmed by the changes the recent Covid-19 pandemic has presented. This has also allowed the provision of short courses in digital upskilling for those outside of the organisation. It is also playing a role in staff, trainer and learner wellbeing, as we have areas within our VLE dedicated to health, mental health, academic support and study skills – enabling extra support that might have not been a possibility previously.

Forus Training is further committed to utilising the VLE to support continuing professional development (CPD) and training. Forus Training is currently migrating some of the mandatory training such as mental health awareness, fire safety, GDPR and more, to online modules. This has reduced pressure on staff and trainers and is more cost-effective for the organisation. In addition, it ensures all staff and trainers are current and up to date with all the requirements, and can access the training at a time that suits them rather than trying to get everyone to attend set slots.

Immersing learners in digital technology ensures that they gain a level of digital fluency that they would not otherwise be guaranteed. It also helps bolster additional skills that they will require in their professional lives such as self-management and independent learning; as VLEs require learners to take a certain level of responsibility for their education into their own hands. These are vital abilities in any workplace setting and are beneficial for the individual's personal lives also. The need for digital capabilities is increasing across most sectors and professions and it is therefore vital that learners leave education feeling comfortable that they are equipped with the digital capabilities they will need to progress. Additionally, digital learning environments can be an important way to engage adult learners by utilising methods that learners themselves use, you are creating a learning environment that is more relevant to them and more conducive to effective study.

Technology is inevitably going to permeate every sector, including that of education, and so the important factor is how Forus Training allows that to happen. Embracing an extensive VLE has helped



significantly improve our educational offering during recent times. QQI has also recently recognised the important role technology can play in education with the publication of, 'The Impact of COVID-19 Modifications to Teaching, Learning and Assessment in Irish Further Education and Training and Higher Education, A QQI Evaluation 2020', clearly, indicating that technology is only going to become more integral to the Irish education sector. Ultimately, this is a step in the right direction as VLEs have the ability to relieve some of the greater problems that lie at the heart of the education sector currently. Certainly, we have seen how effective these digital solutions can be at Forus Training.

Forus Training does not pass off the learning environment as simply planned and implemented in some mechanistic fashion, but as a process of creating and sustaining sites of nurturing, sensitivity, flexibility, adaptability and responsiveness. Attentiveness to what is happening and how things are working out is crucial. It's not just what we do but the way that we do it which matters. This is why the application of programmatic monitoring and review to the environment from where the facilitation of teaching and learning is coming from is detrimental to the process of continuous improvement.

Regulations for Virtual in-person tutorial sessions

- This policy applies to Zoom or other video/audio conferencing for Virtual in-person tutorial sessions.
- Mobile or tablet devices with a sufficient screen may suffice, but we recommend a PC or laptop.
- A webcam or mobile device with a front-facing camera is required for video.
- A headset with microphone is required for reliable audio and to avoid audio-feedback.
- A reliable broadband connection is essential.
- Virtual in-person tutorial sessions must be attended in a private quiet study space with minimal distractions.
- Learners are required to be logged in and ready in good time before the scheduled class time.
- Learners are required to mute their microphones until invited to contribute by their Trainer.
- Learners are required to behave and interact with the same public decorum and respect for others that would apply in any classroom setting.



- Learners leaving an online class for whatever reason are asked to do so without interrupting the tutorial session.
- Questions to the Trainer or requests to contribute can be made by chat message, or raising your hand, without interrupting.
- For class recording, learners must consent to the recording.
- Importantly, for the privacy and respect of trainers/teachers and fellow Learners, and to comply with GDPR regulations, Virtual in-person tutorial sessions must not be overseen, overheard, recorded, or shared with anyone outside the class.
- Attendance at Virtual in-person tutorial sessions is strictly subject to your compliance with these regulations.

Components and Importance of an Effective Learning Environment - Physical and Virtual

Developing an engaging and positive learning environment for learners is one of the most creative aspects of education in adult learning. Typically, the focus is either on the physical learning environments such as the classroom, or on different technologies that are used to develop virtual learning environments (Blended Learning). Forus Training is cognisant of how different individuals can experience the same learning environment quite differently.

However, the learning environment is an expression that is a lot broader than these components. The term comprises of:

- Learners' characteristics;
- Learning and teaching goals;
- Activities that support learning;
- Assessment strategies that drive and measure learning;
- A culture that directly infuses a learning environment.

Forus Training understands that typically, social, physical, psychological or cultural factors involved in a learning environment deeply affect the learners' learning capabilities. If the learning atmosphere is not conducive to gaining new knowledge or skills, it will be hard for learners to remain engrossed or interested.



Forus Training is committed to a learning environment as a great attribute to the success of the learner. Forus Training aims to offer a positive ambiance in order for both learners and trainers to feel motivated and engaged. An ideal learning setting encourages the interaction with learners/trainers and eventually establishes a sense of support.

What Are The Factors That Make A Positive Learning Environment?

Forus Training work to the following principles that contribute to establishing an effective and positive learning environment:

1. Establish a supportive learning culture

Each member of the learning community should have the feeling of connectedness. They must feel that they are contributing to the overall environment while being a bigger and important part of a supportive learning culture.

For this, a proper support system has been developed to provide learners with the required assistance whenever needed. The Forus Training classroom can play an important role in helping learners build stronger and larger networks. Classes provide learners and trainers with friendship, skills, and contacts beyond their immediate communities. Intentionally building networks in the classroom can create meaningful, supportive relationships among learners and trainers. In the Blended Learning approach, this includes online discussion forums and platforms where learners can gather and discuss various topics.

Learners can use these resources and mechanisms to provide support to fellow learners, to share and address concerns, and to express their ideas and opinions about topics and/or the overall learning experience. The Forus Training virtual learning environment offers training and ongoing education through blended learning resources that can be accessed and used by the learners in their own time and yet, are carefully designed and developed to reflect the synchronous learning experience.

2. Address Learners' Needs

Forus Training recognises that adult learners have psychological needs for order and security, nurturing and belonging, competence and personal power, novelty and freedom and even fun. Forus



Training is committed to meeting learners' intrinsic needs, helping learners to be more engaged and autonomous in their learning and, to progress and be facilitated through their learning experience with a positive attitude. This fulfilling learning atmosphere helps learners in developing the right learning attitude while establishing positive relationships with peers.

3. Build self-esteem and self-efficacy: Keeping it Positive

Learners' determination and belief that they can achieve their goals are important factors in their persistence in ongoing learning. Adult learners may have negative feelings about themselves due to failure experienced in their lives, due to dropping out of school, losing a job, or not being able to read or write well enough to complete a job application or read to their children. Forus Training adopts a number of strategies to assist learners in building their self-esteem and self-efficacy. These include but are not limited to:

- Ensuring that learners experience success at their first learning session so the first experience is a positive one.
- Patience! Patience is an extremely important characteristic for any trainer of adults. Adults can often take a longer time in the learning process because of various learning barriers, but this does not mean they aren't motivated to learn.
- Accepting our learners as they are and respecting their values and belief systems.
- Believing in our learners so they are encouraged to believe in themselves.
- Memorize the names of all our learners within the first week of learning and using learners names frequently.
- If we have learners where English is not the primary language, the trainer learns a few key phrases in native languages to model that it is acceptable to struggle with pronunciation and language learning.

Learners respond far better to supportive rather than negative reinforcement. Appreciation is the key to motivation. At Forus Training our learners appreciate the freedom to express their opinions; similarly, the opinions of their peers also play a crucial role in defining their learning attitude. While it is important to express opinions, it is also vital to remain positive.

4. Provide Feedback and Motivate Learners



P7 S20 Learning Environment Policy

Forus Training is committed to feedback, recognising it as a positive way to connect with learners and to set their learning efforts in the right direction. Feedback is vital for learners as it helps them in tracking their progress and in changing their learning strategy accordingly. It also helps them recognize their weak areas while improving the developed skills.

At Forus Training our trainers are encouraged to use feedback continuously, to inform the learner where they are missing the mark and what is needed to be done. Feedback is not only a key to motivate the learner but timely and consistent feedback ensures an interactive learning environment. It keeps learners involved and allows them to keep going while mounting a feeling of purpose and belonging.

Education is undergoing a fundamental change of mindset; the provider, the Trainer and the learner all need to be able to adapt to various requirements, particularly technical. Learners need and want their learning experience to be accessible and convenient. Motivation is a key factor in learner success, and whatever level of motivation our learners bring to the learning environment, learning will be transformed, for better or worse, by what happens during the learning process, within the learning environment. To this end, Forus Training is committed to:

- Involving learners as active participants in their learning experience. Learners have different cognitive styles and so, it is the task of the learning process to ensure that whether learners are in a physical real-life classroom or participating in blended learning materials include visual, audial and textual format to give all learners an equal opportunity of comprehension; textual information, videos, discussion boards/live forums and powerpoint presentation with core material, including visual imagery are some examples of how Forus Training ensure materials are wide-ranging.
- Improving learner autonomy. Important in both the physical learning environment as much as in the blended learning environment, learners succeed only if they are able to take control over their learning experience. The Trainer's role is to facilitate and assist. It is vital that learners are involved into independent goal-setting at the start of their programme to take full ownership of the process and that they are further encouraged through the educational scenarios and situation, to be supported to make independent decisions.



P7 S20 Learning Environment Policy

- Trainers are required to be enthusiastic about what they are facilitating. The trainers' enthusiasm is a crucial factor in learner motivation - only inspired Trainers can inspire learners. If the trainer becomes bored or apathetic, the learners will too.
- Trainers are committed to working from the learners' strengths and interests and affording improvisation and good planning to effective learning and learner interest. Planning is vital in both technical, environmental and educational terms and to ensure learner engagement, regardless of the environment, understanding the individual learners as opposed to only the 'group' will provide the Trainer with a flawless, engaging and beneficial learning environment. Learners need to believe that they have the capacity to succeed.
- In both learning environments, training methods must be varied, carefully prepared and easily accessible to ensure engagement and reawakening in the learners' involvement in the course. Lesson planning incorporates role playing, debates, brainstorming, discussion, demonstrations, case studies, audio-visual presentations, guest speakers and focused group work.
- As some learners may find the writing elements of learning challenging, trainers are instructed to encourage learners to understand literacy as a tool that empowers them to take action in their lives.
- Giving timely and sensitive feedback. In the physical classroom the Trainer must make use of the opportunities to give feedback in real time, streamlining learners and explaining their mistakes and areas for improvement early. In a blended and online environment, feedback is crucial. Delayed feedback may result in the learner's sense of isolation and may cause serious deviations from the programme of study.

A learning environment is a diverse platform where learners and trainers engage and interact to learn new skills. Forus Training appreciates that learners can learn in an array of settings and use the term 'learning environment' to refer to the more preferred and accurate alternative to the traditional classroom, which is often adopted in the education and training involving adults.

5. Celebrate Success

In addition to feedback and appreciation, Forus Training establishes a positive and effective learning environment by way of celebrating the learners' success. This could be anything from a shout out to



a big reward. When learners' achievements are recognised and shared by the trainers with other learners, it creates a sense of achievement and fosters healthy learning behaviour.

6. Safety

A good learning environment offers a safe platform for learners. Before expecting learners to succeed academically, they also need to feel safe, both mentally and physically. Safety in a learning environment goes beyond physical well-being. In order to maintain a safe learning environment, learners must feel supported, welcomed, and respected. Forus Training has robust physical safety measures in place for classroom teaching and learning as well as considerations for mental health safety in the context of the virtual learning platforms.

The Physical Learning Environment (PLE)

[P7 S20 Health and Safety Checklist for Training Venues](#)



P7 S20 Learning Environment Policy

P7 S20 Health and Safety Checklist for Hire of Training Facilities / Venues



Room Location			
Location:	<input type="text"/>	Venue:	<input type="text"/>
Room name:	<input type="text"/>	Eircode:	<input type="text"/>

	Yes	Action req.	N/A
Movement around the classroom (slips, trips and falls)			
Internal flooring is in a good condition	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
There no changes in floor level or type of flooring that need to be highlighted	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
Gangways between desks are kept clear	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
Trailing electrical leads/cables are prevented wherever possible	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
Lighting is bright enough to allow safe access and exit	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
Procedures are in place to deal with spillages, e.g. water, blood from cuts	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
For stand-alone classrooms: Access steps or ramps are properly maintained	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
For stand-alone classrooms: Access stairs or ramps are provided with handrails	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
An 'elephant-foot' step-stool or stepladder available for use where necessary	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
A window-opener is provided for opening high-level windows	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
Furniture and fixtures			
Permanent fixtures in good condition and securely fastened, e.g. cupboards, , shelving	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
Furniture is in good repair and suitable for the size of the user	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
Portable equipment is stable, e.g. a TV set on a suitable trolley	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
Where window restrictors are fitted to upper-floor windows, they are working	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
The hot surfaces of radiators are protected to prevent the risk of burns	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
Manual handling			
Trolleys have been provided for moving heavy objects, e.g. computers	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
Computers and similar equipment			
If you use computers are used a workstation assessment been completed	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
Learners been advised about good practice when using computers	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
Electrical equipment and services			
Fixed electrical switches and plug sockets are in good repair	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
Are all plugs and cables are in good repair	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
Portable electrical equipment, e.g. laminators, have been visually checked and, where necessary, tested at suitable intervals to ensure that the equipment is safe to use	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
+ Damaged electrical equipment has been taken out of service or replaced	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
Fire			
Fire exit doors in the classroom are unobstructed, unlocked and are easy to open	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
Fire-fighting equipment is in place in the classroom	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
Fire evacuation procedures clearly displayed	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
I am aware of the evacuation drill	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
Workplace (ventilation and heating)			
The room have natural ventilation	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
A reasonable room temperature can be maintained during use of the classroom	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
Measures are in place, e.g. blinds, to protect from glare and heat from the sun	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>



P7 S20 Learning Environment Policy

COVID-19 - Pre Event	Yes	Action req.	N/A
Discuss with the venue owner at the earliest possible opportunity to understand any additional restrictions that they may have in place.	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
When assessing your event, it is critical that you understand the status of COVID-19 at Government and Local Council level.	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
Set-Up Pre-Event Registration Process: Ensure that all participants are aware that their contact information may be made available to the government/HSE in the event of a positive COVID-19 case from one of the participants.	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
Develop a non-contact number process.	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
Develop a start list that ensures the total number of people onsite does not exceed government guidelines.	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
Have a clear and flexible refund policy	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
COVID-19 - Communications	Yes	Action req.	N/A
Develop a Participant Communications Plan that outlines any special conditions or new ways of operating	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
Remind participants that they are not to attend if they have had any illness or symptoms of COVID19. Participants must not attend if in the last 14 days they have been unwell or had close contact with a known or suspected case of COVID-19 (cough, sore throat, fever, shortness of breath, etc), even if mild. Participants must leave immediately if they demonstrate any symptoms of COVID-19 during the event.	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
Consider appointing a COVID-19 Liaison Officer for the event	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
COVID-19 - At Event	Yes	Action req.	N/A
Ensure there is a registration process that maintains physical distancing and hygiene requirements.	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
Sanitising alcohol-based dispensers should be provided.	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
Only essential personnel should be appointed to help conduct the event.	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
All non-essential equipment and surfaces are closed off.	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
This is not an exhaustive list and you should identify any other hazards associated with the daily use of the training room in the space overleaf, including any further actions needed. If necessary, discuss this with the venue contact or e-mail hello@forustraining.ie .			
Additional issues	Action Req.		



Further action needed

Hazards noted:	Action taken and when:
<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>

Sign Off by Trainer

Does the Room meet the course entry requirements? Yes No

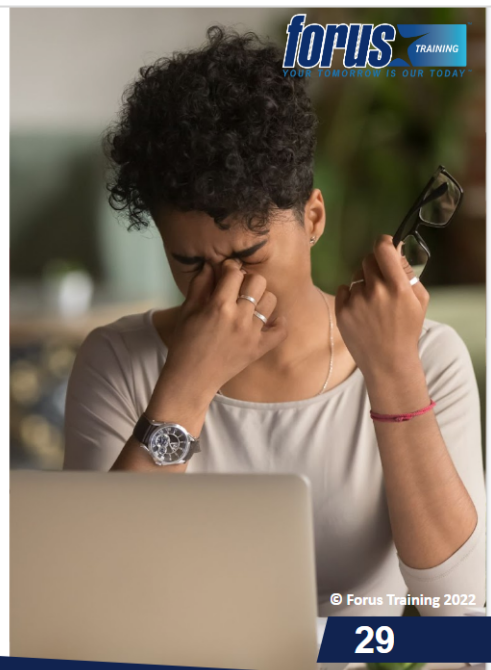
Name: Position:

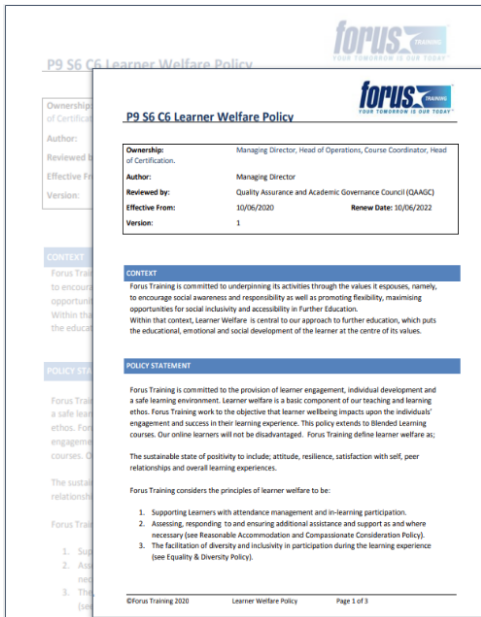
Signature: Date:

The Virtual Learning Environment (VLE)

Health & Safety

- Taking breaks: When working on your LMS take a 3 second break every 3 minutes; every 20 minutes get up and stretch your limbs,
- Comfortable Seating Position: Forearms horizontal, eyes at the same height as the top of the screen casing, chair and keyboard positioned so that thighs and forearms are level,
- Posture: Alter your posture from time to time, Keep your wrists straight and ensure they are not resting on anything whilst you are typing, Use a light touch when keying in, do not pound on the keys,
- Avoid glare on your screen: Arrange your screen so that bright lights are not reflected onto it.





Learner Welfare

The Forus Training welfare policy is focused on the welfare of all Learners and addresses any particular challenges individual Learners may be experiencing during their learning experience.

Please see the policy here:

[Learner Welfare Policy.](#)



© Forus Training 2022

Forus Training has built a positive learning environment which is more about maintaining a healthy culture where the expectations are well communicated and learners are fully aware of the code of conduct, corrective action approaches and only where necessary, disciplinary practices.

7. Employ Interactive Activities

Forus Training aims to operate an effective learning platform. whether physically or virtually, that establishes strong interactions and promotes a collaborative learning culture. This requires trainers to maintain positive relationships with the learners while also ensuring healthy association among the learners.

This is achieved by way of encouraging group activities to encourage interactive participation. The integration of non-competitive activities breaks down the cliques within a learning environment. This also assists the new and quieter learners to have a sense of belonging. Such activities also promote communication in a collaborative working environment and establish cooperative learning structures.



P7 S20 Learning Environment Policy

RELATED POLICIES PROCEDURES AND FORMS

[P1 S4 Academic Strategy](#)

[P7 S20 Health and Safety Checklist for Training Venues](#)

Amendment History			
Amendment summary sheet			
Revision	Date	Amendment summary	Training Requirements
	04/02/2020	Initial release	Read and Review
001	27/01/2021	This policy extends to Blended Learning courses learners who are engaged in this mode of learning will not be disadvantaged.	
	07/03/2022	Reviewed and approved	circulated to staff