

ATHLONE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Teaching, Learning and Assessment Plan



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1. Rationale and Context

Athlone Community College (ACC) is a co-educational, multi-denominational Community College under the patronage of Longford Westmeath Education and Training Board (LWETB). As an ETB school, we are guided by the core values of excellence in education, care, equality, community and respect, as set out in the ETBI Patrons' Framework on Ethos.

This policy has been developed through a structured School Self-Evaluation (SSE) process, informed by consultation with teachers, students and parents. The data gathered through questionnaires, student focus groups and surveys has directly shaped the priorities and commitments expressed here.

A central feature of this policy is the incorporation of Universal Design for Learning (UDL). UDL is a research-based educational framework which aims to remove barriers to learning by building flexibility and choice into the design of teaching, assessment and the learning environment from the outset. Rather than retrofitting supports for particular students, UDL asks teachers to design for diversity as the starting point.

The key messages from our school community reinforce the UDL approach: students want clarity, consistency, meaningful challenge and inclusive support. This policy translates those values into whole-school commitments.

1.1 Legislative and Policy Framework

This policy takes account of the following:

- The Education Act 1998
- Teaching Council Act 2001 and Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers (2nd Edition, 2016)
- Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act 2004
- Looking at Our School 2022 (LAOS): A Quality Framework for Post-Primary Schools
- ETBI Patrons' Framework on Ethos (2022)
- UDL Guidelines, Version 2.2 (CAST, 2018)
- Junior Cycle Framework and Senior Cycle Reform
- Cosán: National Framework for Teachers' Learning
- NCSE Inclusive Education Framework

1.2 Class Structure

Athlone Community College offers broad subject choices across all year groups, structured to reflect the school's commitment to equality of opportunity and high expectations for every learner. Classes in both Junior Cycle (First to Third Year) and Senior Cycle (Fifth and Sixth Year) are organised on a mixed-ability basis.

ACC offers a comprehensive range of programmes across Senior Cycle, including Transition Year (TY), Leaving Certificate Established (LCE), and Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA).

2. Ethos & Mission Statement

3. Universal Design for Learning (UDL) at ACC

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a proactive, whole-school approach to inclusive education. It provides a framework for designing flexible teaching, learning environments and assessment so that all students can access, engage with and demonstrate their learning effectively.

The UDL framework identifies three core principles, each addressing a different dimension of the learning experience:

Multiple Means of Engagement	Multiple Means of Representation	Multiple Means of Action & Expression
The 'WHY' of learning	The 'WHAT' of learning	The 'HOW' of learning

3.1 UDL and our SSE Evidence

Our student voice data gathered between 2024-2026 provides rationale for the UDL approach. Students asked for:

- Multiple ways to access content
- Choice in how they demonstrate their learning
- Clear structure and pacing - time to understand before moving on
- Feedback that helps them improve, not just a grade
- Challenge that stretches thinking, not just additional volume of work
- A classroom climate where asking questions feels safe

Each of these is a UDL principle in action.

3.2 What UDL Looks Like in Practice at ACC

The following table illustrates how UDL principles translate into concrete classroom practice:

UDL Principle	What This Looks Like in ACC Classrooms
Multiple Means of Engagement	• Using collaborative tasks • Setting clearly attainable and challenging learning goals • Building in self-reflection and goal-setting activities
Multiple Means of Representation	• Presenting content visually, aurally and in text • Using videos, diagrams and worked examples alongside written notes • Pre-teaching key vocabulary
Multiple Means of Action & Expression	• Allowing students to show learning through written, verbal, visual or digital means • Providing scaffolds such as writing frames or graphic organisers • Offering tiered tasks for deeper thinking
Proactive Differentiation	• Planning in advance for learner variability • Designing tasks with low floor and high ceiling • Providing optional challenge extensions

	• Embedding supports in the whole-class lesson rather than singling students out
Flexible Assessment	• Using a range of formative assessment approaches • Providing specific, developmental feedback • Allowing students to act on feedback and improve work • Using peer and self-assessment alongside teacher assessment
Accessible Resources	• Using clear, readable dyslexia-friendly fonts and layouts • Providing structured note-frames where helpful • Ensuring digital tools are accessible to all learners
Positive Classroom Climate	• Creating an environment where mistakes are a normal part of learning • Responding patiently to questions • Building student self-efficacy through appropriate challenge and success • Modelling enthusiasm for learning

3.3 UDL and Expert Learners

The goal of UDL is not simply to make learning accessible, it is to develop expert learners: students who are purposeful and motivated, resourceful and knowledgeable, and strategic and goal-directed.

4. Effective Learning and Teaching

4.1 Learner Outcomes

In line with LAOS 2022 (Domain 1) and UDL's goal of developing expert learners, we aim for all students at ACC to:

- Enjoy learning, be motivated to engage, and believe in their own capacity to achieve
- Develop the knowledge, skills and understanding required by the post-primary curriculum
- Develop key skills for Junior Cycle and Senior Cycle programmes
- Demonstrate critical thinking, problem-solving and creative skills
- Understand themselves as learners and develop positive learning dispositions (growth mindset, resilience, curiosity)
- Attain their potential in state and school assessments
- Become increasingly self-directed, strategic and independent as learners

4.2 Learner Experiences

Student voice gathered during our SSE process identified the hallmarks of an effective lesson. Students described an ideal lesson as having clear structure, pace, examples, and active engagement. These align directly with UDL principles of multiple means of representation and engagement:

Start of Lesson	During Lesson	End of Lesson
Learning intentions written and explained clearly	Clear explanation with worked examples and demonstrations	Recap of learning intentions
Recap of previous learning	Active, varied learning activities	Student Reflection
Key vocabulary and definitions introduced	Opportunities to practice and apply learning	Homework assigned (when beneficial and applicable)
Connection to prior learning made explicit	Time for questions without feeling rushed	
	Resources shared on Teams for later revision	

5. Teachers' Practice

5.1 Planning and Preparation

Effective, inclusive teaching begins with deliberate, UDL-informed planning. At ACC, teachers will:

- Plan lessons with clear, relevant learning intentions contextualised to students' needs and abilities
- Design sequences of learning tasks that build progressively on prior knowledge
- Plan proactively for learner variability by designing tasks with a low floor and a high ceiling so all learners can access and be extended
- Identify and prepare varied resources (visual, audio, digital, text) in advance
- Plan for both formative and summative assessment within lessons and units of work
- Engage in collaborative long-term, medium-term and short-term planning within subject departments
- Digital Tools
 - Create a shared vision for digital learning
 - Develop department-level digital goals
 - Embed digital skills across subjects
 - Use project-based learning
 - Promote responsible and safe use of technology

5.2 Teaching Approaches

The following approaches, identified through our SSE data as most effective, are encouraged across all classrooms:

Highly Effective Teaching Strategies at ACC (SSE Evidence 2024–25)	
✓	Think-Pair-Share: building student confidence before whole-class discussion
✓	Exit Tickets: quick formative checks of learning at lesson end

✓	Quizzes and interactive tools
✓	Peer Feedback and Peer Assessment: structured, supportive and language-guided
✓	Effective Questioning: open, closed, higher-order and differentiated questions
✓	Modelling and Worked Examples: showing the process, not just the answer
✓	Collaborative Tasks and Group Work: with clear roles and purposes
✓	Videos, simulations and visual explanations
✓	Walking Debates and Active Learning Tasks
✓	Revision Activities embedded within lessons
✓	At least one digital assessment strategy implemented per subject department

5.3 Differentiation and Inclusion (UDL in Practice)

UDL-informed differentiation at ACC means:

What we differentiate	How we do it (UDL-informed examples)	Student experience
Content (What students learn)	Pre-teaching key vocabulary; providing summaries; using video to introduce complex concepts	All students access the same knowledge with appropriate entry points
Process (How students engage)	Offering tiered tasks; providing graphic organisers and writing frames; allowing choice of collaborative or independent work	All students engage meaningfully at the right level of challenge
Product (How students show learning)	Accepting a variety of verbal, written, visual or digital responses where applicable; using exit tickets, discussions, portfolios or quizzes	All students can demonstrate their learning effectively
Environment (Where and how learning happens)	Flexible student-centred seating, clear classroom routines, distraction-reduced options; predictable lesson structure	All students feel settled, safe and ready to learn

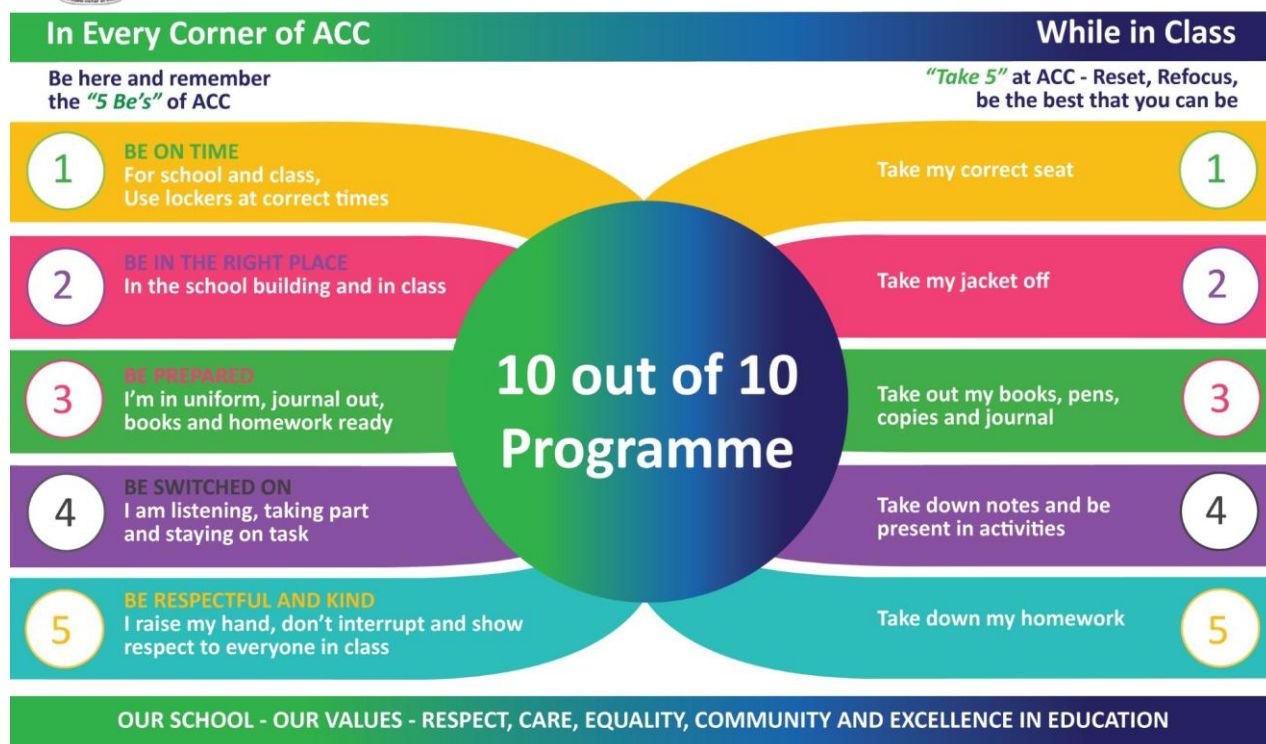
5.4 Classroom Environment and Climate

The 10 out of 10 programme helps to create a positive, consistent and supportive teaching and learning environment across Athlone Community College. Through regular check-ins and shared expectations, students are encouraged to be prepared, respectful, organised and engaged in their learning. The programme promotes positive relationships between students and staff, reinforces a sense of belonging and helps establish calm, focused classrooms where students

can feel safe, supported and ready to learn.



Athlone Community College



5.5 Homework

Homework is an opportunity to consolidate and extend learning and should be:

- Written on the board and recorded in the student's journal
- Purposeful and clearly linked to specific learning goals
- Varied in format, including exam-style questions, revision tasks, quizzes and research activities
- Designed with flexibility where possible, offering options that allow students to demonstrate understanding in different ways
- Manageable and mindful of the total homework load across subjects
- Clearly explained so students know what to do and why
- Checked and used to inform subsequent teaching

6. Assessment

A UDL approach to assessment means offering students multiple means of demonstrating their learning, using a range of formative and summative methods, and ensuring that assessment information is used to improve teaching and support every learner.

6.1 Purposes of Assessment

Assessment at ACC serves to:

- Identify learning needs and guide targeted support
- Monitor student learning and progress over time

- Contribute to state and school-based examination outcomes
- Inform curriculum and lesson planning

6.2 Examples of Assessment

Formative Assessment	Summative Assessment
Sharing and revisiting clear Learning Intentions at the start and throughout lessons	House/class examinations
Generating and sharing success criteria with students (and co-creating where appropriate)	Examinations for examination year groups in November
Teacher observation and differentiated questioning to check understanding	Mock examinations for Leaving Certificate and Junior Cycle students
Exit Tickets to gauge learning at the end of lessons	State Examinations (Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement, Leaving Certificate)
Think-Pair-Share and other collaborative formative activities	Portfolio and project work
Quizzes	Classroom-Based Assessments (CBAs)

6.3 AEN Assessment

The CAT 4 (Cognitive Ability Test) is a diagnostic timed assessment used to measure students' reasoning ability and academic potential across verbal, nonverbal, mathematical, and spatial areas. It is used to identify gifted and talented students and support students with learning gaps. It provides information on the student's cognitive strengths and needs.

This assessment takes place in January of Sixth Class and is used as baseline data to help form mixed ability classes.

PPAD-E (Post Primary Assessment and Diagnosis – English) is currently used at the start of First Year to assess literacy skills consisting of five subsets – Word reading, Spelling, reading speed, Reading Comprehension and Writing Samples. The test is culturally appropriate and Irish based and is linked to evidence-based interventions. It is suitable for considering eligibility of students for an exemption from Irish and is helpful in providing data for RACE/ DARE. It is useful in diagnostic assessment, monitoring, and evaluating progress.

WIAT III (Wechsler Individual Achievement Test)

Is used to measure word reading, spelling and writing, for the purpose of eligibility for RACE/ DARE

DASH (Detailed Assessment of Speed of Handwriting) used to assess students' speed of handwriting for the purpose of eligibility for RACE/ DARE.

6.4 Reporting

Data gathered from the CAT4, PPAD-E is used to identify students that are gifted/ talented or who need specific support and / or interventions. This information informs Students Support Plans (SSP) and guides teachers on specific targets that need to be met. The targets worked on by teachers in SET classes are reported through term reports on VSWare. This information is also used by RACE coordinators to identify students that may be eligible for RACE and by the

Guidance Department when making an application for DARE. A SET Term report is also completed by SET teachers twice per academic year outline targets met by students and tracking progress made.

7. Teachers' Collaborative Practice and Professional Learning

The quality of teaching at ACC is strengthened when teachers work together, share expertise and engage in ongoing professional learning. This is a central principle of LAOS 2022 (Domain 4: Teachers' Collective/Collaborative Practice) and of the ETB ethos.

7.1 Professional Learning

At ACC, teachers are committed to ongoing professional learning that develops their capacity to implement UDL and other evidence-based approaches. This includes:

- Engaging with PLE opportunities on UDL, differentiation, formative assessment and inclusive practice
- Participating in TeachMeet sessions designed around student voice evidence and UDL strategies
- Reflecting on and developing practice in response to SSE data
- Accessing supports from national bodies
- Upskilling in the area of Digital Competence
 - Deliver professional learning using preferred formats: collaborative learning (as per SELFIE findings)
 - Establish Digital Champions / peer support system
 - Provide differentiated CPD through Teach Meets etc (beginner → advanced)
 - Share practice at staff meetings
 - Encourage participation in Oide and external PLEs

Our SSE data identified AI as the area most requiring CPD. As AI tools increasingly affect both teaching and student work, ACC will develop clear guidance and professional learning to support teachers in navigating this ethically and effectively.

7.2 Collaborative Practice

At ACC, teachers will:

- Work collaboratively within and across subject departments to share UDL-informed approaches and resources
- Engage in joint planning, including curriculum and assessment planning
- Develop and implement consistent whole-school approaches to formative assessment and feedback
- Share expertise through TeachMeet sessions and department meetings
- Collectively review student performance data to identify areas for improvement
- Work with learning support and pastoral care colleagues to co-design inclusive approaches for students with additional needs

8. Digital Learning and Technology

Digital technologies are a key enabler of UDL at ACC. Used purposefully, they expand access, offer choice in how students engage with content and demonstrate learning, and support teachers in differentiating flexibly.

At ACC:

- Office 365 is the primary digital platform
- Digital tools are used to support assessment and engagement
- Teachers are supported to develop digital competence and AI literacy through CPD
- Students are supported to use technology responsibly and effectively as a learning resource
- School leadership will work to improve equitable access to devices

The UDL principle of multiple means of action and expression is significantly enhanced by technology: students can demonstrate learning verbally, visually, digitally or in writing. Teachers are encouraged to use digital tools not as a substitute for quality teaching but as an expansion of the range of ways students can access, engage with and express their learning.

9. Sustainability and Teaching for Global Citizenship

Sustainability is a core dimension of teaching and learning at Athlone Community College. We believe that education has a fundamental role to play in developing students who are environmentally aware, globally responsible and actively engaged in shaping a more sustainable future. Sustainability at ACC is not confined to a single subject or programme. It is a whole-school, cross-curricular commitment that permeates teaching, learning and assessment across all year groups and disciplines.

10. Senior Cycle Redevelopment

Senior Cycle Redevelopment is the most significant reform of post-primary education in Ireland since the introduction of Junior Cycle reform, and it has direct and immediate implications for teaching, learning and assessment at Athlone Community College. The programme, led by the Department of Education in partnership with the NCCA, the State Examinations Commission (SEC) and Oide (the national support service for teachers and school leaders), involves the phased redevelopment of all Leaving Certificate subjects over a number of years. A new model of assessment is being introduced in which Additional Assessment Components (AACs), which are externally assessed by the State Examinations Commission but completed during the school year, will account for at least 40% of the total marks available in each redeveloped subject.

The introduction of AACs mean that:

- Senior Cycle teaching must develop the skills, independence and process-knowledge students need to complete sustained assessment tasks
- Formative assessment and feedback practices must become even more important, as students need ongoing guidance during the completion of AAC work
- Teachers carry a responsibility for the monitoring and authentication of student work
- Students must be taught the skills of independent working, time management, source referencing and self-assessment that sustained AAC tasks require

School Year	Revised / Redeveloped Subjects
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2025/26 (Tranche 1)	Biology, Physics, Chemistry, Business , Arabic, Ancient Greek, Latin New subjects: Drama, Film & Theatre Studies; Climate Action and Sustainable Development
2026/27 (Tranche 2)	Construction Studies, Engineering, Geography , Physical Education
2027/28 (Tranche 3)	Accounting, English, Agricultural Science, Computer Science, Design and Communications Graphics, History, Home Economics, Mathematics, Music , Physics and Chemistry
2028/29 (Tranche 4)	Art, Economics, French, Gaeilge, German , Italian, Politics and Society, Spanish , Technology
2029/30 (Tranche 5)	Applied Mathematics , Classical Studies, Japanese, Lithuanian, Mandarin Chinese, Polish, Portuguese, Religious Education, Russian

11. Monitoring, Review and Evaluation

This policy is a living document, reviewed and updated through the school's SSE cycle. The effectiveness of UDL implementation will be monitored as a specific strand of this process.

Monitoring will include:

- Student, teacher and parent questionnaires
- Student focus groups
- Analysis of assessment data and examination results
- Department planning and CPD records

Review

This plan will be formally reviewed annually, or sooner if new legislative or regulatory requirements apply, if SSE data indicates significant changes are needed, or if major curriculum reform occurs. All stakeholders (students, teachers, parents and the Board of Management) will be consulted in the review process.