

**Annual Quality Report (SQT Training)**  
**Reporting Period 2020 (Jan – Dec)**

**Annual Quality Report (SQT Training)**  
**PART A: INTERNAL QA SYSTEM**  
**Reporting Period 2020 (Jan – Dec)**

## PREFACE

Note: QQI's provider portal, QHub, is currently under development and will be completed in November 2020. AQR 2021 will be submitted via QHub.

The **Annual Quality Report (AQR)**; formerly AIQR) forms part of Quality and Qualifications Ireland's (QQI) quality assurance (QA) framework of engagement with Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). The AQR provides documentary evidence of the development and evolution of each institution's internal quality system. It provides QQI with assurance that internal QA procedures have been established and are being implemented consistent with regulatory requirements.

The AQR, particularly part A, should assist with **document management** in the institutional review process and will facilitate institutions in providing review teams with procedural QA documentation in preparation for the external review process. It is an important part of the evidence base considered by external **review teams** as part of QQI's CINNTE cycle of institutional reviews, demonstrating that the institution's internal QA system is aligned with QQI's Core and relevant Sector- and Topic-specific Statutory QA Guidelines, and with the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area 2015 (ESG). It enables the review team to satisfy itself of compliance with these requirements for the purpose of the institutional review process.

Each AQR is **published in full on QQI's website**, providing transparency on the HEIs' assurance and enhancement of quality to external stakeholders. (As such, institutions should ensure that their submissions do not contain any data that they consider to be commercially sensitive.) Collectively, the AQRs comprise a single national repository of quality assurance practice in Irish higher education institutions.

Each year, QQI produces a synthesis report of the key themes highlighted across the AQRs, primarily arising from Part B of the reports.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>PREFACE</b>	<b>3</b>
1.1 Links to Reference Documents Cited in this Report	6
<b>PART A: INTERNAL QA SYSTEM</b>	<b>7</b>
1.2 Introduction and Overview of Institution	8
1.3 Internal QA Framework	10
1.3.1 Governance and Management of Quality	12
1.3.2 Programme Development and Delivery	12
1.3.3 Learner Resources and Support	14
1.3.4 Staff Recruitment, Development and Support	14
1.3.5 Information and Data Management	15
1.3.6 Public Information and Communication	15
1.3.7 Self-Evaluation, Monitoring and Periodic Review	16
1.4 Details of Arrangements with Third Parties	17
1.4.1 Arrangements with PRSBs, Awarding Bodies, QA Bodies	17
<b>PART B: QA SYSTEM</b>	<b>20</b>
2.1 Quality Implementation and Developments	20
2.1.1 Strategic QA Updates	20
2.1.2 Update on Planned QA Objectives identified in Previous AQR	22
2.1.3 Governance and Management	22
2.1.4 Internal Monitoring and Review	26
2.2 IQA System - Enhancement and Impacts	27
2.2.1 Impact and Enhancements resulting from Re-engagement	27
2.2.2 Staff Development and Upskilling for Virtual Delivery	31
2.2.3 Adaptations to Teaching, Learning & Assessment for Virtual Delivery	32
2.2.4 Adaptations to Supports & Resources for Learners arising from Covid-19.	37
2.2.5 Self-Evaluation, Ongoing Monitoring and Review Activities	39
2.3 Initiatives within the Institution related to Academic Integrity	42
2.4 QA Improvement and Enhancement Plans for Upcoming Reporting Period	43
2.4.1 QA and QE supporting the Achievement of Strategic Objectives (2021)	43
2.4.2 Reviews planned for Upcoming Reporting Periods	44

<b>2.5 Additional Themes and Case Studies</b>	<b>45</b>
2.5.1 Case Study 1: Retaining a Learner-Centric Focus in the Transition to Virtual Training Delivery: A Tutor's Perspective	45
2.5.2 Digital Transformation - Implementation of new Management Information System (MIS)	47

## 1.1 Links to Reference Documents Cited in this Report

### Legislation

- [Qualifications and Quality Assurance \(Education and Training\) Act 2012 \(as amended\)](#)
- [Regional Technical Colleges Act 1992 \(as amended\)](#)
- [Technological Universities Act 2018](#)
- [Universities Act 1997](#)

### QQI Documents

#### Statutory QA Guidelines (QAG)

- [Core QAG](#)
- [Sector-specific QAG for Independent/Private Providers](#)
- [Sector-specific QAG for Designated Awarding Bodies](#)
- [Sector-specific QAG for Institutes of Technology](#)
- [Topic-specific QAG for Providers of Statutory Apprenticeship Programmes](#)
- [Topic-specific QAG for Providers of Research Degree Programmes](#)
- [Topic-specific QAG for Blended Learning](#)

#### Other QQI Policy Documents

- [QQI's Policy for Collaborative Programmes, Transnational Programmes, and Joint Awards, 2012](#)
- [QQI's Code of Practice for Provision of Programmes of Education and Training to International Learners, 2015](#)
- [QQI Policy Restatement on Access, Transfer and Progression, 2015](#)

### Other National/International References

- [European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area \(2015\)](#)
- [IHEQN Guidelines on Collaborative Provision](#)
- [National Policy Statement on Ensuring Research Integrity in Ireland](#)
- [Ireland's Framework of Good Practice for Research Degree Programmes, 2019](#)
- [HEA National Framework for Doctoral Education](#)
- [The Salzburg Principles](#)
- [The Salzburg II Recommendations](#)
- [SOLAS Code of Practice for Employers and Apprentices](#)
- [UN Sustainable Development Goals](#)

## PART A: INTERNAL QA SYSTEM

Mapping of ESG (2015) to QQI QA Guidelines (QAG)				
AQR Part A Section	QQI QAG Core Sub-section No.	QAG Core Sub-section Title	ESG Standard No.	ESG Standard Title
1.0 - Internal QA Framework	2.1	Governance and Management of Quality	1.1	Policy for Quality Assurance
	2.2	Documented Approach to Quality Assurance		
2.0 - Programme Development and Delivery 4.0 - QA of Research Activities and Programmes	2.3	Programmes of Education and Training	1.2	Design and Approval of Programmes
8.0 - Monitoring and Periodic Review			1.9	On-going Monitoring and Periodic Review of Programmes
5.0 - Staff Recruitment, Development and Support	2.4	Staff Recruitment, Management and Development	1.5	Teaching Staff
2.3 - Teaching, Learning and Assessment	2.5	Teaching and Learning	1.3	Student-centred Teaching, Learning and Assessment
	2.6	Assessment of Learners		
3.0 - Learner Resources and Supports	2.7	Supports for learners	1.6	Learning Resources and Student Support
6.0 - Information and Data Management	2.8	Information and Data Management	1.7	Information Management
7.0 - Public Information and Communication	2.9	Public Information and Communication	1.8	Public Information
2.0 - Programme Delivery and Development 8.0 - Monitoring and Periodic Review 9.0 - Details of Arrangements with Third Parties	2.10	Other Parties Involved in Education and Training	1.9	On-going Monitoring and Periodic Review of Programmes
2.0 - Programme Development and Delivery 8.0 - Monitoring and Periodic Review			1.2	Design and Approval of Programmes
2.0 - Programme Development and Delivery 8.0 - Monitoring and Periodic Review			1.9	On-going Monitoring and Periodic Review of Programmes
8.0 - Monitoring and Periodic Review	2.11	Self-evaluation, Monitoring and Review	1.10	Cyclical External Quality Assurance
4.0 - QA of Research Activities and Programmes			QAG for Providers of Research Degree Programmes	

## 1.2 Introduction and Overview of Institution

This is the Annual Quality Report (hereafter AQR) for SQT Training for the reporting period 1<sup>st</sup> January 2020 - 31<sup>st</sup> December 2020. It is to be submitted by **Friday, 26 March 2021**.

The AQR has been approved by SQT's Academic Council and is submitted by **Lorraine Halpin (Director of Quality and Academic Affairs)**.

### SQT Profile

SQT was founded in 1989. Its primary goal is to develop and deliver high quality, focused, responsive, and innovative training and educational programmes for learners. The organisation has built an extensive portfolio of quality clients across both the public and private sector. To date the company has delivered programmes to in excess of 85,000 learners across hundreds of organisations spanning a wide range of industries.

A distinctive feature of SQT is its learner profile. All learners are adults, with the vast majority in full-time employment. Another unique feature is that, unlike many other higher education providers, SQT does not provide programmes for second-level school leavers; or provide centre-based delivery at its location in Limerick. Prior to transitioning to virtual delivery due to the Covid-19 pandemic in March 2020, all SQT programmes were delivered through traditional classroom methods only (face-to-face). It essentially offers two categories of programmes:

- **Public Programmes:** These programmes are typically delivered to learners from a number of organisations. Prior to March 2020, these were delivered at central locations, typically hotel venues across Ireland. The primary venues include The Castleknock Hotel and City West Hotel in Dublin.
- **In-house Programmes:** These are both standard and tailored for a particular organisation and, generally, cater for four to fifteen learners. Such programmes are usually delivered at the company's own training facilities.

The company is located within the National Technology Park in Limerick and the administration / management functions are located on site. SQT presently have 39 approved Tutors and 13 Management and Operational staff based at its offices in Limerick.

SQT offers a range of accredited and non-accredited programmes. Programmes range from 0.5 to 20 teaching days across twelve broad subject areas, categorised as follows:

1. Lean Six Sigma
2. Continual Process Improvement
3. Project & Programme Management
4. Quality
5. Environment & Energy Management
6. Health & Safety
7. Food Safety
8. Life Sciences
9. Laboratory
10. Hospitals / Medical
11. Train the Trainer
12. Leadership & Personal Development



Of note is that all learners are registered on programmes on an on-going, rolling basis, unlike many academic institutions, who accept intakes typically twice per year i.e. September and January.

In the context of QQI, SQT secured initial QA approval from FETAC in 2007 and, subsequently, HETAC in 2008. The scope of QQI provision is presently limited to the following subject areas:

- **Lean Six Sigma** (4 HET Special Purpose Awards)
- **Food Safety** (3 FET Special Purpose Awards)
- **Leadership & Personal Development** (1 Minor and 2 Special Purpose Awards)

The organisation successfully re-engaged with QQI in May 2019. The re-engagement exercise represented a significant body of work and the process has ultimately driven the development of a revised QA Framework and associated QA procedures, which together underpin the achievement of a holistic and embedded QA system. SQT are confident that the system is fit for purpose and compliant with the requirements of both QQI and other awarding bodies. The review process and revised QA framework has created an increased awareness that quality assurance is an integral part of all individual roles and responsibilities.

SQT were proud to become a member of HECA (Higher Education Colleges Association) in 2014. HECA is the recognised voice of independent higher-level education in Ireland. Both David Williams (Managing Director) and Lorraine Halpin (Director of Quality and Academic Affairs) are members of the HECA Board. Lorraine Halpin is also a member of the HECA Academic Quality Enhancement Forum, a subcommittee of QA professionals within HECA colleges.

### **AQR Reporting Period**

Due to SQT's profile and rolling intake on its programmes, all reporting and analysis is carried out based on a calendar year (January to December). Following discussion with QQI, it was agreed that the reporting period would be January - December 2020, rather than September 2019 to August 2020.

## 1.3 Internal QA Framework

The current revision of SQT's Quality Assurance Framework brings it in line with QQI's Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines. The Framework covers the full scope of the 11 QA areas as set out in QQI's Core Statutory Quality Assurance (QA) Guidelines and is shown below in Figure 1.

The framework comprises five key areas:

1. **Quality Strategy and Planning** which is directly aligned to SQT's Organisational Strategy.
2. **Implementation** of quality assurance through documented quality assurance policies, procedures and work instructions.
3. **Ongoing Monitoring and Self-Evaluation** through a wide variety of relevant methods which encapsulate feedback from all relevant stakeholders.
4. **Continuous Improvement** through systematic methods such as PIN's (potential for improvement notices), programme improvement plans and quality improvement plans.
5. **Publication of Outcomes / Findings** via SQT's website and other relevant channels.

The system incorporates 31 policy and procedural documents and related work instructions, as well as a catalogue of forms, records, specifications and resources. It incorporates equivalent policies and procedures for FET (Further Education and Training) and HET (Higher Education and Training) provision, notwithstanding notable differences in areas such as assessment and programme development. The fundamental overarching QQI QA documents utilised for developing the framework are, as follows:

- Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines (2016), QQI.
- Sector Specific Independent/Private Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines (2016), QQI.

This revised framework has been informed by the following:

- The on-going internal review of SQT's quality system since the last major review of its QA manual in 2013.
- The internal self-evaluation element of QQI's re-engagement process in 2019. This process also involved a benchmarking exercise against SQT's internal QA policies and procedures, and the statutory guidelines noted above.

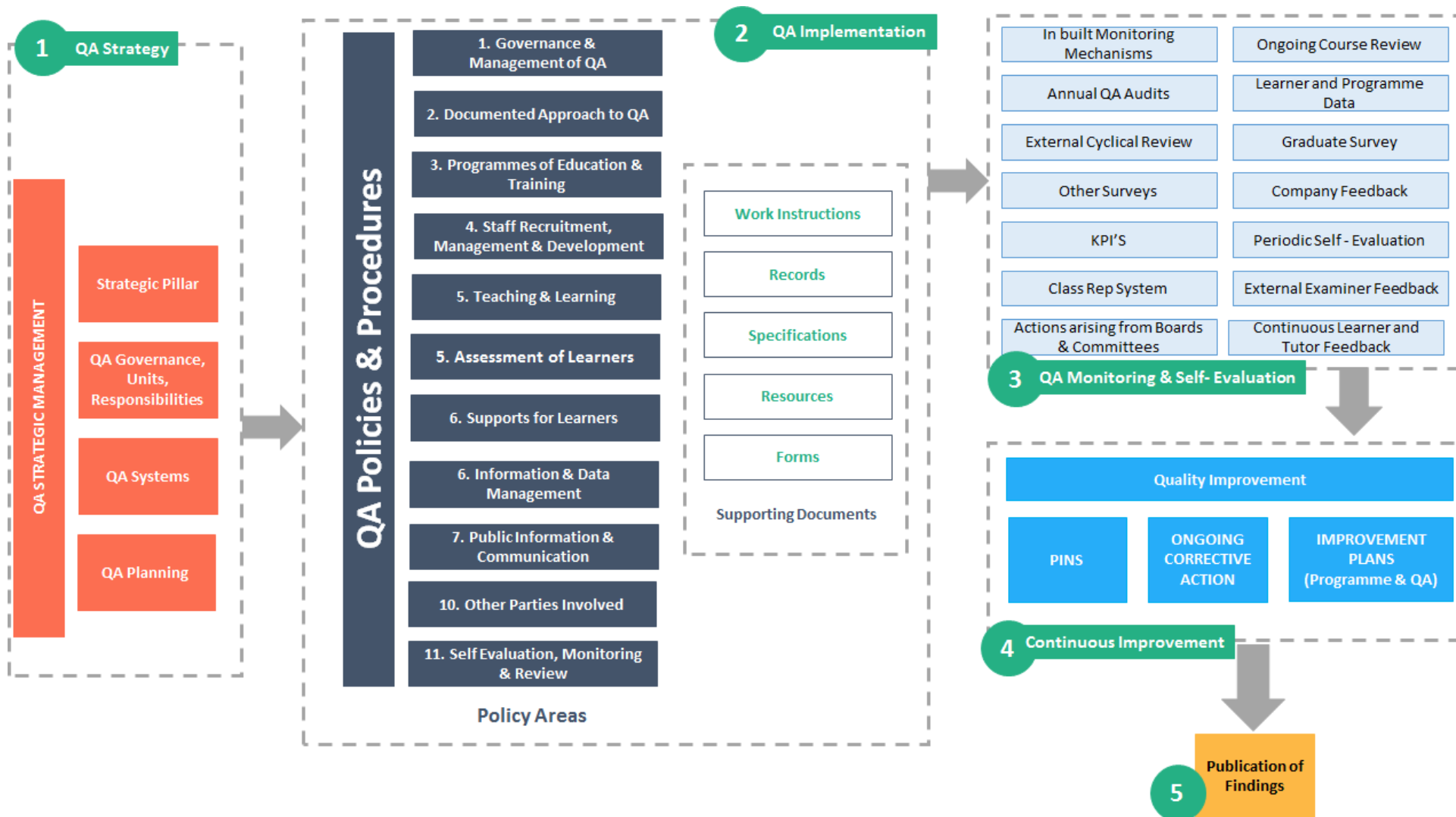


Figure 1: SQT's QA Framework

### 1.3.1 Governance and Management of Quality

SQT's governance structure spans both corporate and academic domains. This is comprehensively set out in QAP1-2 SQT Governance and its operation in practice is described in Section 2.1.3, QA Leadership and Management Structural Developments, below.

The policies and procedures specific to Governance and Management of Quality are, as follows.

QA Area	Code	Document Title	Approving Unit AC = Academic Council BOD = Board of Directors
1. Governance and Management of Quality	QAP1-1	<u>Quality Assurance Policy</u>	AC
	QAP1-2	<u>SQT Governance</u>	BOD
	QAP1-3	<u>Risk Management</u>	BOD
	QAP1-4	<u>Strategic Planning</u>	BOD
2. Documented approach to Quality Assurance	QAP2-1	<u>Ongoing Review and Update of QA Documents</u>	AC

QA updates in this area during the reporting period are documented in Section 2.1.3 Governance and Management.

### 1.3.2 Programme Development and Delivery

This section provides information relating to SQT's policies and procedures for Programme Development and Delivery. This covers the spectrum from programme development to award stage.

#### 1.3.2.1 Programme Development and Approval

As part of the re-engagement process in 2019, the policies and practices for the validation and revalidation of programmes were reviewed and aligned with current QQI guidelines. The process for design and validation of QQI FET programmes is now aligned to the HET process, as documented in QAP3-1: Development and Validation of Programmes. QAP3-2 deals with the process of updating programmes and course material, as appropriate.

As SQT's scope of QQI programme provision is limited to Special Purpose and Minor awards, careful consideration was given to the development of a fit for purpose programme development / revalidation procedure. It is acknowledged that the QQI guidelines focus on the development of major awards and those of longer duration. Nonetheless, SQT is confident that the processes documented in QAP3-1 and QAP3-2 are fit for purpose and fully comply with all relevant QQI obligations and guidelines.

QA Area	Code	Document Title	Approving Unit AC = Academic Council BOD = Board of Directors
3. Programmes of Education and Training	QAP3-1	<u>Development and Validation of Programmes</u>	AC
	QAP3-2	<u>Updating Programmes and Course Material</u>	AC

### 1.3.2.2 Admission, Progression, Recognition & Certification

Given the mature profile of SQT's learner cohort and the specific programme focus, transfer and progression options for HET programmes, in particular, are difficult to formalise on a universal basis. Third level providers deal with exemptions and RPL on a case-by-case basis. QAP3-3 and QAP3-4 address Access, Transfer and Progression and RPL.

QA Area	Code	Document Title	Approving Unit AC = Academic Council BOD = Board of Directors
3. Programmes of Education and Training	QAP3-3	<u>Access, Transfer and Progression</u>	AC
	QAP3-4	<u>Recognition of Prior Learning</u>	AC

### 1.3.2.3 Teaching, Learning and Assessment

SQT's Teaching and Learning Policy (QAP5-1) is fit-for-purpose and considered appropriate for SQT's teaching and learning approach and its unique position in the training and education landscape. Robust QA procedures are in place in QAP6-1 for all aspects of assessment including assessment regulations and the management of the entire assessment process.

QA Area	Code	Document Title	Approving Unit AC = Academic Council BOD = Board of Directors
5. Teaching and Learning	QAP5-1	<u>Teaching and Learning Policy</u>	AC
6. Assessment of Learners	QAP6-1	<u>Assessment of Learners (QQI Programmes)</u>	AC

Minor updates were implemented to QA6-1 during the reporting period. Such updates were specific to policy and procedures relating to academic misconduct.

### 1.3.3 Learner Resources and Support

Section 7 of SQT's QA framework includes a range of policies and procedures, as shown below that document the specific resources and supports it provides to its learners.

QA Area	Code	Document Title	Approving Unit AC = Academic Council BOD = Board of Directors
7. Support for Learners	QAP7-1	<u>Approval and Management of Venues</u>	AC
	QAP7-2	<u>Supports for Reasonable Accommodation</u>	AC
	QAP7-3	<u>Personal Mitigating Circumstances</u>	AC
	QAP7-4	<u>Protection of Enrolled Learners</u>	BOD
	QAP7-5	<u>Learner Complaints</u>	AC
	QAP7-6	<u>Academic Appeals</u>	AC
	QAP7-7	<u>Non-Standard Course Completion (QQI Programmes)</u>	AC

### 1.3.4 Staff Recruitment, Development and Support

Since its establishment in 1989, SQT has employed the services of subject matter experts in specific areas to ensure that adequate expertise is available to develop, deliver and support SQT's course offerings. These are referred to as Training Partners. Relationships with them operate within a legally binding agreement, in an environment of transparency, trust and mutual respect and ensure the adequate protection of learners.

The legal agreement ultimately acknowledges that, whilst the Tutors are employed by the Training Partner, the Training Partner devolves full authority to SQT to:

- Monitor and control Training Partner personnel in connection with the provision of any of the validated programmes; and
- Monitor and control the quality of output and/or teaching by such Training Partner personnel in connection with all or any validated programmes.

This legal framework includes provisions for due diligence on the reputation, legal status, and financial sustainability of any such parties involved in provider provision or related services. Specific policies and procedures (QA Section 4: Staff Recruitment, Management and Development) are integrated within the legal framework. Training Partners are fully integrated within SQT's policies, procedures and governance structures. Therefore, they are subject to and expected to fully adhere to the SQT QA system. This is clearly documented in the roles and responsibilities of all Teaching Staff.

The policies and procedures relating to teaching staff are set out below.

QA Area	Code	Document Title	Approving Unit AC = Academic Council BOD = Board of Directors
4. Staff Recruitment, Management and Development	QAP4-1	<u>Recruitment and Induction of Teaching Staff</u>	AC
	QAP4-2	<u>Peer Review of Teaching Staff</u>	AC
	QAP4-3	<u>Monitoring the Effectiveness of Teaching Staff</u>	AC
	QAP4-4	<u>Professional Development of Teaching Staff</u>	AC

### 1.3.5 Information and Data Management

Data protection policies and procedures are set out within Section 8 of SQT's QA framework and over four documents, as set out below.

QA Area	Code	Document Title	Approving Unit AC = Academic Council BOD = Board of Directors
8. Information and Data Management	QAP8-1	<u>Information Management Policy</u>	BOD
	QAP8-2	<u>Data Protection Policy</u>	BOD
	QAP8-3	<u>Management of Data Breaches</u>	BOD
	QAP8-4	<u>Subject Access Requests</u>	BOD

These policies, procedures and supporting documentation were reviewed and updated to comply with GDPR legislation, which came into effect in May 2018.

All of the systems have been developed and designed to ensure compliance with data protection legislation and regulation. Any sensitive data specific to learners needs such as, disability or health of an individual applicant or learner is retained and shared in accordance with the consent provided and in line with Data Protection legislation.

### 1.3.6 Public Information and Communication

SQT's policy QAP9-1: Public Information and Communication, sets out the processes for the dissemination of all public information and communication, relating to its programmes and its learner support systems. This includes the approval of programme brochures and related marketing material prior to printing. All programme brochures are developed by the Programme Directors, using information from validated programme documentation, which has been approved by QQI. Additionally, QAP10-1 applies to all other education and training relationships established by SQT, in its pursuit of innovation, excellence, accreditation and relevance for its range of programmes and diverse learner organisations.

QA Area	Code	Document Title	Approving Unit AC = Academic Council BOD = Board of Directors
9. Public Information and Communication	QAP9-1	<u>Public Information and Communication</u>	AC
10. Other parties involved in Education and Training	QAP10-1	<u>Other parties involved in Education and Training</u>	AC

### 1.3.7 Self-Evaluation, Monitoring and Periodic Review

Section 11 of SQT's QA Framework focuses on self-evaluation, monitoring and review, as shown below. Specifically, QAP11-1: Ongoing Monitoring of Programmes and QA Framework ensures that appropriate mechanisms are in place to support the ongoing monitoring and continuous enhancement of its programmes, related services, activities and overall QA framework. QAP11-2: Periodic Programme Review and Revalidation Programmes (QPI Programmes) and QAP11-3: External Cyclical Review address SQT's obligations with the relevant regulatory bodies and the processes by which it ensures full compliance with their requirements.

QA Area	Code	Document Title	Approving Unit AC = Academic Council BOD = Board of Directors
11. Self-Evaluation, Monitoring and Review	QAP11-1	<u>Ongoing Monitoring of Programmes and QA Framework</u>	AC
	QAP11-2	<u>Periodic Programme Review and Revalidation of Programmes (QPI Programmes)</u>	AC
	QAP11-3	<u>External Cyclical Review</u>	AC



## 1.4 Details of Arrangements with Third Parties

### 1.4.1 Arrangements with PRSBs, Awarding Bodies, QA Bodies

SQT is committed to establishing and maintaining close links with reputable national and international awarding bodies and other educational institutes in delivering its programmes. In addition to delivering QQI and NEBOSH validated programmes, SQT also offers programmes, which have been approved through our Training Partners. These are set out in Table 1 below. Comprehensive details concerning all programmes are published on the SQT website [www.sqt-training.com](http://www.sqt-training.com).

Awarding Body / Institute	Approved Training Partner
International Register of Certified Auditors (IRCA)	Antaris
Institute of Environmental Management & Assessment (IEMA)	Antaris
Association of Energy Engineers (AEE)	Target Energy
Chartered Institute of Environmental Health (CIEH)	IMS
International Food Protection Training Institute (IFPTI)	IMS

**Table 1: Other Awarding / Certification Bodies**

Type of arrangement	Total Number
PRSBs	0
Awarding bodies (other than QQI)	1
QA bodies	0

<b>1. Type of arrangement</b> (PRSB/awarding body/QA body)	Awarding Body
Name of body:	NEBOSH
Programme titles and links to publications	International Diploma in Health and Safety International General Certificate in H&S Certificate in Fire Safety Certificate in Environmental Management Award in Environmental Awareness at Work
Date of accreditation or last review	February 2020
Date of next review	NA

**Annual Quality Report (SQT Training)**  
**PART B: INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE**  
**ENHANCEMENT & IMPACT**  
**Reporting Period 2020 (Jan – Dec)**

## **PART B: QA SYSTEM**

### **2.1 Quality Implementation and Developments**

This section of the report seeks to:

- Provide an update on quality assurance developments that occurred during the reporting period (2020), and which relate to and are aligned with SQT's strategic objectives
- List the meeting schedule for significant governance bodies
- Document specific changes to governance units and
- Provide an overview of internal monitoring and review processes

#### **2.1.1 Strategic QA Updates**

SQT's Strategic Plan (2018-2022) positions quality assurance as a key strategic pillar. The fundamental goal in this respect is to "strengthen and continue to embed strong corporate governance and a rigorous QA Framework across the entire organisation".

The re-engagement process, which took place in 2019, has provided external validation of SQT's QA system. In the two years preceding the panel visit, the re-engagement exercise represented a significant body of work for the organisation. SQT adopted a rigorous approach to the process, which was undertaken in an enthusiastic manner by all staff involved. It drove a systematic review and critical evaluation of the entire organisation, which resulted in enhancement across all areas. The process ultimately led to the development of a revised QA Framework and associated QA policies and procedures, which together underpin the achievement of a holistic, embedded and fit-for-purpose QA system. Finally, SQT's governance structures, noted below, were redesigned in order to ensure full oversight and compliance on an on-going basis. The re-engagement Panel Report and SQT response is accessible [here](#).

#### **Impact of Covid-19**

SQT's decisive and team-based transformational response to the Covid-19 global pandemic in March 2020 was fully compliant with its QA responsibilities, in terms of delivery and assessment of its accredited programmes. This ensured:

- continuity and completion of existing programmes and
- commencement of new programmes (as SQT programmes are offered on a continuous intake)

The shift to virtual delivery involved making fundamental changes to SQT's business model, programme delivery and learner support operations. The roll-out of this response is comprehensively discussed in the next section of this report (Section 2.2).

As is evidenced in SQT's current Strategic Plan, alternative learning pathways and the use of virtual technology have been part of SQT's long term strategy for many years. Covid-19 has been the catalyst for the implementation of this new approach to programme delivery. Since the pandemic began in March 2020, SQT has progressed

from undertaking contingency measures in response to the Covid-19 restrictions, to embracing and integrating, virtual and blended delivery methods into the re-development of its programme delivery framework, in conjunction with its traditional classroom-based provision. SQT is excited about the potential opportunities this can offer, given the very positive learner and client company feedback received to date. It believes that this will expand and broaden its target market, while continuing to serve a niche market in the training and education sector. The Director of Quality and Academic Affairs has extensive experience in the development and delivery of both eLearning, virtual and blended learning programmes. Together with the Managing Director and through the endorsement of the Academic Council, Board of Directors and Programme Board, they will continue to lead the Virtual Learning Strategy within SQT.

### **Extension of Scope of Provision**

In responding to the Covid-19 pandemic, QQI issued guidance mandating providers to move to online programme delivery, where possible, but urging them to be cognisant of the implications for programme quality and the integrity of the awarding system. A similar approach was adopted by other awarding / certification bodies.

In implementing its transformational virtual delivery project, SQT has had ongoing communication and consultations with QQI since May 2020 with respect to extending its scope of provision on a permanent basis. In doing so, it will be guided by QQI in relation to this process. It will continually engage with its stakeholders in terms of their needs and maintain the integrity of the award system. It will make a formal submission to QQI for approval of its updated QA policies and procedures to incorporate Blended Learning, when directed by QQI. It understands that extension of scope of provision will involve a two-stage process - initial application to QQI for approval of blended modalities followed by a second application for approval of full online delivery when guidelines for full online delivery have been published by QQI. In this regard, SQT has undertaken a gap analysis against QQI's Guidelines for Blended Learning Programmes. Approval of this process is of critical strategic importance to SQT and, based on the evidence to date, sustainable from a stakeholder perspective.

### **Why include Virtual and Blended delivery on a permanent basis?**

In summary, SQT has integrated, virtual and blended delivery methods into the strategic development of its programme delivery framework, in conjunction with its traditional classroom-based provision for the following reasons:

- The **short duration** of SQT's **industry focused programmes** make them ideally suited for virtual delivery.
- During the reporting period, SQT delivered more than 450 virtual programmes to approximately 4,500 learners across its entire suite of programmes. To date, **stakeholder feedback has been overwhelmingly positive** and has confirmed that the quality of SQT programmes has not been compromised by this new mode of provision. Specifically:
  - *93% of learners, who completed course evaluations, rated their course 4 or 5 stars*
  - *99% reported that they will apply the new skills learned and*
  - *98% would recommend their course to a colleague.*

In many respects, the benefits associated with **virtual delivery have led to enhancements across the entire suite of programmes.**

- Extensive engagement with client employers has confirmed that **virtual and blended will be the preferred modalities in the longer term**. This is particularly the case in specific sectors and it is incumbent upon SQT to respond positively to this reality.
- SQT is confident that virtual delivery will continue to **expand and broaden its target market in the longer term**, while continuing to serve a niche market in the training and education sector.
- SQT had made **significant investment in 2020 across all areas of the organisation to ensure the effective roll out of the new delivery model**. This is reflected in the roll-out of a range of TEL applications and the upgrade of its digital learner support network. It will continue to invest in those areas, so that it will be in a position to capitalise further on its Tutor competences and their professional experience and associations.

### **2.1.2 Update on Planned QA Objectives identified in Previous AQR**

This section is not applicable as this is SQT's first AQR.

### **2.1.3 Governance and Management**

SQT's governance structure spans both corporate and academic domains. Its QAP1-2: SQT Governance policy sets out the overall governance framework and the key functions and decision-making processes of all governance units. It describes the roles and responsibilities of individuals within the governance structure and the documentation requirements for both corporate and academic domains. These are described in more detail below and changes and enhancements completed in 2020 and planned for 2021 are documented.

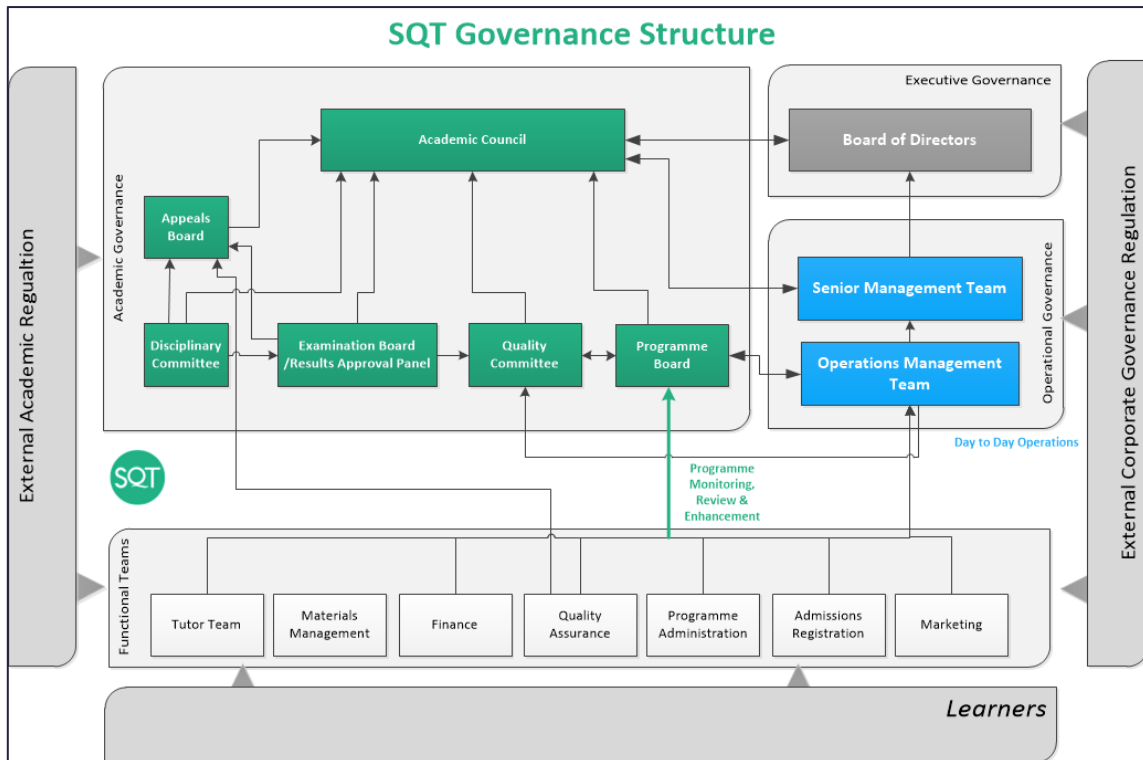
#### **Governance Meeting Schedule**

SQT's Governance structure is managed by a number of different units, consistent with the roles and responsibilities set down in QAP1-2: SQT Governance. These units are managed through a series of prescribed meeting schedules and the reporting of these in line with best practice. The following is a summary of the meetings that took place during this AQR reporting period 1 January '20 to 31 December '20.

Body	Meeting dates (Jan - Dec 2020)
Academic Council	7 <sup>th</sup> April, 28 <sup>th</sup> May, 31 <sup>st</sup> July, 26 <sup>th</sup> November
Quality Committee	11 <sup>th</sup> March, 8 <sup>th</sup> July, 7 <sup>th</sup> October, 18 <sup>th</sup> December
Teaching and Learning Committee	12 <sup>th</sup> December (Inaugural meeting)
Programme Boards	<b>Food Safety:</b> 30 <sup>th</sup> March, 13 <sup>th</sup> August <b>Leadership and Personal Development:</b> 1 <sup>st</sup> April, 16 <sup>th</sup> July <b>Lean Six Sigma:</b> 27 <sup>th</sup> April, 15 <sup>th</sup> May, 9 <sup>th</sup> October <b>Life Sciences:</b> 31 <sup>st</sup> March, 17 <sup>th</sup> July <b>Laboratory:</b> 1 <sup>st</sup> April, 16 <sup>th</sup> July <b>CPI:</b> 1 <sup>st</sup> April, 21 <sup>st</sup> July, <b>Quality, Health &amp; Safety, Energy &amp; Environment:</b> 27 <sup>th</sup> March, 17 <sup>th</sup> July
Examination Boards	<b>FET:</b> 23 <sup>rd</sup> March, 26 <sup>th</sup> June, 6 <sup>th</sup> November <b>HET:</b> 10 <sup>th</sup> January, 8 <sup>th</sup> May, 9 <sup>th</sup> October
Board of Directors	15 <sup>th</sup> June, 6 <sup>th</sup> July, 24 <sup>th</sup> August, 21 <sup>st</sup> October
Senior Management	22 <sup>nd</sup> January, 19 <sup>th</sup> February, 18 <sup>th</sup> March, 22 <sup>nd</sup> April, 20 <sup>th</sup> May, 17 <sup>th</sup> June, 22 <sup>nd</sup> July, 19 <sup>th</sup> August, 23 <sup>rd</sup> September, 14 <sup>th</sup> October, 18 <sup>th</sup> November, 9 <sup>th</sup> December

## QA Leadership and Management Structural Developments

SQT is committed to developing and maintaining a governance structure that is effective, fit for purpose and appropriate to the scale and scope of the organisation. It is controlled by a Board of Directors, whose key function is to manage the overall strategic direction of the organisation, consistent with its corporate and academic responsibilities and objectives. An Academic Council is appointed by the Board of Directors. It has ultimate responsibility for both academic standards and quality assurance. Its structure is shown in Figure 2 below. This structure ensures that the organisations academic activity is managed effectively with clear and appropriate lines of responsibilities and accountability.



**Figure 2: SQT Governance Structure**

The role of the Academic Council is to assist the Board of Directors in planning, coordinating, overseeing and developing the educational work of SQT in order to protect, maintain and develop academic standards. This responsibility is discharged by means of a series of sub committees such as Quality Committee, Examination Board and Programme Board. The Examination Board is supported in its functions by an Appeals Board and Disciplinary Board, as necessary. Each of these governance units has clearly defined terms of reference and each committee reports to, and is answerable to the Academic Council. Therefore, Academic Council has an explicit function in the development and quality assurance of all programmes delivered by SQT. Further, there is a clear delineation of responsibility and decision making between the Board of Directors and the Academic Council. The Board of Directors and the Academic Council is chaired by an independent academic Non-Executive Director. This independent oversight ensures that academic decision-making processes are independent of commercial decisions and, therefore, do not impact on the integrity of the academic process.

The executive management of SQT rests with the Managing Director, who reports to the Board of Directors. The governance structure is diagrammatically represented below in Figure 3. The day-to-day running of the organisation rests with the Operations Management Team under the direction of the Senior Management Team. Quality Assurance and enhancement is the responsibility of the Director of Quality and Academic Affairs. Programme Directors have responsibilities for the management of programme content and delivery, whilst the academic management of programmes is the responsibility of the Programme Board.



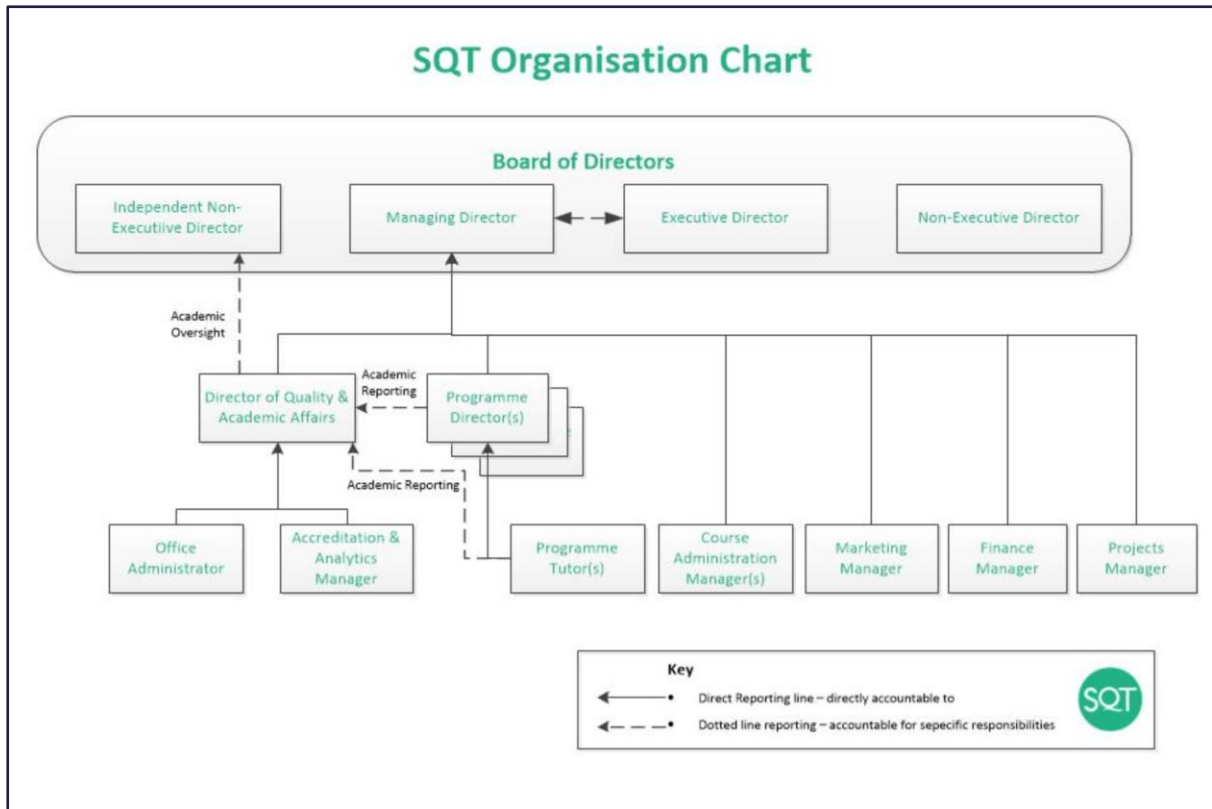


Figure 3: Organisation Chart

### Changes and Enhancements - QA Governance and Management (2020)

- **Expansion of Senior Management Team:** The Senior Management team was extended to incorporate the Marketing Manager and Projects Manager in October 2020.
- **Addition of Teaching & Learning Committee:** A formal Teaching and Learning Committee was appointed following an initial brain storming session in December 2020. The Committee seeks to provide a forum for discussion and peer support amongst Tutors with a key objective of promoting excellence in Teaching and Learning.
- **Increased Externality on Academic Council:** The re-engagement process provided an opportunity to critically evaluate the appropriateness and suitability of SQT's governance structures, including the level of independent oversight. Thus far, SQT have considered one independent member to be appropriate given the scale and scope of SQT's provision. Notwithstanding this, the re-engagement process in 2019 suggested that additional externality would be appropriate, given the scope and growth potential of the QQI validated programmes. The Board of Directors was happy to act on this suggestion and a suitably qualified person was appointed to the Academic Council in 2020. This appointment is also a member of the Teaching and Learning Committee, where he provides important insights and guidance.

## Areas for Review and Enhancement - QA Governance and Management (2021)

- **Meeting Frequency:** The disruption and degree of organisational change and business process re-engineering that was required to respond to Covid-19 resulted in more frequent meetings and online engagement during the reporting period. It is, therefore, appropriate to review the frequency of meetings for some groups in the longer term. This is particularly true for the Senior Management and Operations Management Teams. Subsets of both groups meet on an informal basis, as required. This will be reviewed during 2021 and changes will be implemented, if appropriate.
- **Impact on Roles and Responsibilities:** The virtual delivery project has had a direct impact on individual roles and responsibilities across the organisation. This has been considered as part of the gap analysis for blended and virtual learning provision. As a result, roles and responsibilities will be updated in 2021 as part of the planned QA updates and scope of provision extension process.

### 2.1.4 Internal Monitoring and Review

The Quality Committee developed a QA Audit Schedule in December 2019, which covered the period January 2020 - December 2021. This two-year schedule ensures that a thematic analysis of each of the eleven areas of the QA Framework is reviewed at least once during that period, as set out in QAP2-1: Ongoing Review and Update of QA Documents. It is subject to amendment, as new issues arise and unforeseen problems are identified. In undertaking the audit process, assigned staff with responsibility for specific areas are allocated to review the current policy, procedures, work instructions and guidelines relating to that area in the context of the outcomes of monitoring activities, feedback received from various stakeholders, issues that have arisen, or changes in external factors such as new policies and procedures in place by awarding bodies. The outcome of these reviews is presented to the Quality Committee and becomes the subject of an action in the ongoing Quality Improvement Plan (QIP).

#### Impact of Covid-19 on Internal Monitoring and QA Review

The QA Audit Schedule was updated by the Quality Committee in July 2020 when it became clear that an entire QA review and update would be required to facilitate extension of scope of provision to facilitate blended and virtual learning in line with SQT's longer term strategy and guidance from QQI.

As has been referenced above, an initial gap analysis has been undertaken against QQI's Guidelines for Blended Learning and will form the basis of SQT's plans to revise its current QA policies and procedures during Q1 and Q2 of 2021.

Additionally, updates to internal processes and workflows have led to the review and update of specific work instructions. Work on this area will continue in 2021, as further enhancements and process efficiencies are implemented, from learnings gained during the virtual delivery process, throughout the organisation.

## 2.2 IQA System – Enhancement and Impacts

This section of the report has been divided into two parts as follows:

- The first part (2.2.1) presents the developments and enhancements made as a direct result of the QQI re-engagement process (mandatory changes and specific advice). The Expert Panel site visit took place in May 2019 and the outcome was formally approved by QQI's PAEC in September 2019.
- The second part (2.2.2 to 2.2.5) seeks to demonstrate how SQT's internal QA framework operates and aligns with the core policies and procedures set out in Part A of this report. It focuses primarily on staff development and the key aspects of programme delivery, learner support, self-evaluation, monitoring and review arising from SQT's response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Worth noting are the tutor reflections in rolling out the virtual delivery model and what worked well in practice. This section, also, documents the changes and enhancements completed in 2020 and those planned for 2021.

### 2.2.1 Impact and Enhancements resulting from Re-engagement

The re-engagement process provided external validation of the organisations QA Framework, which is evidenced by the six commendations received. In the two years preceding the panel site visit, the process represented a significant body of work for the organisation and the rigorous approach adopted involved all staff in a team exercise led by the Director of Quality and Academic Affairs, overseen by the Academic Council. The re-engagement process drove a systematic review and critical evaluation of the entire organisation, which has resulted in enhancement across all areas and mechanisms for continuous improvements. The process has resulted in the development of a customised, fully integrated and QQI approved QA Framework and associated policies and procedures. Together these underpin the achievement of a holistic, embedded and fit-for-purpose QA system.

The re-engagement expert panel made 7 commendations, as follows:

1. The panel commends the **openness and collegiate approach of the SQT team** in their dealings with the panel throughout the re-engagement process.
2. The panel commends the **dedication and commitment of the team** at SQT to the mission and vision of the organisation.
3. The panel commends the **high level of commitment, understanding and ownership among all staff of SQT's QA documentation and processes**.
4. The panel commends the **appropriateness of the QA** to the specific context and mode of operation of SQT. It was clear to the panel that the system is custom-designed to specifically suit SQT programmes, staff and learners.
5. The panel commends the **systematic, structured approach to QA** as presented by the Director of Quality and Academic Affairs.
6. The panel commends the **accessible and clear structure of the QA documentation**.
7. In addition, the panel commended SQT for presenting a **comprehensive and clear re-engagement application and draft set of QA policies and procedures**.

The Panel proposed 5 mandatory changes, which were all considered to be discrete and readily amendable. SQT welcomed these proposed changes and considered each to be capable of further enhancing its suite of policies and procedures. Consequently, all changes were discussed internally and implemented shortly after

the panel site visit. They were approved by SQT's Academic Council and Board of Directors, on the 7<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> June `19, respectively. The panel also proposed one item as specific advice. This and the 5 mandatory changes together with SQT's action are set out in Table 2 below.

Proposed Mandatory Change / Specific Advice	Action Taken by SQT
<p><b>Mandatory Change 1:</b> The current complaints procedure needs to be broadened to include and account for other relationships within the organisation, for example, staff complaints about other staff, staff complaints about students, or company complaints about the provider.</p>	<p>The Complaints Policy (QAP7-5) was broadened to account for complaints made by other external parties (in addition to learners) and was renamed from 'Learner Complaints' to 'Complaints'.</p>
<p><b>Mandatory Change 2:</b> The policy pertaining to proposed peer review of teaching practice should be reviewed in light of human resources and industrial relations considerations, as well as oversight of procedure. The policy should account for potential outcomes and actions of the process.</p>	<p>The Peer Review of Teaching policy (QAP4-2) was amended to include a 'responsibility' section which shows clear oversight of the process. An Outcomes of the Process (Section 6) was also added to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- ensure appropriate record keeping</li> <li>- ensure that specific developmental requirements are converted into appropriate staff developmental plans as per QAP4-4 Professional Development of Teaching Staff</li> </ul>
<p><b>Mandatory Change 3:</b> The delegation of responsibilities beyond the Director of QA &amp; Academic Affairs and the Accreditation &amp; Systems Manager should be clarified within the QA Manual. This is noted within role descriptions, but should also appear in the QA Manual.</p>	<p>Minor updates were made to the following policies to ensure that an individual is responsible for specific tasks / actions rather than a specific Board or Committee.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- QAP1-1: Quality Assurance Policy</li> <li>- QAP1-3: Risk Management</li> <li>- QAP1-4: Strategic Planning</li> <li>- QAP4-1: Recruitment and Induction of Teaching Staff</li> <li>- QAP7-1: Approval and Management of Venues</li> </ul>
<p><b>Mandatory Change 4:</b> With regard to learners who cannot complete their current programme of study, the options for learners should be clarified.</p>	<p>A new 'Non-Standard Programme Completion' policy has been developed QAP7-7 to clarify the options for learners who cannot complete their current programme of study.</p>
<p><b>Mandatory Change 5:</b> A process for closing the feedback loop to employers, learners and other stakeholders should be formalized. This could be done effectively within the form of an annual report, as discussed during the site visit.</p>	<p>Annual Programme Improvement Reports have been introduced and added to Stage 5 of the QA Framework within QAP1-1 Quality Assurance Policy.</p>

<p><b>Specific Advice:</b> The provider should consider simplifying the description of students with disability with regard to student supports. In relation to this item of specific advice, SQT could consider consulting with HE providers with experience in this regard to approach best practice, as opposed to minimum legislative requirements.</p>	<p>The definition /description of disability has been simplified in QAP7-2 Support for Reasonable Accommodation. The original definition had been adapted from the legislation.</p> <p>In addition, SQT is committed to consulting with a HE provider in order to develop suitable approaches to best practice in this regard. This consultation has been delayed due to the change in priorities resulting from Covid-19 but will be considered in the context of the QA updates planned for 2021.</p>
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**Table 2: Mandatory Changes and Specific Advice Resulting from SQT's Re-engagement Process (2019)**

## 2.2.2 Staff Development and Upskilling for Virtual Delivery

Specific policies and procedures are in place for the recruitment, management and development of teaching staff namely:

- QAP4-1: Recruitment and Induction of Teaching Staff
- QAP4-2: Peer Review of Teaching Staff
- QAP4-3: Monitoring the Effectiveness of Teaching Staff
- QAP4-4: Professional Development of Teaching Staff

The shift from face-to-face training to virtual delivery and the adoption of new technologies required the implementation of a rapid upskilling and support strategy. This was required for all staff involved in the delivery of programmes (Programme Directors and Tutors), as well as for administration staff whose roles had to change in order to support the new mode of virtual delivery. Training Partners and Tutors have highly commended the technical and administrative supports they have received in this new learning environment. In undertaking this transformational project, there has been a huge sense of collaboration and peer support across the various Training Partners. This has been critically important to the success of SQT's shift to virtual delivery and the sustainability of its new business model. In this regard, the key actions for the specific groups are set out in Table 3 below. All of these initiatives and actions took into account the Government directed health and safety guidance and were fully compliant with them.

<b>Training Partners</b>
The Senior Management team held a series of group meetings with all Training Partners to formulate a Covid-19 Contingency Plan.
Individual meetings were held with each Training Partner to discuss and agree a "Virtual Delivery Plan" and a "Tutor Support Plan" for all Training Partners. This included a review of each programme to determine its suitability for virtual delivery.
<b>Programme Delivery Staff</b>
Customised training was provided for programme delivery staff, which provided instruction in the design and delivery of virtual programmes (Skillnet programme delivered by Flexlabs).
One-to-one support provided for programme delivery staff in the design and delivery of their virtual programmes.
A number of support resources were developed for Learners and Tutors.
Addition of a "Virtual Delivery" section including a "Tutor Discussion Forum" within the Tutor Portal on Moodle.
Mock training sessions were available for all Tutors to facilitate sharing of feedback and ideas.
"Tutor Meet ups" were facilitated via Zoom.
Ongoing Tutor Training has been provided to offer instruction and guidance on the use of various TEL tools.
The Teaching and Learning Committee was formed in December 2020.
<b>Administration and Support Staff</b>
Relevant internal work instructions and supports were put in place for the upskilling and support of all administration staff.
Training and individual supports were developed to provide instruction and guidance on the various video conferencing platforms which are now supported by Course Administration Managers.

**Table 3: Upskilling and Support Strategy for Staff (Response to Covid-19)**

## Areas for Review and Enhancement - Staff Development and Upskilling (2021)

SQT's roll out of virtual delivery has identified the following initiatives for 2021.

- **Teaching and Learning Committee** - The formation of the Teaching and Learning (T&L) Committee in December 2020 has created an excellent platform for collegial support amongst Tutors and an opportunity for critical peer discussion. One of the first objectives and key projects being carried out by this group is a review of the Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL) tools and applications with a view to developing a roadmap of phased enhancements in 2021.
- **Digital Champions** - The concept of 'Digital Champions' or Tutors with TEL expertise in different tools is an initiative being promoted by the Teaching and Learning Committee. The objective is to share experience and feedback on the use of different tools and technologies across the Tutor Teams.
- **Further Integration of Tutor Portal** - The Tutor Portal which currently resides on Moodle is being reviewed. It has been suggested that MS Teams may be a more accessible and functional platform for this resource in some situations. This will be explored further.
- **Peer Review and Tutor Induction Process** - The availability of video conferencing platforms offers further opportunities for both Tutor induction and peer review of teaching activities. Developments in these areas will be considered as part of the planned QA updates in 2021.

### 2.2.3 Adaptations to Teaching, Learning & Assessment for Virtual Delivery

In developing its Covid-19 Contingency Plan, the Senior Management Team was mindful of the unpredictable and volatile public health situation from March 2020 onwards. The plan was informed by public health guidance<sup>1</sup>, dialogue across HECA colleges, direction from awarding bodies and ongoing communication with client companies. All actions were undertaken and subject to approval by the relevant governance units within SQT. Given the profile of SQT learners and the large element of in-company training provided, it was acknowledged that many client organisations would not approve of their staff attending classroom-based delivery in the immediate future. Consequently, SQT took a strategic decision to adapt a virtual delivery model, which was rolled out on a phased basis. During 2020, a small number of programmes, which could not be delivered virtually were delivered on the client's site. These programmes were generally one day in duration.

#### SQT's Approach - Phased Rollout of Virtual Delivery Model

In preparing to deliver virtual programmes, the learning outcomes and academic standards were foremost in shaping the programme structure and ensuring that its delivery was consistent with the high standards expected in the face-to-face classroom. Each Training Partner, in conjunction with their Tutor Team, initially carried out a review of individual programmes to determine its suitability for virtual delivery. Programmes were ranked on a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being the easiest to adapt for virtual delivery and 5 being the most difficult. Programmes were then offered on a phased basis with those ranked 1 being offered first and those ranked 5 being rolled out last. The phased roll-out of all programmes took approximately nine months. Alternative delivery and assessment strategies for individual

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<sup>1</sup> Key documents include the Guidance for Further and Higher Education for returning to on-site activity in 2020: Roadmap and COVID-19 Adaptation Framework Roadmap and the HSA Return to Work Protocols



programmes were reviewed by the relevant Programme Board, External Examiners (for QQI programmes) and Senior Management Team, in advance of Academic Council approval on the 7<sup>th</sup> April 2020.

Having trialled and researched many video conferencing platforms, Zoom was selected as the preferred delivery platform. Zoom is a web-based video conferencing tool with a local, desktop client and a mobile app that allows users to meet online, with or without video. Where a company does not allow the use of Zoom, SQT have successfully utilised alternative platforms such as MS Teams and WebEx. Best practice guidelines and etiquette rules are implemented to ensure that all virtual classroom activity is as effective and safe, as possible. Moodle was effectively incorporated into the delivery of additional programmes where appropriate. Other suitable technologies such as Kahoot, Mentimeter and Padlet were also utilised.

The integration of these technologies affords the opportunity to implement a diverse range of ways to deliver content and communicate with and assess learners. This is consistent with SQT's Teaching and Learning Strategy of operating a constantly evolving process of reviewing and reflecting on one's teaching practice, in order to facilitate the achievement of the learning outcomes and meet the specific needs of its learners and client companies. [Case Study 1: Retaining a Learner-Centric Focus in the Transition to Virtual Training Delivery: A Tutor's Perspective](#) seeks to provide an important in this regard.

## **Reflections on the Shift to the Teaching and Learning Virtual Delivery Process- Tutor Perspective**

As regards teaching and learning, Tutors quickly recognised and identified the key differences in delivering face-to-face and virtual programmes. As a result, they engaged collectively and with their professional peers to develop effective strategies that ensured that best practice was implemented. These strategies and advice were shared across all Training Partners and are summarized, as follows.

- Tutors noted that they had to **work harder to verify learner engagement** in the virtual environment. Zoom has proven to be a very effective platform. However, the Tutor must be very active and engaging and constantly eliciting learners to contribute comments or feedback, as opposed to waiting for them to come in voluntarily. In addressing this issue, several strategies were implemented by Tutors such as:
  - Using a printed list of attendees to rotate questions between learners and elicit feedback during the class. This helps to verify understanding and confirm clarity.
  - Where possible, Tutors request that cameras remain turned on to ensure that a classroom environment is replicated in so far as is practicable. This is noted in the pre-course correspondence and again at the Tech Check.
  - Use of breakout rooms and Zoom polls have been critically important to assist with learner interaction and engagement and to provide feedback to the Tutor for areas which require further attention.
  - Screen sharing by learners and whiteboard functionality has been extremely effective for integrating feedback from breakout rooms and exercises.
- **Pre-course planning and preparation** was deemed key from a teaching perspective and the use of detailed teaching plans with timings has proven very effective.
- **Engagement with pre-course material** was strongly encouraged in advance of course commencement and was a positive enhancement to virtual programmes. The objective was to give learners an opportunity to digest content in a structured and self-paced

manner and, thereby, give them greater time and opportunity to critically engage during the virtual training sessions.

- For some of the longer courses, it was found that there were limited opportunities **for learners to learn from each other** during the course. Whilst it still happening and can be facilitated, however it is not as prevalent as it would be in a classroom setting.
- **Teaching and Learning was found to be much more intense** in the virtual environment. Consequently, more frequent, shorter breaks have been built into the teaching schedule, which benefits both the Tutor and the learner.
- **Prioritising content that should be covered** by the Tutor during the virtual sessions vs exercises that could be used as pre and post course activities. Delivering in a virtual classroom, with blocks of two hours maximum, meant that topics also needed to be grouped into blocks so that learners were fully engaged.
- **Tutors need to be very comfortable with the technology** in advance of course delivery and, therefore, practice sessions were mandatory prior to the commencement of course delivery.
- **More Planning was required for Virtual Delivery** - Tutors reported the need for increased preparation and lesson planning (with detailed timings, for example).

### **What Worked Well from a Teaching and Learning Perspective**

Given the substantive nature of the shift to virtual delivery and the imperative to ensure compliance with internal and external QA requirements and award standards, it is important to recap the areas that worked well in practice. SQT are confident that the learning process has not been negatively impacted. This has been verified by group feedback and learner interaction, individual learner feedback via survey monkey, client / industry feedback, assessment results and progression through assessment. Stakeholder feedback has been overwhelmingly positive and has confirmed that the quality of SQT programmes has not been compromised by this new mode of provision, as evidenced in 2.1.1 above. Table 4 below presents a summary of 'What worked well' from a Teaching & Learning perspective. This is followed by areas for ongoing review and enhancement in 2021.

<b>Virtual Classrooms</b>
The technology has worked extremely well.
Learners being on time for each session.
For some courses, pre-reading was very effective and completed by the majority of learners.
Breakout groups worked really well and the learners reacted very positively to them (most Tutors advised limiting these to 3 or 4 per session).
Sharing of documents within the online platform.
Shorter and more frequent virtual sessions allowed learners to reflect between sessions and ask questions in the next session.
<b>Client Engagement</b>
Adoption by client companies, given a dividend in terms of learner availability, flexibility and safe environment.
<b>Course Preparation and Peer Support</b>
Cross functional learning, collaboration and collegiality amongst all Tutors and the management team. This has been a key factor in the success of SQT's virtual programmes.
Preparation for courses was much more planned and detailed (with timings for each session, for example)
<b>Learner Monitoring and Support</b>
SQT support, pre course tech check and meeting the learners prior to the training.
Interaction between Tutor and learner.
More interactions on Moodle.
Survey Monkey course evaluation forms providing real-time feedback and allowing immediate action, if required,
Zoom Polls for immediate feedback and action, as appropriate.

**Table 4: What Worked Well from a Teaching and Learning Perspective**

### **Impact on Assessment arising from the Virtual Delivery Model**

As part of the review of each programme, the Tutor Teams reviewed their individual programmes to determine an alternative approach to assessment, having considered the changed delivery mode. Proposals were submitted to the Director of Quality and Academic Affairs and discussed with the External Examiner in March 2020. These arrangements were subsequently endorsed by the Academic Council and documented in a Contingency Plan, which was submitted to QQI in April and updated in August 2020. In order to protect the academic standards and integrity of the programmes and the appropriate QQI awards, approval was subject to the following requirements:

- All assessments sought to assess the attainment of the learning outcomes.
- All assessment changes were subject to External Examiner approval.
- New learner cohorts were advised of the changes in delivery and assessment.
- Learners with assessments in progress were not to be disadvantaged by the ongoing pandemic.
- Extensions to assessment deadlines would be reviewed and awarded taking the current pandemic crisis and individual circumstances into account.
- In addition to scheduled virtual delivery, individual support and mentoring was to be provided, as necessary.

In summary, the following adaptations were implemented.

- Replacement of in class examinations with appropriate alternatives such as Moodle quizzes and the redistribution of assessment weighting.
- All assessments are now submitted via Moodle. Prior to March 2020, some FET programmes were submitted as hard copy assessments.

It is important to note that none of SQT's QQI validated programmes involve terminal examinations. Further, both External Examiners (FET and HET) have commended and fully support the revised course assessment strategies and methodologies. In some cases, they have proposed the longer-term replacement of in class examinations. These are currently being considered by the relevant Programme Board and will be included in the revised QA policies and procedures that will underpin the scope of provision extension proposal in due course.

### **Areas for Review and Enhancement - Teaching, Learning and Assessment (2021)**

- **External Examiner Reports:** Given the development of the virtual learning mode of delivery and its potential integration into a blended learning format post Covid-19, it would be useful to add additional features to the current External Examiner Report template. This is suggested in order to facilitate further expert and independent comment on the use of the various technology-enhanced learning tools and the appropriate balance between classroom and virtual delivery in a post Covid -19 environment.
- **Multiple Platforms:** As has been mentioned above, where a company does not allow the use of Zoom, SQT have successfully carried out the programme delivery using other platforms such as MS Teams or WebEX, for example. This will be reviewed as part of the Technology Enhanced Learning Roadmap in 2021.
- **Moodle:** SQT will continue to exploit the potential of Moodle and further develop its application as the core portal for learner material, support and communication.

## 2.2.4 Adaptations to Supports & Resources for Learners arising from Covid-19.

As part of its Teaching and Learning Strategy, SQT provides a range of support mechanisms to its learners, as set out in a QA policy framework. These are categorised, as follows. In addition, comprehensive documentation as described below, is also provided.

- **Email / Telephone / Video Conferencing Support:** Tutors provide individualised learner support such as email and/or telephone communication throughout the duration of the programme.
- **On-going Project Mentoring and Feedback:** On specific courses SQT Tutors provide on-going mentoring and project feedback for the duration of their research assignments (case studies and projects). Where possible, all learner feedback is captured via the Moodle system.
- **Workplace Support:** SQT provides support, where requested, in advancing the learner's academic and professional development.

Learner supports which were in place for traditional face-to-face structures were reviewed and adapted in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Supports which were previously carried out in a face-to-face manner are now undertaken online. This is achieved primarily using Zoom, MS Teams or Moodle.

In a recent survey of employers which was undertaken as part of the review and revalidation of SQT's suite of Lean Six Sigma programmes, the question asked, 'Were you happy with the support provided by Tutors?', respondents rated as excellent at 4.8/5 stars (96%).

### Technical Supports Implemented for Virtual Programmes



The following technical supports were put in place for all virtual programmes:

- **1 week prior to the course:** SQT schedules a 'Tech Check' with all learners approximately 1 week in advance of course commencement. This ensures that any potential IT issues are dealt with and resolved in advance of the course.
- **Morning of the Session:** A member of SQT support staff logs into the Zoom course on the morning of course commencement to ensure that all learners successfully login and all equipment is working correctly.
- **Duration of the Session:** Dedicated IT support staff are also available for the duration of the virtual training session to deal with any Zoom issues. In addition, a dedicated Moodle Support email address is used for queries.
- **Documentation:** A Tutor and Learner Zoom Guide has been developed and is updated on a regular basis.

Extensive learner feedback across SQT's entire suite of programmes has indicated that the technical supports in place for learners are effective. The Tech Checks in advance of course commencement has been rated at 91% and the use of technology to aid learning has been rated as 90%. Because learners are in employment and typically using various systems on a daily basis, more often than not they are very comfortable with accessing and using the required technology.

## Programme Documentation embracing SQT`s Green Initiative

Over the last two years, SQT have transformed and redesigned their programme documentation. This has not only improved the presentation of the documentation, it has also significantly improved its carbon footprint. The enhancements and significance of the transformation is presented below. It has received very positive feedback from learners, with the quality of course materials during the period under review been rated at 92%.

	BEFORE (ANNUAL USAGE)	AFTER (ANNUAL USAGE)
Folders	3.5 tonnes of mixed plastic/cardboard/metal	Eliminated
Plastic tabs	900 kg	Eliminated
Cardboard Packaging	365kg	182kg
Bubble Wrap	6 tennis courts	Eliminated. Where needed this is replaced with recyclable paper
Plastic Tape	3km	Replaced with paper tape
		

## Areas for Review and Enhancement - Learner Supports and Resources (2021)

Key enhancements in this area are linked to supports for teaching and learning and have been set out in Section 2.2.3 above. In addition, specific enhancements will be implemented at a programme level as set out within individual programme improvement plans.

## 2.2.5 Self-Evaluation, Ongoing Monitoring and Review Activities

Self-evaluation, ongoing monitoring and review processes are a fundamental component of SQT's QA framework and it has specific policies to deal with each aspect, as shown below. This section also summarises the actions undertaken in 2020 and the areas for review and enhancements in 2021.

### Self-Evaluation

During the period under review, SQT commenced its scheduled programme review and revalidation process for its suite of Lean Six Sigma programmes, namely:

- **Certificate in Process Engineering (SPA)** Lean Six Sigma Green Belt, NFQ Level 6, 10 ECTS Credits
- **Certificate in Process Engineering (SPA)** Lean Six Sigma Green Belt, NFQ Level 7, 15 ECTS Credits
- **Diploma in Process Engineering (SPA)** Lean Six Sigma Black Belt, NFQ Level 8, 60 ECTS Credits

This was conducted in accordance with SQT's policy QAP11-2: Periodic Programme Review and Revalidation of Programmes (QQI). The process was managed and led by the Director of Quality and Academic Affairs in close collaboration with the Programme Team, including input and support from the Lean Six Sigma Course Administration Manager and the Accreditation and Analytics Manager. The process involved engagement and consultation with a broad range of stakeholders and was an excellent opportunity to review the impact and effectiveness of the new virtual modes of delivery.

### NEBOSH External Monitoring - Award for Gold Status Learning Partner

As has been referenced in Section 1.4, SQT is a validated Learning Partner for NEBOSH, the National Examination Board in Occupational Safety and Health. NEBOSH is a UK-based examination board offering qualifications and courses in health, safety, environment and well-being management. It is the world's leading accreditation body for the health and safety industry. SQT offers a range of NEBOSH courses which are delivered through our Training Partner Antaris.

Following a self-evaluation and external monitoring exercise facilitated by NEBOSH, SQT were awarded the prestigious 'Gold' Learning Partner Status in 2020.

Achieving Learning Partner Gold Status indicates that SQT has exceeded expectations in across six principles areas as follows:

1. Learner expectations
2. Learning environment
3. Quality of course materials
4. Qualified tutors
5. Learner support
6. Delivery evaluation

## Ongoing Monitoring

The effectiveness of all SQT programmes (virtual or classroom based) is monitored through a variety of mechanisms on an ongoing basis, such as:

- Learner Programme Evaluation Forms
- Tutor Programme Evaluation Forms
- Programme Board Meetings
- Informal Correspondence with Learners and Tutors
- Examination Board Meetings
- External Examiner Reports
- Company Programme Organiser Feedback (In-house programmes)
- Client / Employer Meetings
- Learner Representative Feedback

All mechanisms are integrated in SQT's policy: QAP11-1 Ongoing Monitoring of Programmes and QA Framework and are reviewed on a regular basis. This is illustrated in Figure 4 below.

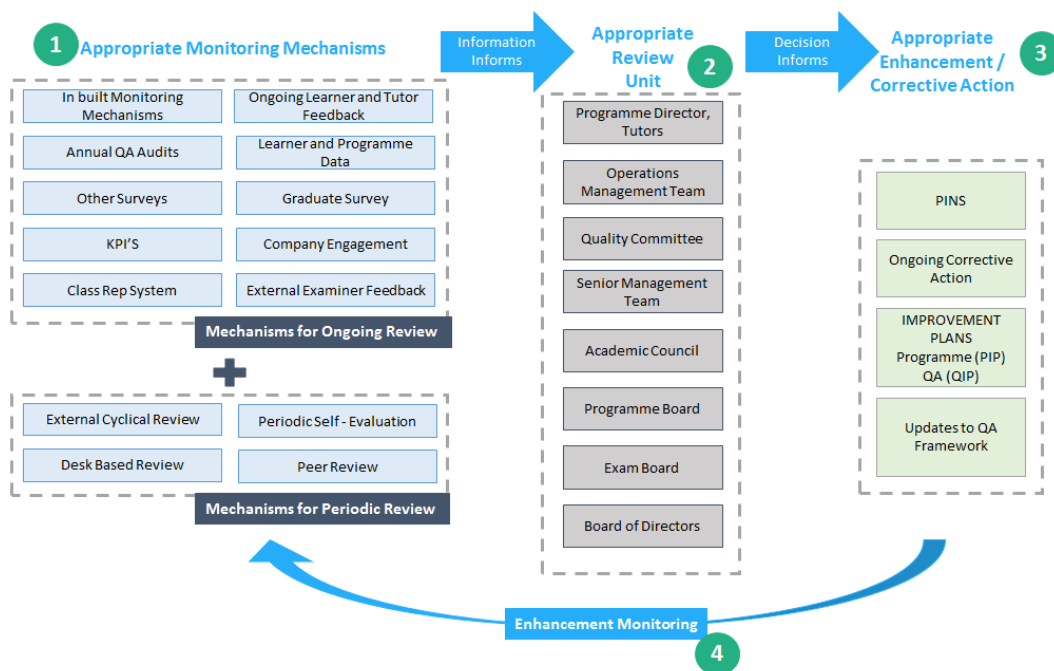


Figure 4: Ongoing Monitoring, Periodic Review and Continuous Improvement Cycle

## Enhancements to Monitoring Implemented in 2020

- **Electronic Learner and Tutor Feedback forms:** Since the introduction of virtual delivery, handwritten feedback forms have been replaced by Survey Monkey Evaluation forms. Responses are integrated into SQTs Management Information System (MIS) and can be accessed by Tutors and administration staff. This is a significant quality enhancement as it allows for immediate feedback, timely analysis and reporting from both a qualitative and quantitative data perspective. In addition, a dashboard developed using PowerBI provides timely information and analysis of learner feedback which is reviewed by relevant staff on a daily basis. This is documented in [Case Study 2: Digital Transformation - Implementation of new Management Information System \(MIS\)](#) - Section 2.5.
- **Utilise the system to generate timely monitoring KPI's:** The new MIS system has led to further automation of important oversight reports and KPI's, which are reviewed by



relevant governance units. Further work is required in 2021 to exploit the full potential of the system.

- The use of Zoom and MS Teams technology has led to **increased engagement with clients** as well as making **meetings for SQT's governance units more accessible**.

#### **Areas for Review and Enhancement - Self Evaluation and Ongoing Monitoring (2021)**

- Key enhancements in this area have been referenced above and relate to the ongoing **integration and automation of relevant KPI's, QA indicators and relevant reports** to ensure timely and accurate information is available to designated personnel and governance units.
- SQT will also action relevant **enhancements and changes arising from the scheduled review and revalidation exercise** of its suite of lean six sigma programmes in March 2021.

## 2.3 Initiatives within the Institution related to Academic Integrity

In undertaking its virtual delivery project in response to Covid-19, SQT was particularly mindful of ensuring the academic integrity of its programmes. In doing so, it strictly followed the approval processes inherent in its QA framework and the specific policies related to teaching, learning, assessment and other areas, where relevant. It ensured that:

- The teaching and learning delivery process addressed the learning outcomes for each specific programme.
- The attainment of the learning outcomes was fully assessed.
- All assessment changes were subject to External Examiner approval.
- All learners were fully informed of the changes, in terms of delivery and assessment.
- The learners with assessments in progress were not to be disadvantaged by the ongoing pandemic.
- Any extensions to assessment deadlines would be reviewed in the light of the current pandemic crisis and individual circumstances.
- All learners were fully informed of the various communication channels available to them and, in particular, on the mechanisms for feedback and ongoing support.
- In addition to scheduled virtual delivery, individual support and mentoring sought would be provided, as necessary.

This project necessitated a significant investment in SQT's MIS system and the integration of a range of technology enabled learning applications into the teaching, learning and assessment processes. These initiatives were incorporated into the contingency plan submitted to QQI in March '20 and updated in August '20. They were backed up by detailed operating procedures and work instructions. Mindful of the fact that none of SQT's validated programmes involve terminal examinations, this resulted in the:

- Replacement of in class examinations with appropriate alternatives such as Moodle MCQ's.
- Submission of all assessments via Moodle.
- Redistribution of assessment weighting to better reflect the individual learner effort and the competencies achieved.
- Continued emphasis on the use of the Tutor cross-moderation marking process, as a means of ensuring the fairness and integrity of the assessment results.
- Development of policies and procedures for the remote invigilation of examinations. This has been implemented successfully for other non-QQI awarding / certification bodies.

## 2.4 QA Improvement and Enhancement Plans for Upcoming Reporting Period

### 2.4.1 QA and QE supporting the Achievement of Strategic Objectives (2021)

No.	Relevant objectives	Planned actions and indicators
1	Extended Scope of Provision to implement blended and online modalities for the delivery of SQT's suite of QQI programmes in the longer term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Agree timelines with QQI</li> <li>- Finalise gap analysis against QQI QA Guidelines</li> <li>- Update relevant policies and procedures</li> <li>- Submit revised QA to QQI for approval</li> <li>- Publication of revised QA (subject to approval)</li> </ul>
2	Information Management / Dashboards etc (ADM)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Key performance and QA metrics to be driven by the system (Ref Case Study 2: Digital Transformation - Implementation of new Management Information System (MIS)).</li> <li>- Upskill administration staff in use of data analytics and reporting</li> </ul>
3	Technology Enhanced Learning Roadmap	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Formalise and Implement Technology Enhanced Learning Roadmap</li> <li>- Promote activities of the Teaching and Learning Committee across the entire Teaching staff</li> <li>- Continue to monitor CPD requirements for all staff and provide appropriate training and supports, as required</li> <li>- Review and upgrade of the current Tutor Portal</li> </ul>
4	Exploit the full potential of the ADM MIS system to drive process efficiency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Utilise ICT systems to automate and streamline business processes</li> <li>- Review and update of work instructions to ensure system processes are as efficient as possible</li> </ul>
5	Periodic Internal Review of SQT's QQI FET Programmes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Carry out a periodic internal review of SQT's suite of QQI accredited FET programmes</li> </ul>

## 2.4.2 Reviews planned for Upcoming Reporting Periods

### 2.4.2.1 Reviews planned for Next Reporting Period

Unit to be reviewed	Date of planned review	Date of last review
Programme review and revalidation of SQT's suite of Lean Six Sigma Programme: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Certificate in Process Engineering (SPA)</b> Lean Six Sigma Green Belt, NFQ Level 6, 10 ECTS Credits</li> <li>- <b>Certificate in Process Engineering (SPA)</b> Lean Six Sigma Green Belt, NFQ Level 7, 15 ECTS Credits</li> <li>- <b>Diploma in Process Engineering (SPA)</b> Lean Six Sigma Black Belt NFQ Level 8, 60 ECTS Credits</li> </ul>	25 <sup>th</sup> March 2021 (Virtual Site Visit)	February 2016

A periodic internal review is planned for SQT's suite of QQI accredited FET programmes in 2021. These programmes are as follows:

Training Partner	Subject Category	HET / FET	Programmes to be Reviewed
IMS	Food Safety	FET	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Food Standards Auditing (SPA) Level 6, 5 ECTS</li> <li>- HACCP Implementation and Verification (SPA) Level 5, 5 ECTS</li> <li>- Advanced HACCP Design and Validation based on Risk Assessment (SPA) Level 6, 5 ECTS</li> </ul>
Sonas CPD	Personal Development and Leadership, Training Delivery & Evaluation	FET	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Leadership (Minor award) Level 6, 15 ECTS</li> <li>- Training Delivery &amp; Evaluation (SPA) Level 6, 2 x 15 ECTS</li> </ul>

## **2.5 Additional Themes and Case Studies**

### **2.5.1 Case Study 1: Retaining a Learner-Centric Focus in the Transition to Virtual Training Delivery: A Tutor's Perspective**

#### **Introduction**

In March 2020, COVID-19 began its severe impact on most industries and sectors worldwide. The sudden reality of resulting lockdowns changed the media of training delivery options within SQT at an accelerated pace, with SQT management and Programme Directors, now tasked with developing a new strategy for training delivery. This development was required to comply with Government guidelines and client requirements and ensure that training was delivered to the high standards SQT and its representative Tutors are known for. This required organisation-wide effort and collaboration, consistent with SQT's Teaching and Learning strategy and QA framework.

#### **Methodology**

The initial phase involved understanding what best practice recommended to senior leaders in SQT and the tutor groups. This was achieved through upskilling of all Tutors and consulting experts in Virtual Classroom training. The research undertaken involved investigating current delivery platforms which were available, and also determining what other third level institutions were using. Once this information was available, the task was to review how this impacted delivery of the Leadership and Personal Development subject areas under my remit. Integrating this information with SQT's pre-existing Teaching and Learning Strategy to underpin this new media of delivery was a key factor in the successful evolution to Virtual Classroom delivery.

Many factors needed to be considered by me at this point i.e. what new steps were needed to support learners, but also the other parties involved in the successful running of the various programmes. These included the previously mentioned learners (what support would they need, how did we discover their need?), programme sponsors (what information, delivery options and education was required to reassure clients of quality output through this media of delivery), myself (what practical supports were required to enable programme delivery to the expected high standards?).

#### **Discussion**

These separate nuances of our multi-faceted psychological contract were addressed. Being learner-centric was achieved through having the ability to use different delivery platforms according to specific client requirements. This ability to provide options was a key factor to instilling confidence in our ability to deliver in a medium familiar to learners and programme sponsors in different organisations. This flexibility over media of delivery continues to be a positive and key differentiator for our clients, as opposed to a one-size-fits-all approach.

As a tutor, my preparedness was facilitated through inhouse training by Flex Labs on Virtual Classroom training and integration of this best practice into our programme rollout. This new delivery structure was adapted to ensure we met learner and client expectations, while being congruent to the SQT Teaching and Learning Strategy (ref TL Strategy here?), based on the principles of adult learning theory put forward by Knowles (Knowles, 1970).

Feedback from all stake-holders has been collated and studied carefully since rollout of this new training media. The adaptation of the Hattie & Timperley (Hattie & Timperley, 2007) model of feedback to enhance learning has ensured that programmes in my area (Leadership and Personal Development) were continuously reviewed and refined based upon feedback received. This three dimensional process of feed up, feedback and feed forward, was pivotal in successfully meeting clients expectations. The use of the three key questions proposed by them are shown below.

*“Where am I going? (What are the goals?), How am I going? (What progress is being made toward the goal?), and Where to next? (What activities need to be undertaken to make better progress?)”*

Applying these principles to redesign programmes for Virtual Delivery ensured that the focus remained on SQT’s core teaching and learning philosophies.

## **Conclusions**

Client and learner feedback has been very positive. Having collated this data from the past twelve months, we determined that, on average, learners rated their overall learning experience as 4.6 out of 5 stars for this category of programmes.

The information that this feedback provides ensures that we are constantly adapting to the evolving expectations of our clients. The delivery on expectations revealed in the multi-faceted contract has been achieved successfully and has resulted in learner satisfaction remaining very positive during the last year - irrespective of lockdown. The use of Virtual Classroom delivery has allowed learners to engage with content and Tutors in ways that are different from face-to-face delivery, but feedback suggests that this difference in no way hinders the efficacy of the programmes for our learners or the organisations that we serve.

## **References**

Hattie, J., & Timperley, H. (2007, March). The Power of Feedback. Review of Educational Research, 81-112.

Knowles, M. S. (1970). The Modern Practice of Adult Education. New York: Association Press.

## 2.5.2 Digital Transformation - Implementation of new Management Information System (MIS)

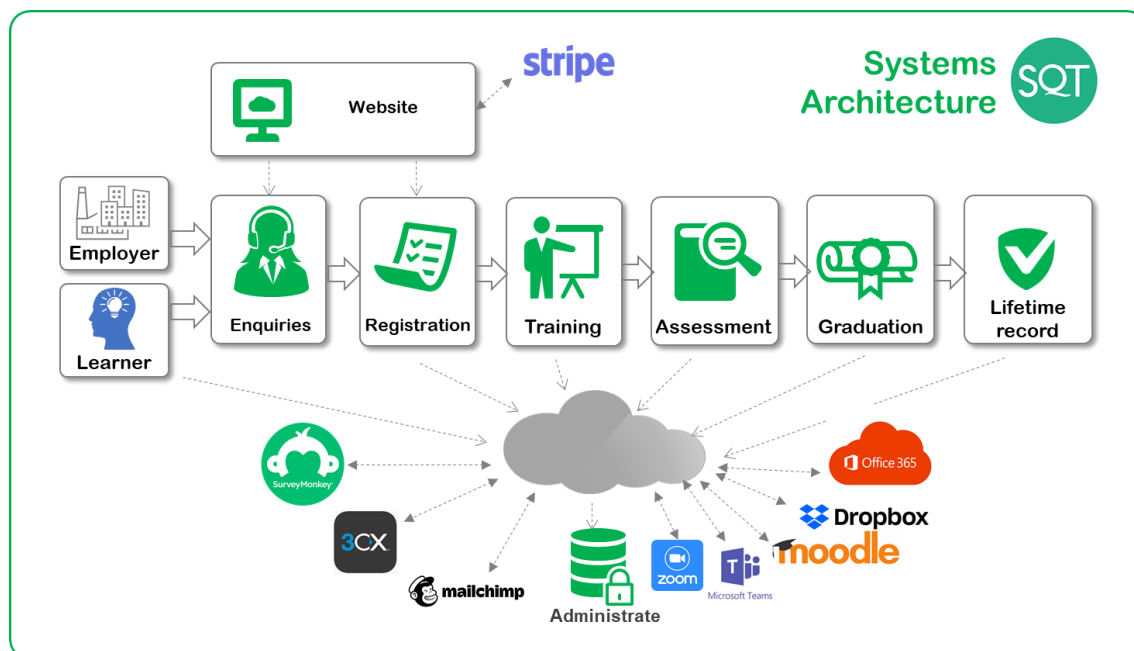
### Introduction

Over the past 20 years SQT have managed our business processes through a customised MIS system developed by an external IT provider. The system was built on what is now “old technology” using an on-site server which over time required more and more maintenance. In addition, we had paper-based steps within our processes as well as additional external regulatory requirements. With these evolving requirements it became clear that data management and reporting would be critically important as the business grows.

In 2018 we made the decision to invest in a new MIS system that could evolve and grow with our needs and get us to a point where information could be managed accurately, efficiently and in a timely manner. The technology needed to be robust and reliable as well as being able to evolve. It was clear that the solution should be based on a SAAS (Software As A Service) platform and it needed to be a specialised product rather than a generic CRM system.

### System selection

The programmes provided by SQT are typically short courses, 2-3 days with rolling intakes. The profile of our programmes means that we are not just engaging with learners, we are engaging with their employers on a regular basis so there are elements of account management to be considered. The life cycle of a learner is a long one and it has to be tracked and managed along the way. We wanted to do this in one system which would be the “single point of truth” for all data.



Prior to reviewing possible options we conducted a needs analysis and identified the key areas of functionality required, this allowed us to quickly identify a shortlist of solutions and then develop a gap analysis for the final selection process.

On reviewing the products available in the market that would meet our requirements we narrowed it to two possible platforms. On conducting a gap analysis of both systems our final

choice was Administrate. The key feature that Administrate could provide over the other option was the ability to track assessment data within the system and thus allowing us to develop a single repository for our data. In addition, the system would allow us to connect with other platforms either through existing connections (API) or have the option of developing custom connections.

### System Deployment

We began the process of transition in 2019, initial steps were to complete a gap analysis between our existing processes and how the system worked. Processes needed to be adapted and standardised across our business. We also needed to complete an analysis of the data we had within our existing system to determine the data cleansing required in order to transfer it to the new system.

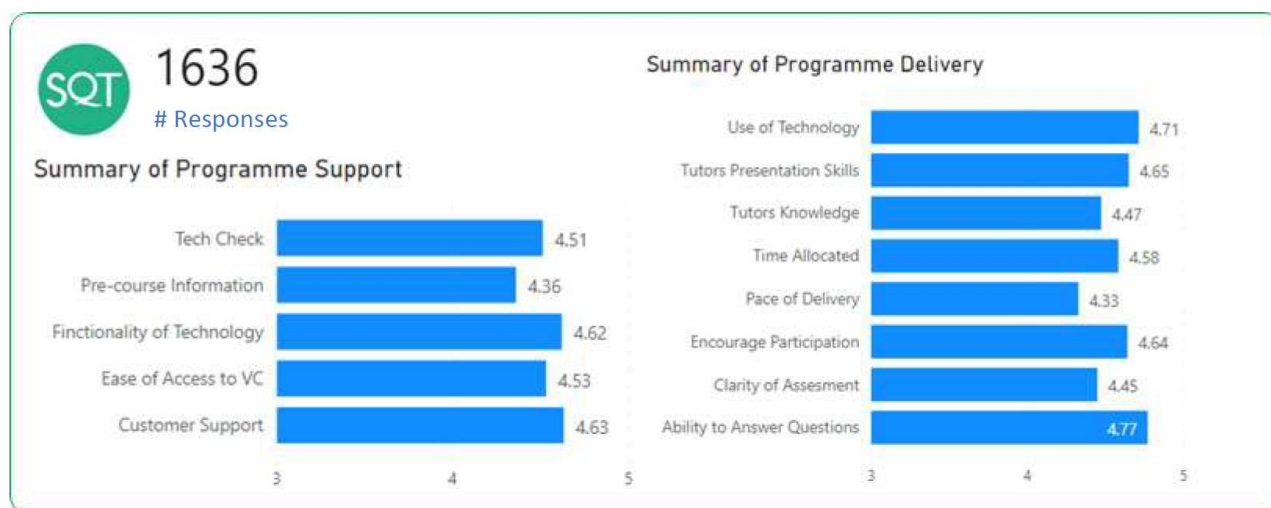
Later in 2019 we had completed this work and copied our data into Administrate. In March 2020 when the Covid-19 pandemic hit, the progress of the project was slowed while we dealt with the changes to the business. We continued to run both our old and new system in parallel throughout 2020, while shutting off our old system in December 2020. Running both in parallel allowed us to test and verify the new system compared to the old and reducing risk to the business if we had issues.

### Key Benefits

We have achieved our key goal of having a single robust system for all data. We now have more effective reporting which allows us to streamline our business processes and track and manage our learners right through their journey with SQT.

### Example of the benefits

The system has allowed us to replace paper-based processes. For example, previously we collected learner feedback on a paper-based feedback form. This was manual, time intensive to record and took longer to process and analyse. Now the learner receives a feedback form electronically from Administrate via Survey monkey. On completion of the form the data is sent back into Administrate.



Above is an example of the dashboard based on responses, (questions scored on a scale of 1-5, 1 = poor, 5 = excellent) this data can now be analysed and filtered by programme, course manager, tutor and clients. We have found that most learners complete this form within 48 hours of course completion. This allows us to have timely data and a clear view of how the programme has been received.



## **Next Steps**

With the system now in place and fully functional we have more work planned in 2021. Priorities include development of reporting and dashboards and using the data to drive our business goals.

Examples include:

- Dashboards for governance meetings that allow for specific dashboards. To allow viewing and querying of data pulled directly from the system.
- Data provided to tutors on a weekly basis
- Reports for client organisations who may wish to view details of their staff training records.