

A focused review of the implementation and effectiveness of its quality assurance procedures by SOLAS under Section 34(1)(b) of the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012

Containing:

- the report of the independent review team (August 2025)
- the SOLAS provider response to the report of the independent review team (October 2025)
- the SOLAS Quality Improvement Plan (October 2025)

Report of the independent review team August 2025

Contents

Executive summary	4
1. Introduction	8
2. Context	8
3. Overview of review purpose and objectives	11
4. Review team	14
5. Review methods	15
6. Review team recommendations/directions to QQI	35
7. Concluding remarks	37
Appendix A: Terms of Reference for the Focused Review	38
Appendix B: List of Documentation Considered by the Review Team	53
Appendix C: Site Visit Schedule	57
Appendix D: Employer Survey	60

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Provider Name:

SOLAS

Address:

Block 1, Castleforbes House,

Castleforbes Road

Dublin 1

D01 A8N0

Review Objectives

The objectives of the review were to:

- Determine whether or not the quality assurance procedures established by SOLAS under Section 28 of the 2012 Act in relation to the development and approval of assessment instruments relating to phases 4 and 6 of the Advanced Certificate Craft – Electrical programme are being implemented, and whether or not they are fit for purpose and appropriate;
- Determine whether or not the quality assurance procedures established by SOLAS under Section 28 of the 2012 Act in relation to the distribution of assessment instruments relating to phases 4 and 6 of the Advanced Certificate Craft – Electrical programme are being implemented, and whether or not they are fit for purpose and appropriate; and
- Determine whether or not the procedures and processes that have been designed by SOLAS under section 28 of the 2012 Act are appropriate and fit for purpose to ensure an effective interface between SOLAS' QA procedures and those of collaborating providers with regard to the assessment of phases 4 and 6 of the Advanced Certificate Craft – Electrical programme, and whether the procedures and processes are being implemented effectively.

Within these overall objectives, the review team were asked to give special consideration to three areas relating to SOLAS' procedures and associated processes for managing and coordinating the development and approval of assessment instruments; to support the

distribution to collaborating providers of assessment instruments; and to ensure oversight of the interface between SOLAS' QA procedures and those of collaborating providers.

Membership of the Review Team:

Role	Name	Affiliation
Chair	Billy Kelly,	Former deputy registrar/dean of teaching and learning, DCU
Coordinating reviewer	Dr Deirdre Stritch	Independent education and QA consultant and former Senior Manager for QA Approval and Focused Reviews at QQI
Apprentice representative	Seán McLoughlin	Qualified electrician, 2024 graduate of ATU & WorldSkills Lyon 2024 best of nation and medallion of excellence winner
QA expert	John Vickery	Independent education and QA consultant and former registrar, IT Tallaght
Subject-matter expert	Franco Cargius	College lecturer, Coleg Cambria, Wales; contracted assessment writer for Qualifications Wales
Subject-matter expert	Ian Thompson	Lecturer and QA for electrical installation apprenticeship; formerly of Belfast Met (Course co-ordinator/IQA/lecturer for electrical installation apprenticeship)

Date of Site Visit: 7th and 8th April 2025

Date of Draft Report: 28th May 2025

Date of Final Report: 22nd August 2025

Recommendation of External Review Team to QQI:

Directions

The review team recommends that QQI issue the following directions to SOLAS:

1. SOLAS, as a matter of urgency, completes full implementation of its QA processes for the assessment of the Advanced Certificate Craft – Electrical, and ensures full accountability through its management and governance structures for:
 - a. ensuring the consistent, ongoing implementation of those processes; and
 - b. exercising oversight of quality assurance implementation, as appropriate to SOLAS' role as coordinating provider.

2. SOLAS immediately prioritises the resolution of the issues and concerns identified through this review process. To that end:
- a. SOLAS is directed to produce a quality improvement plan (QIP) with associated roles, responsibilities and timelines clearly identified, to be submitted to, and agreed with, QQI as a matter of utmost urgency. That QIP will address:
 - i. The implementation of governance arrangements for oversight of the programme, its delivery and assessment, including that the national Programme Advisory Board (PAB) be reconvened and meet on a regular basis and include apprentice representatives;
 - ii. The implementation of oversight arrangements for the relationship with the collaborative providers and the assessment process;
 - iii. The establishment of a routine monitoring process for the delivery and assessment of the Advanced Certificate Craft – Electrical;
 - iv. The security of all stages and aspects assessment practice;
 - v. The currency and accuracy of assessment instruments;
 - vi. The appropriateness of assessment instruments;
 - vii. Plans for engagement and consultation with collaborative providers generally (individually and collectively) and with particular reference to the development and roll-out of alternative assessment systems to ensure their appropriateness and their feasibility;
 - viii. Feedback mechanisms for collaborative providers and other stakeholders of the Advanced Certificate Craft – Electrical;
 - ix. Document control arrangements within SOLAS relating to the Advanced Certificate Craft – Electrical; and
 - x. Effective utilisation of data to inform continuous enhancement of the Advanced Certificate Craft – Electrical programme and its assessment.

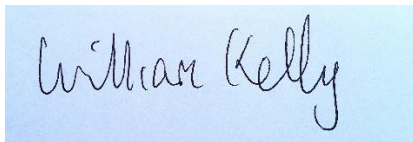
Recommendations

The review team makes the following recommendations to QQI and SOLAS:

1. To ensure that the necessary improvements and adjustments are made promptly, and in order to maintain confidence in the Craft Electrical award, the review team recommends that QQI immediately convenes a steering group of relevant parties to support SOLAS in the realisation of the aforementioned directives as quickly and effectively as possible.
2. The review team recommends that SOLAS moves towards compliance with ISO 9000; however, efforts taken towards ISO 9000 compliance should not take precedence over, or detract from, the development and implementation of the aforementioned quality improvement plan.

The detailed assessment of the review panel is set out in the following report.

Signed (on behalf of the Review Team)

A blue rectangular box containing a handwritten signature in black ink that reads "William Kelly".

Date: 22 August 2025

Mr. Billy Kelly

1. INTRODUCTION

In March and April 2025, QQI conducted a focused review of the implementation and effectiveness of SOLAS' quality assurance (QA) procedures¹ under section 34(1)(b) of the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012.² The review was carried out in accordance with agreed terms of reference (available in Appendix A). QQI may conduct a focused review of a provider's QA procedures from time to time or in response to concerns that have arisen in relation to the implementation and effectiveness of a provider's QA procedures. In this instance, a focused review was instigated by QQI to consider concerns related to the governance and quality assurance of assessment on Phases 4 and 6 of the Advanced Certificate Craft – Electrical programme (the national electrical craft apprenticeship). An external team of experts (henceforth 'the review team') chaired by Mr. Billy Kelly, was appointed by QQI to conduct the review on its behalf. This report sets out the findings of the review team and its recommendations to QQI.

2. CONTEXT

SOLAS (An tSeirbhís Oideachais Leanúnaigh agus Scileanna) is the State agency responsible for setting national policy and allocating funding for the Irish further education and training (FET) sector.³ As per the Industrial Training Act 1967, SOLAS is also responsible for the regulation, registration, employment and education of apprentices. A function of SOLAS under Section 7(1)(e) of the Further Education and Training Act, 2013, is to "provide, or arrange for, the provision of training and retraining for employment and to assist in and coordinate the provision of such training by persons other than An tSeirbhís".⁴ As set out in Section 2.2.3. of the SOLAS' [QA Manual](#), SOLAS is the "... the coordinating provider for those apprenticeships developed before 2016, namely, craft

¹ QQI (2017) *Procedures for Focused Reviews by QQI of the Implementation and Effectiveness of Provider QA Procedures*. Available at: [qp-19-procedures-for-focused-reviews-by-qqi-of-the-implementation-and-effectiveness-of-provider-qa-procedures.pdf](#)

² Section 34 (Review by Authority of quality assurance procedures of relevant providers), Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012. Available at: [Revised Acts](#)

³ Please see Part 2 of the Further Education and Training Act, 2013. Available at: [Further Education and Training Act 2013](#)

⁴ Please see: [Further Education and Training Act 2013, Section 7](#)

apprenticeships.” (2023, p. 10). In fulfilment of this role, SOLAS is a ‘relevant provider’ of QQI under the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012. SOLAS is required by Section 28 of the Act to have quality assurance procedures in place for programmes of education and training that it provides that lead to QQI awards.⁵ These include the aforementioned national craft apprenticeship programmes, for which SOLAS is the coordinating provider⁶ for programme delivery by education and training boards (ETBs), technological universities (TUs) and Dundalk Institute of Technology (DKIT). In December 2020, QQI approved SOLAS’ interim QA procedures for craft apprenticeships subject to four conditions, which related to:

1. expansion of the high-level governance framework specified in the SOLAS 2020 QA Handbook to incorporate formal and informal stakeholder engagement within the management and oversight structures;
2. updating of all relevant memoranda of understanding (MOUs) and service-level agreements (SLAs) to reflect the cultural change towards a more flexible, dynamic and collaborative model of apprenticeship;
3. clarification of SOLAS’ roles and responsibilities with regard to internal QA, its role as regulator for craft and consortium-led apprenticeships, and as a coordinating provider; and
4. publication of the 2020 QA Handbook and other relevant policies and procedures on SOLAS’ website.

⁵ Relevant QQI QA guidelines in this instance are the [Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines developed by QQI for use by all Providers](#) (2016), and the [Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines developed by QQI for Providers of Statutory Apprenticeship Programmes](#) (2016).

⁶ A ‘coordinating provider’ is defined in the [Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines developed by QQI for Providers of Statutory Apprenticeship Programmes](#) (2016) as “... a relevant or linked provider who is ultimately responsible for providing (as defined by the 2012 Act) an apprenticeship programme. Among its responsibilities are the development and maintenance of the curriculum and assessment procedures for the programme and leading the collaborating providers involved. To act as a Coordinating Provider for an apprenticeship programme, the entity must be a relevant or linked provider under the 2012 Act. This means, among other things, that it must be a legal entity and the provision of education and training must be one of its principal functions. If an entity is not already a relevant provider, it may become one through a QQI process.” (pp. 8-9)

QQI approved SOLAS' updated QA procedures, which addressed these points in June 2023.⁷ These procedures include SOLAS' assessment rules for craft apprenticeships.⁸

This focused review of the implementation and effectiveness of the aforementioned QA procedures and assessment rules was instigated on foot of ongoing concerns that came to QQI's attention in relation to the security and integrity of assessment practices on Phases 4 and 6 of the Advanced Certificate Craft – Electrical programme. The concerns became the subject of focused discussion between QQI and SOLAS in August 2024. In December 2024, QQI was made aware of alleged breaches of assessment security on Phases 4 and 6 of the programme.

QQI's concerns relate specifically to:

1. The validity of an assessment system that relies on a limited number of assessment instrument versions (in some cases, there is only one version used) for use at a national level by all students undertaking phases 4 and 6 of the 4 Advanced Certificate Craft – Electrical and the re-use of the same assessment instruments across examination cycles.
2. The infrequent updating by SOLAS of assessment instruments for use at a national level by all students undertaking phases 4 and 6 of the Advanced Certificate Craft – Electrical.
3. Following from 1 and 2, the predictability of assessment and the associated risks to assessment integrity and validity.
4. The extent to which assessment instruments adequately capture all relevant learning outcomes and enable assessors to differentiate student achievement.
5. Clarity about the expected standards of attainment for grades, marking criteria and weighting and duration of assessments.
6. The effectiveness of SOLAS monitoring and reporting processes for apprenticeship programme delivery.
7. The effectiveness of the interface between SOLAS' assessment procedures for the programme and each collaborating provider's approved quality assurance procedures.

⁷ SOLAS (2023) *Quality Assurance of Craft Apprenticeships: Quality Assurance Manual*. Available at: [solas-qa-manual-2023.pdf](#)

⁸ SOLAS (2023) *Quality Assurance of National Craft Apprenticeships: Craft Apprenticeship Assessment Roles*. Available at: [solas-craft-apprenticeship-assessment-rules-2023.pdf](#)

8. The effectiveness of measures to ensure the security and confidentiality of assessment instruments.
9. The operation of feedback mechanisms between teaching/tutoring staff within collaborating providers and SOLAS assessment staff.
10. Engagement by and between collaborating providers and SOLAS in the ongoing development and review of assessment instruments.

3. OVERVIEW OF REVIEW PURPOSE & OBJECTIVES

3.1 Purpose of Review

The purpose of this focused review was to:

1. Evaluate the effectiveness of the quality assurance procedures established by SOLAS and approved by QQI in relation to the assessment of phases 4 and 6 of the Advanced Certificate Craft – Electrical programme, including procedures and processes designed and implemented by SOLAS to ensure oversight of the interface between SOLAS' QA procedures and those of collaborating providers with regard to the assessment of phases 4 and 6 of the programme. This incorporated consideration of whether the related channels of communication between SOLAS and the collaborating providers are appropriate, sufficient and effective.
2. Determine whether or not these procedures are being fully and effectively implemented.

3.2 Review Objectives

The objectives of the review were to:

- Determine whether or not the quality assurance procedures established by SOLAS under Section 28 of the 2012 Act in relation to the development and approval of assessment instruments relating to phases 4 and 6 of the Advanced Certificate Craft – Electrical programme are being implemented, and whether or not they are fit for purpose and appropriate;

- Determine whether or not the quality assurance procedures established by SOLAS under Section 28 of the 2012 Act in relation to the distribution of assessment instruments relating to phases 4 and 6 of the Advanced Certificate Craft – Electrical programme are being implemented, and whether or not they are fit for purpose and appropriate; and
- Determine whether or not the procedures and processes that have been designed by SOLAS under Section 28 of the 2012 Act are appropriate and fit for purpose to ensure an effective interface between SOLAS' QA procedures and those of collaborating providers with regard to the assessment of phases 4 and 6 of the Advanced Certificate Craft – Electrical programme, and whether the procedures and processes are being implemented effectively.

3.3 Special Considerations

Within these overarching objectives for the focused review, the review team was asked to give special consideration to three areas:

1. The **procedures and associated processes that SOLAS has established to manage and coordinate the development and approval of assessment instruments** for phases 4 and 6 of the Advanced Certificate Craft – Electrical programme, including the procedures (and associated processes) in place to ensure the availability of:
 - a. **Timely, sufficient appropriate and current subject-matter expertise** to inform the development of reliable, up-to-date assessment instruments that will facilitate collaborating providers to determine whether or not apprentices have demonstrated the relevant minimum intended learning outcomes.
 - b. **A sufficient number of distinct and varied assessment instruments** appropriate to the number of collaborating providers conducting assessment at a national level to support the integrity of the assessment process.
2. The procedures and associated processes that SOLAS has established to support the **distribution to collaborating providers of assessment instruments** for phases 4 and 6 of the Advanced Certificate Craft – Electrical programme, including the means by which SOLAS:
 - a. assures itself of the **integrity and security** of the assessment development and distribution process.

- b. **identifies potential vulnerabilities** in the distribution process that may compromise the integrity of the assessment process.
 - c. designs and implements measures to **mitigate the risks** inherent in any potential vulnerabilities identified.
 - d. takes **action to respond to any security breaches** identified and prevent similar breaches from arising in future.
- 3. The **procedures and processes that have been developed and implemented by SOLAS to ensure oversight of the interface between SOLAS' QA procedures and those of collaborating providers** – in particular with regard to collaborating providers' administration of assessment processes for phases 4 and 6 of the Advanced Certificate Craft – Electrical programme, and including how SOLAS assures itself that the collaborating providers:
 - a. **apply their routine quality assurance infrastructure to the assessment** of phases 4 and 6 of the Advanced Certificate Craft – Electrical programme
 - b. assure themselves of the **security and validity** of the assessment process.
 - c. **identify potential vulnerabilities** in the assessment process that may compromise the integrity of the process.
 - d. design and implement measures to **mitigate the risks** inherent in any potential vulnerabilities identified.
 - e. **take action to respond to any security breaches** identified and prevent similar breaches from arising in future.

4. REVIEW TEAM

The focused review was conducted by a team of six independent experts and peers selected by QQI (hereafter the ‘review team’).

Role	Name	Affiliation
Chair	Billy Kelly	Former deputy registrar/dean of teaching and learning, DCU
Coordinating reviewer	Dr Deirdre Stritch	Independent education and QA consultant and former Senior Manager for QA Approval and Focused Reviews at QQI
Apprentice representative	Seán McLoughlin	Qualified electrician, 2024 graduate of ATU & WorldSkills Lyon 2024 best of nation and medallion of excellence winner
QA expert	John Vickery	Independent education and QA consultant and former registrar, IT Tallaght
Subject-matter expert	Franco Cargius	College lecturer, Coleg Cambria, Wales; contracted assessment writer for Qualifications Wales
Subject-matter expert	Ian Thompson	Lecturer and QA for electrical installation apprenticeship; formerly of Belfast Met (Course co-ordinator/IQA/lecturer for electrical installation apprenticeship)

The review team attended an online briefing and training session with QQI staff on 1 April 2025, while the review site visit was held in person at SOLAS’ main offices at Castleforbes House in Dublin on the 7 and 8 April 2025.

5. REVIEW METHODS

The focused review was conducted in accordance with the [Procedures for Focused Reviews by QQI of the Implementation and Effectiveness of Provider QA Procedures](#) (2017). The review team considered a range of documents provided by both SOLAS and QQI, including the terms of reference (Appendix A), a self-evaluation report, the 'Provider Statement', submitted by SOLAS in March 2025 and SOLAS' published QA procedures and related policies relevant to apprenticeship and assessment. The review team found SOLAS' Provider Statement to be limited in detail on the issues being addressed through the focused review. Furthermore, the Provider Statement did not address each of the ten concerns outlined in the terms of reference for the review. Consequently, following a detailed review of the Provider Statement, the review team sought additional information from SOLAS so that a fuller understanding of the context and concerns identified by QQI could be established (a full list of documents and information shared with the review team is available in Appendix B).

A two-day site visit to SOLAS' main offices in Dublin was conducted on 7 and 8 April 2025, at which the review team met with the SOLAS CEO, senior managers and key executive staff; heads of department/function, lecturing and teaching staff and academic administrators from collaborating providers; current apprentices, and one employer representative.⁹ The review team also held a meeting with the Chair of the SOLAS Board to determine the Board's knowledge of, and perspectives on, the issues being explored through the focused review (the schedule for the site visit is included in Appendix C). Meetings were held using a combination of in-person and online modes to accommodate attendees. The review team had a very positive engagement with SOLAS staff and higher education representatives and apprentices. Discussions were held on the content of the Provider Statement, and other evidence submitted by QQI and SOLAS.

Following the site visit, a survey was conducted with employers of electrical apprentices to ascertain their perspectives on the quality assurance of the assessments undertaken by electrical apprentices on Phases 4 and 6 of the Advanced Certificate Craft – Electrical programme (the survey instrument is available in Appendix D). Finally, the review team chair and rapporteur held a meeting on behalf of

⁹ Unfortunately, due to time constraints, the views of employers could not be captured in the level and depth required during the site visit. A separate short, anonymous survey was subsequently conducted by QQI on behalf of the review team.

the review team with a group of authorised officers (AOs) selected by SOLAS on Friday, 16 May 2025. The meeting enabled the review team to explore the experiences and views of AOs on assessment practice on Phases 4 and 6 of the Advanced Certificate Craft – Electrical programme.¹⁰

¹⁰ This meeting was held subsequent to the site visit at the request of SOLAS, which had, unfortunately, been unable to accommodate a meeting between the review team and AOs at the April site visit.

5. EVALUATION AND REVIEW OUTCOMES

5.1 Evaluation – Overarching Findings

At the outset, the review team wishes to acknowledge the commitment of the executive staff at SOLAS who hold responsibility for the national Advanced Certificate Craft – Electrical programme. Their openness and candour throughout the site visit¹¹ were greatly appreciated and contributed significantly to the review process. This commitment and candour notwithstanding, SOLAS’ senior management emphasised to the review team the non-statutory nature of the agency’s role as coordinating provider for the Craft Electrical programme, and the perceived mis-alignment of this role with SOLAS’ wider strategic responsibilities for the FET sector.¹² The challenges of continuing in the role of coordinating provider in this context were stressed in discussions and were evident in the approaches adopted to oversight of programme delivery and assessment, which lack strategic vision or direction and appear to be under-resourced. As a result, much of the current activity around the Advanced Certificate Craft – Electrical programme appears reactive, with staff frequently engaged in “firefighting”, rather than implementing longer-term, strategic solutions.

The review team has concerns that, to date, SOLAS has not prioritised the issues that led to this focused review appropriately or strategically, as reflected in the fact that these issues had not been formally brought to the attention of the SOLAS Board, which in accordance with SOLAS’ approved QA procedures, has ultimate responsibility for craft apprenticeship and for providing strategic guidance to the executive, as well as for monitoring the effectiveness of activities (2023, p. 13). The National Apprenticeship Advisory Committee reports to the SOLAS Board and is chaired by a SOLAS Board member. SOLAS’ QA Manual is explicit in stating that the senior management team has a responsibility to “ensure all Board members have a clear understanding of the key activities and decisions related to SOLAS.” (p. 13). The review team considers that the failure to report critical, ongoing, assessment-related issues to its Board, including that the agency was subject to a focused

¹¹ As noted above, the schedule for the site visit, which took place on 7 and 8 April 2025, is appended to this report (see Appendix C).

¹² This is reflected in the [Action Plan for Apprenticeship, 2021-2025](#), which established an ambition for all craft apprenticeships to move from SOLAS/ National Apprenticeship Advisory Committee (NAAC) management and delivery of programmes to a single apprenticeship system by the end of 2025.

review of the implementation of its approved quality assurance procedures in this area, represents a significant omission, and a departure from, its approved QA procedures and good governance practice of provider quality assurance.¹³

The review team further notes the absence of a clear and sustained commitment to delivering the Advanced Certificate Craft – Electrical apprenticeships, responsibility for which is earmarked to move away from SOLAS, though no timeframe or definite plan has yet been agreed for this move. This expected change in SOLAS’ role as coordinating provider for craft apprenticeships is highlighted in its QA Manual: “This is a role which will be phased out over the coming years as the new Action Plan for Apprenticeship 2021-2025 is implemented.” (p. 11). It appears to the review team that the planned change in SOLAS’ role as coordinating provider, in line with Government policy,¹⁴ has led to a de-prioritisation of the ongoing implementation and monitoring of the effectiveness of its approved quality assurance procedures for the Advanced Certificate Craft – Electrical programme. For example, SOLAS management outlined that the agency has a clear statutory responsibility under the Further Education and Training Act 2013 for funding further education and training and for oversight of apprenticeship, e.g., through approving new programmes and maintaining the registers of apprentices and employers. However, management stressed that “The coordinating provider role is not enshrined in legislation, but a legacy role inherited from FÁS.”¹⁵ Senior management articulated SOLAS’ role as that of a “caretaker”, until a permanent, national strategy is put in place for the coordinating provider role and stressed that the agency is currently “performing duties that would reside better within an education provider, for example, developing curricula, and setting assessments ... This role doesn’t fit with SOLAS’ other roles as a State agency.” SOLAS staff, both senior management and executive, expressed a confidence that any deficits in assessment in Phases and 4 and 6 of the programme would be redressed through the on-the-job phases (Phases 5 and 7)

¹³ The expectations and standards for good governance are set out Section 1.1(b - d) of QQI’s Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines, which requires that: “The quality assurance system is owned by the provider (b); that the provider has in place “A system of governance that protects the integrity of academic processes and standards (c); A system of governance that considers risk” (2016, p. 6).

¹⁴ Please see the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (2021) [Action Plan for Apprenticeship, 2021-2025](#).

¹⁵ FÁS (An Foras Áiseanna Saothair – The Training and Employment Authority) was the State training agency and provided assistance to those seeking employment. Its functions, including the delivery of apprenticeships, were taken over by SOLAS and the Education and Training Boards (ETBs) following its dissolution in 2013.

of the programme.¹⁶ The review team considers that a degree of hesitancy in fully embracing the responsibilities associated with SOLAS' role as coordinating provider has contributed to the issues and concerns outlined in this report.

The review team was further advised by the senior management and executive staff at SOLAS that the roll-out of approved QA procedures is still in progress and that there have been challenges and a "backlog" of activity following the Covid-19 pandemic, which diverted resources elsewhere. Senior management stated that the agency needs a fully-resourced QA team that can focus on QA *improvement* and that can proactively engage in monitoring activity. Staff confirmed, for example, that external authentication is not taking place in Phases 4 and 6 of the programme. The review team was assured, however, that there is a new manager in place who will be looking at assessment processes as part of wider QA implementation. Furthermore, it was confirmed to the review team that governance of the Advanced Certificate Craft – Electrical programme through the Programme Advisory Board (PAB), which includes a range of stakeholders including collaborating providers, is not being implemented as intended: the review team was advised by SOLAS senior management that the PAB is convened for particular matters and not as a matter of routine.

One of the most pressing issues identified through the focused review is the weak or underdeveloped relationship between SOLAS and its collaborating higher education institution (HEI) providers for Phases 4 and 6 of the programme, which undermines efforts to deliver a cohesive and effective programme and ensure the currency, appropriateness, security and integrity of assessment. Whilst SOLAS' senior management staff stressed that building relationships with partner higher education institutions has been an area of focus, both senior management and executive staff repeatedly expressed resignation regarding the agency's ability to "control" or influence the behaviour of collaborating providers despite having memoranda of understanding in place. Additional information provided by SOLAS to the review team states that:

¹⁶ Exploring the extent to which this is the case was outside the direct remit of this review, but comments made by employers, apprentices and authorised officers suggest that a reliance on Phases 5 and 7 to make up for any shortfall in attainment of learning outcomes by apprentices in Phases 4 and 6 is not without risks and challenges.

As the MOUs are not considered enforceable agreements, they do not create legally binding obligations. This devolved arrangement creates challenges for SOLAS where issues relating to assessment or other quality assurance concerns arise. (SOLAS)

This interpretation appears to have stifled efforts by SOLAS to appropriately investigate and address concerns raised around breaches of assessment. Indeed, the belief that SOLAS lacks real authority to implement its QA procedures with collaborating providers appears to have contributed to a paralysis of action within the organisation, where concerns are acknowledged, but not actively pursued or resolved in strategic or meaningful ways.

The review team's more detailed findings are set out below under each of the ten concerns identified by QQI in the terms of reference for the focused review (see Appendix A).

Concern 1

The review team finds that QQI's concerns are substantiated regarding the validity of an assessment system that relies on a limited number of assessment instrument versions (only one version is used in some cases) for use at a national level by all apprentices undertaking phases 4 and 6 of the Advanced Certificate Craft – Electrical programme, and the re-use of the same assessment instruments across examination cycles. It was confirmed to the review team by both SOLAS and collaborating providers that a limited number of assessment instruments have been used repeatedly over several years, and that concerns in that regard have been continually brought to SOLAS' attention by HEIs with no response:

Phase 6 P12T3 assessment repetition. Assessments should be changed each year. (HEI Quality Report, June 2023).¹⁷

Concern expressed that the SOLAS exams have not changed in the past 4 years, with this having implications for students' engagement and performance. This should be addressed as a matter of priority. (HEI Quality Report, April 2024).

¹⁷ Quality reports are submitted to SOLAS by HEIs through the Apprenticeship College Results Processing Website, and are discussed in further detail under concern 8.

There is concern amongst lecturing staff about the fact that examination papers are repeated and these are widely available to students. This has resulted in students learning for the examination and lacking interest in engagement beyond the topics on the examination paper. From a quality assurance perspective, this is very concerning and something that should be addressed by SOLAS as a matter of urgency. (HEI Quality Report, June 2024).

Lecturing staff from collaborating providers, as well as apprentices, informed the review team that these assessment instruments are in wide circulation amongst the relevant apprentice population nationally. Some statements made at the site visit by learners suggested that there are challenges in differentiating student achievement levels due to the availability of previously used assessment instruments online and the repeated use of those same instruments. Students, it was alleged, can predict the questions that will be asked.

This view was further confirmed by authorised officers (AOs) who confirmed that they were aware from apprentices that assessments papers are accessible in advance of exams on social media sites and chat groups used by apprentices. AOs stated that this practice dates back to at least 2020 and the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, though appears to have become more of an issue (or come to greater prominence) in the last year. One of the three AOs with whom the review team met considered this issue to be directly related to the risks inherent in having such a small pool of assessment papers which are in continuous use.

The review team was also informed that the sequence of assessment papers can be accurately predicted by apprentices based on the year identified in the footer of the first assessment paper issued. The consequence of this approach according to lecturing staff and apprentices is that apprentices who seek to engage ethically with assessment are disadvantaged, becoming indivisible in the assessment outcomes from apprentices that staff suspect or know to be significantly weaker. Lecturing staff reported that there is “no bell curve” in assessment outcomes as would be expected to reflect the range of apprentice capacities in the classroom, noting that there was a lack of results in the mid-range.

The review team was further told that repeated use of the same small pool of assessment instruments disadvantages students who do not access the available materials and hampers differentiation of student achievement. It also impacts the culture in the classroom in that it disincentivises apprentice attendance and engagement (once apprentices feel they know what assessment is likely to come up, many choose not to attend class), thereby narrowing the learning undertaken to simply what is expected to be on the exam paper.

Concern 2

The review team finds that QQI's concerns regarding infrequent updating by SOLAS of assessment instruments for use at a national level by all apprentices undertaking phases 4 and 6 of the Advanced Certificate Craft – Electrical are substantiated. This was acknowledged by SOLAS to be a problem in both its Provider Statement and in discussions with the review team at the site visit. The SOLAS Provider Statement confirms that:

SOLAS does not have the capacity to develop assessments in house. To date, there have been several issues which have restricted SOLAS's ability to generate, maintain and rotate alternate versions of assessments.” (p. 11).

The Provider Statement then outlines the challenges faced by the agency in recruiting subject matter experts to develop and update assessment instruments, noting that “This remains a high risk for the craft of Electrical in particular, given its position as the craft apprenticeship with the highest volume of apprentices.” (*ibid.*). At the site visit, SOLAS senior management advised that, while engaging subject matter experts has been extremely difficult to date, new arrangements are in place to enable recruitment of additional experts.¹⁸

The limited ability to develop and update assessment instruments has led to a number of issues that compromise the security and integrity of assessment: primarily repetitive use of the same assessment papers (see discussion under Concern 1 above), and the continuous recycling of errors

¹⁸ SOLAS confirmed to the review team that approximately 20 subject matter experts have been identified for the Advanced Certificate Craft – Electrical programme.

and inaccuracies in those assessment papers. The review team was advised by lecturing staff in collaborating providers that model answers provided to them by SOLAS are incorrect in some instances and have not been updated despite feedback being given (as evidenced in sample feedback sheets viewed by the review team). In other instances, the review team was told that there is an incongruity between questions and model answers provided in more recent versions of assessment introduced in December 2024 and March 2025. These incorrect model answers are also in circulation amongst apprentices with the result that the 'model' wrong answers are then reproduced by apprentices in assessment:

I can't believe how easily students are getting their hands on assessments in advance. Students have it on their phones. Students tell me there's a leak. This is really lowering the standards of electricians being trained and registered in the profession. This is reflected in practical exams ... Results are unrealistically high and I have seen this for years. Students who are not at the level are getting 90+ %. There was a leak last year and the first questions was to draw a diagram – the model answer in the SOLAS answer was wrong and so many students drew the wrong answer (HEI Lecturer).

Concerns about assessment integrity and security were shared by the four employers who responded to a survey conducted by QQI on behalf of the review team. Three of the four employers confirmed that they were already aware of issues regarding assessment integrity and security on Phases 4 and 6 of the programme, and two noted that they had raised concerns with SOLAS. AOs with whom the review team met further confirmed that employers had expressed concerns to them that apprentices are learning more on-the-job than in training.

Concern 3

The review team finds that QQI's concerns relating to the predictability of assessment and the associated risks to assessment integrity and validity are substantiated, and were confirmed to the review team by SOLAS, as well as other stakeholders with whom the review team met. Additionally, apprentices advised the review team that the version of assessment that is likely to be issued can sometimes be predicted by the first assessment paper undertaken, based on year of publication in

the footer of the exam paper. Apprentices advised that the practical assessment is especially predictable. The consequences of repeated use of predictable assessment have already been outlined in detail under Concerns 1 and 2 above.

Concern 4

The panel is unable to determine whether QQI's concerns are substantiated regarding the extent to which assessment instruments adequately capture all relevant learning outcomes and enable assessors to differentiate apprentice achievement. The review team examined multiple iterations of the curriculum documentation for the Advanced Certificate Craft – Electrical programme, including Version 1 (2019) of the Programme Descriptor Template (PDT)¹⁹, another document entitled 'Electrical Curriculum Code: 46 - General Introduction to the Apprenticeship Programme' referred to as 'Rev 5.2', and dated September 2022,²⁰ which the review team was advised at the site visit is the version currently in use, and the Electrical Curriculum and Assessment Revision System (CARS).²¹ The review team undertook a comparative analysis of these documents, which revealed inconsistencies in how minimum intended module learning outcomes (MIMLOs) are mapped to assessment instruments and a lack of clarity regarding the current assessment framework in use. Additionally, the review team was unable to confirm to its satisfaction which version of the curriculum is actually in use and is informing current assessment practice; the CARS document indicates that the version of the curriculum in use for assessment on Phases 4 and 6, is Version 5.1, which the review team did not see. The review team concludes that the curriculum documentation (as submitted during the review process) lacks sufficient clarity and consistency to support confidence that assessment practices and documentation management are subject to robust quality assurance procedures.

Furthermore, the version of the curriculum currently in use is also not the curriculum for which the programme was revalidated in 2023 (Version 6). The programme [re-validation report](#) recommends that "... SOLAS proceeds with the implementation of this revised programme in 2023, not 2024, considering the pressing need to update the currency of the curriculum." (p.13). Given that the review team cannot determine with certainty the version of the curriculum currently in use, and the

¹⁹ Submitted to the review team on both 19th March and 3rd April 2025.

²⁰ Submitted to the review team on 1st April 2025

²¹ Submitted to the review team on 4th April 2025

fact that the programme (and associated assessments) which were validated by QQI in 2023 have not yet been implemented, the review team is not in a position to definitively confirm whether the assessment instruments adequately capture all relevant learning outcomes. The review team further notes that lecturing staff in collaborating providers, as well as apprentices, advised that there are essential areas of the curriculum that are not covered (or adequately covered) in the current assessment instruments, such as renewable technologies and home automation. This may leave gaps in learning as it is widely known that certain topics are not being assessed. Additionally, collaborating providers expressed that some questions are out of scope and others do not reflect the curriculum at all.

Whilst outside the direct scope of the focused review, the review team was repeatedly advised, including by lecturing staff in collaborating providers and employers, that aspects of the curriculum itself are outdated, lack currency and/or are not reflective of current trade practice in all areas. For example, there is a lack of focus on site management and project tools contracts that would prepare apprentices for future roles. The review team received no indication from SOLAS as to when the revalidated programme (Version 6), which would likely address (some) of these issues relating to the currency of the current curriculum, will be implemented. Staff in collaborating providers informed the review team that they have received little information on the roll out of the revalidated programme (Version 6).

Concern 5

The review team finds that QQI's concerns regarding the clarity around expected standards of attainment for grades, marking criteria and weighting and duration of assessments are substantiated. The review team was advised by lecturing staff in collaborating providers that they receive limited rubrics for grading. Additionally, because of continual errors in exam papers, including new papers issued in December 2024 and March 2025, lecturing staff must devise their own marking schemes to account for these errors in each assessment period. A consequence of this is that there are likely to be differences in how the same exam is marked across HEIs. Lecturing staff also highlighted a mismatch between the exam papers and the model assessment answers they received from SOLAS; for example, staff referred to a recent question from the new December 2024 assessment in which apprentices were able to show the upcoming new exam in pdf form – a water harvesting system to

replace the garage door system in T3 and for which the model answer was incorrect. This required staff to redraw the diagram in light of what they considered the correct answer and mark it according to that. Lecturing staff further advised that they had only received guidance three weeks prior to the new March 2025 assessment to give up to 10% latitude for two of three mistakes in those assessment papers.

The review team heard evidence of internal moderation of assessment, which are specific to each HEI (though exam boards take place in all instances). Executive staff in SOLAS confirmed to the review team that the agency's external authentication processes are not being implemented. The retention time for papers also varies across HEIs. As a consequence, while there is a national curriculum for the Advanced Certificate Craft – Electrical programme, several factors mitigate a national standard in assessment and attainment in that programme.

Concern 6

The review team finds that QQI's concerns regarding the effectiveness of SOLAS' monitoring and reporting processes for apprenticeship programme delivery are substantiated. Members of SOLAS' executive staff confirmed to the review team that the agency is not implementing monitoring processes for the Advanced Certificate Craft – Electrical programme. SOLAS expressed the view that the memoranda of understanding in place with collaborating providers are not legally binding, thereby limiting SOLAS' ability to take appropriate investigative steps or corrective measures in relation to concerns raised regarding the security and integrity of assessment. Conversely, HEI staff met by the review team expressed an openness and willingness to have SOLAS visit and engage more proactively in all aspects of programme development, delivery and assessment. As previously noted, the Programme Advisory Board (PAB) is not meeting or operating as envisaged in SOLAS' QA procedures, which were approved in 2023. Of particular relevance to Concern 6, the PAB is not:

Conducting an annual review of the relevant Apprenticeship Programme and implementing agreed minor changes (programme content, delivery, assessment etc.) within the guidelines of relevant QQI policies and criteria (SOLAS, 2023, p. 57).

The review team was advised by senior management that the last meeting of the PAB took place at least 15 months before the review site visit. HEIs are also restricted in the extent to which their own QA procedures can be implemented effectively in relation to the Advanced Certificate Craft – Electrical programme; programme boards, which are the primary locus of monitoring and review activity, are often not in place for the programme and, when in place, cannot operate typically or effectively, as they have no control or input into curriculum design, delivery or assessment. Executive staff at SOLAS reported to the review team that they do not have the time and resources to manage the QA system more effectively, and are constrained by the need to react to, and address, crises as they emerge; they described themselves as “permanently firefighting”.

The review team further observes that a cautious and somewhat disconnected approach to exercising oversight responsibilities may be limiting the implementation and effectiveness of SOLAS’ quality assurance procedures; for example, the review team heard from both SOLAS staff and AOs that they were aware of “rumour” and “hearsay” regarding assessment malpractice, but felt that this was did not constitute grounds for formal action (including investigatory action) in the absence of concrete proof of wrong-doing. Persistent “rumblings” of breaches in assessment integrity and security were not, on their own, considered sufficient grounds to initiate discussions with collaborating partners, either individually or collectively, nor to conduct a thorough investigation into the longstanding (albeit unsubstantiated) allegations of assessment malpractice. The review team did not see evidence that proactive measures were taken to prevent further assessment breaches, and/or to strengthen the integrity of the assessment process in line with Section 5.3 of SOLAS’ approved QA procedures and Section 14 of the [Craft Apprenticeship Assessment Rules](#), until the matter was formally brought to SOLAS’ attention by QQI. Furthermore, as previously noted, the review team was informed that none of these concerns were formally brought to the attention of SOLAS’ Board, as would be expected in accordance with SOLAS’ approved QA procedures (2023, p. 13).²²

²² An email included in additional information submitted to the review team states that: “Breaches have not yet been discussed in any formal meetings that have been subject to minutes. As these breaches have primarily had an operational impact, and have diverted significant resources in each instance to address them, discussion of this matter at a higher level of governance has not yet taken place”. (SOLAS email to QQI, 1 April 2025)

Further issues around responding to, and closing the feedback loop, on quality reports submitted by collaborating providers are discussed under Concern 9 below.

Concern 7

The review team finds that QQI's concerns regarding the effectiveness of the interface between SOLAS' assessment procedures for the programme and each collaborating provider's approved quality assurance procedures are substantiated. The review team found little evidence for any interface between SOLAS' quality assurance system and that of collaborating providers. As noted under Concern 6 above, SOLAS is not conducting external authentication for the programme. The review team did hear evidence that HEIs engage external examiners and held exam board meetings as required under their own and SOLAS' QA procedures, and that feedback is shared with SOLAS on foot of those exam board meetings. It is noteworthy, however, that when the review team sought information on, and access to, sample quality reports which it had heard about from HEI staff, it was initially advised by SOLAS via email that "No such reports are available, as provider self-assessment has not taken place to date"; however, four reports from one HEI dating from 2023 and 2024 were subsequently shared with the review team. Three of these reports raise concerns about the repeated use of assessment instruments (see discussion under Concern 1 above). Additionally, the report template itself is outdated, referring to antecedent agencies which have not existed for many years, e.g., FETAC, FÁS and IOTI. The treatment of these reports reflects a lack of attention to detail, which heightens existing concerns about overall quality and professionalism.

Concern 8

The review team finds that QQI's concerns regarding the effectiveness of measures to ensure the security and confidentiality of assessment instruments are substantiated. The Cascade system used by SOLAS appears to be effective: all HEIs confirmed that they receive assessments from SOLAS via Cascade, which are then printed and stored securely. Assessments are brought to the examination room on the day of the exam: lecturers have no access to assessments in advance. The practical assessment is made available significantly in advance of the exam to enable HEIs to prepare the necessary materials. Invigilation may be conducted by an internal lecturer in some instances, which

the review team notes is a potential weakness, but not by the lecturer delivering the subject examined in the practical assessment.

Despite the range of protective measures adopted by SOLAS since November 2024, the review team heard assertions that there have been ongoing breaches of assessment security up to, and including, the assessments held in March 2025, for example, SOLAS staff hand-delivered assessments to HEIs in March and included a unique identifier on assessments for each HEI. Despite these measures, breaches of assessment took place (as discussed under Concerns 1 and 2 above), which have not yet been investigated by SOLAS, nor has a meeting with HEIs been convened to discuss the matter and determine where the vulnerability in the assessment process lies. Given today's communications networks, one breach quickly and easily moves from local level to nation-wide. Whilst it was outside of the review team's remit to investigate or draw conclusions on the source of this and previous breaches of assessment security, communication between SOLAS and its collaborating providers on this issue has been limited and not designed to find collective, collaborative solutions to the problem. Moving forward, close collaboration with HEIs will be essential to ensure a smooth and effective transition to new and enhanced approaches to assessment.

The review process also identified potential ongoing risks during the upcoming period, as SOLAS develops and transitions to the introduction of new approaches to safeguarding the integrity of assessment.²³ In additional written information submitted to the review team, SOLAS states that "Assessments for the revalidated Electrical craft are in development, with an expectation of 4 versions of each assessment being made available initially." While new plans have been initiated, they remain in the early stages of development and lack the necessary detail regarding logistical arrangements with collaborating providers, as well as on the broader implications of the proposed new approach (such as exclusive use of multiple-choice question (MCQ) formats for all written

²³ It was confirmed to the review team that new versions of assessment papers will be rolled out in 2025 (perhaps in the summer). Existing questions will be reviewed by subject matter experts and those that appropriately address the learning outcomes will be reworded and retained as part of a bank of online questions, which will be complete towards the end of 2025. This bank will inform a multiple-choice question (MCQ) and short answer assessment format, the operation of which is still being considered. SOLAS committed to reviewing the performance of those questions within and across HEIs. It is intended that the new approach will facilitate monitoring activity; for example, the identification of instances where particular HEIs are not covering the curriculum effectively. Practical assessment will continue to be conducted in-person.

assessments). HEI staff expressed concerns to the review team around the feasibility of using HEI computers to facilitate online exams, the timetabling/availability of computer labs and reservations about the appropriateness of an MCQ format for all non-practical assessments.

Concern 9

The review team finds that QQI's concerns regarding the operation of feedback mechanisms between teaching/tutoring staff within collaborating providers and SOLAS assessment staff are substantiated. Discussions with both collaborative providers and SOLAS representatives indicate a relationship that was at times characterised by mistrust. Collaborative providers expressed both frustration and apathy regarding the nature and frequency of engagement with SOLAS; significantly, all collaborating providers on Phases 4 and 6 of the programme reported that they had received no feedback on any of the issues that they had repeatedly highlighted over a number of years. Both SOLAS staff and collaborating providers confirmed to the review team that feedback mechanisms are not working as intended:

SOLAS acknowledges the deficiencies in the assessment feedback process to date. The issues stem primarily from the manual input of data into the SOLAS feedback log, and the lack of available SMEs [subject matter experts] to resolve technical issues with papers (SOLAS Provider Statement, p. 11)

HEI staff were unanimous in voicing deep frustration with the lack of any acknowledgement or response from SOLAS to feedback given through the formal feedback sheets, quality reports or other mechanisms. Communication was described by HEI staff as being “entirely one way” with “no close-out.” The review team saw evidence in quality reports (see Concerns 1 and 2 above) and feedback sheets that feedback on the accuracy of assessment questions and model answers, as well as on the risks associated with the repetitious use a small pool of assessment instruments, was made repeatedly by HEI staff, but was not acted upon. This appears to have created a culture within which HEI staff view feedback mechanisms as futile and meaningless. SOLAS staff also acknowledged that

the feedback log has not been actioned as well as they would like. Non-formal feedback mechanisms appear to work well in some instances and not in others. The review team heard from lecturing staff about significant difficulties in communicating with SOLAS about core aspects of programme delivery and assessment.

Concern 10

The review team finds that QQI's concerns regarding engagement by and between collaborating providers and SOLAS in the ongoing development and review of assessment instruments are substantiated. The review team has concern that the bank of questions for an online assessment model, which is currently under development, represents an incomplete solution which has not been developed in consultation with providers to determine its feasibility and appropriateness from a pedagogical perspective. There appear to have been no discussions between SOLAS and collaborating providers on the development (or implementation) of this proposed solution. As noted, several times already in this report, the relationship between SOLAS and partner HEIs appears to be fractured and one-sided. Whilst the review team heard examples of good interaction at an operational level, there is a concerning lack of engagement at the level of senior management oversight of the programme and the relationship with collaborating providers.

Wider sectoral committees that were in place previously seem to no longer exist, while the PAB does not meet regularly or routinely (as discussed previously). It would appear that the current MoUs in place between SOLAS and the collaborating providers are not fit for purpose and are not supporting the sound functioning of the relationship between SOLAS and HEIs. This relationship must be enhanced significantly for the effective delivery and assessment of the Advanced Certificate Craft – Electrical programme. In addition to enhanced bilateral relations underpinned by MoUs, the review team sees a value in a formal mechanism for routine, regular, collective discussion of key issues impacting programme design, delivery and assessment. Such a mechanism would not only enable the identification of sectoral responses to issues, but facilitate peer learning.

Looking outside of engagement with collaborating providers, there appears to be very limited (if any) engagement with apprentices and employers as new approaches to assessment are developed.

Wider discussion and consultation with all constituents is required for successful approaches to be identified and implemented.

5.2 Review Outcomes

The review team was asked to determine whether SOLAS QA procedures have been implemented and are effective in three specific areas related to assessment on phases 4 and 6 of the Advanced Certificate Craft – Electrical programme. Informed by the evaluation and findings outlined under Section 5.1 above, the review team’s determinations are summarized below.

1: Determine whether or not the quality assurance procedures established by SOLAS under section 28 of the 2012 Act in relation to the development and approval of assessment instruments relating to phases 4 and 6 of the Advanced Certificate Craft – Electrical programme are being implemented, and whether or not they are fit for purpose and appropriate (including consideration of Special consideration 1)

The review team finds that the quality assurance procedures established by SOLAS under section 28 of the 2012 Act in relation to the development and approval of assessment instruments relating to phases 4 and 6 of the Advanced Certificate Craft – Electrical programme are not being implemented in full. Further, the review team finds that these procedures could be further enhanced through more frequent engagement with collaborating providers on Phases 4 and 6 and employers, to ensure the currency and appropriateness of assessment instruments. In particular, the review team finds that, to date, there have not been sufficient resources to inform the development of reliable, up-to-date assessment instruments that facilitate collaborating providers to determine whether or not apprentices have demonstrated all relevant minimum intended programme learning outcomes. Additionally, the review team finds that there has not been a sufficient number of distinct and varied assessment instruments available which are appropriate to the number of collaborating providers conducting assessment at a national level to support the integrity of the assessment process.

2: Determine whether or not the quality assurance procedures established by SOLAS under section 28 of the 2012 Act in relation to the distribution of assessment instruments relating to phases 4 and 6

of the Advanced Certificate Craft – Electrical programme are being implemented, and whether or not they are fit for purpose and appropriate (including consideration of Special consideration 2)

The review team finds that the quality assurance procedures established by SOLAS under section 28 of the 2012 Act in relation to the distribution of assessment instruments relating to phases 4 and 6 of the Advanced Certificate Craft – Electrical programme are not being implemented in full. Consequently, the review team is not in a position to draw firm conclusion relating to the *potential* appropriateness of these procedures. Nonetheless, the review team finds that the means by which SOLAS assures itself of the integrity and security of the assessment development and distribution process requires significant enhancement, as do the means by which SOLAS identifies potential vulnerabilities in the distribution process that may compromise the integrity of the assessment process. The review team further finds that there are significant gaps in the means by which SOLAS designs and implements measures to mitigate the risks inherent in any potential vulnerabilities identified, and in which it takes action to respond to any security breaches identified and prevent similar breaches from arising in future.

3: Determine whether or not the procedures and processes that have been designed by SOLAS under section 28 of the 2012 Act are appropriate and fit for purpose to ensure an effective interface between SOLAS' QA procedures and those of collaborating providers with regard to the assessment of phases 4 and 6 of the Advanced Certificate Craft – Electrical programme, and whether the procedures and processes are being implemented effectively (including consideration of Special consideration 3)

From the evidence submitted, including discussions held at the site visit, the review team finds that the interface between SOLAS' QA procedures and those of collaborating providers with regard to the assessment of phases 4 and 6 of the Advanced Certificate Craft – Electrical programme has significant scope for enhancement. The review team is unable to confirm that these procedures and processes are being implemented effectively. The panel further finds that there are significant gaps and weaknesses in the means by which SOLAS assures itself that collaborating providers:

- apply their routine quality assurance infrastructure to the assessment of phases 4 and 6 of the Advanced Certificate Craft – Electrical programme to assure themselves of the security and validity of the assessment process;
- identify potential vulnerabilities in the assessment process that may compromise the integrity of the process;
- design and implement measures to mitigate the risks inherent in any potential vulnerabilities identified; and
- take action to respond to any security breaches identified and prevent similar breaches from arising in future.

6. REVIEW TEAM RECOMMENDATIONS/DIRECTIONS TO QQI

6.1 Directions

On foot of its findings, the review team recommends that QQI issue the following directions to SOLAS:

1. SOLAS, as a matter of urgency, completes full implementation of its QA processes for the assessment of the Advanced Certificate Craft – Electrical, and ensures full accountability through its management and governance structures for:
 - a. ensuring the consistent, ongoing implementation of those processes; and
 - b. exercising oversight of quality assurance implementation, as appropriate to SOLAS' role as coordinating provider.and
2. SOLAS immediately prioritises the resolution of the issues and concerns identified through this review process. To that end:
 - a. SOLAS is directed to produce a quality improvement plan (QIP) with associated roles, responsibilities and timelines clearly identified, to be submitted to, and agreed with, QQI as a matter of urgency. That QIP will address:
 - i. The implementation of governance arrangements for oversight of the programme, its delivery and assessment, including that the national Programme Advisory Board (PAB) be reconvened and meet on a regular basis and include apprentice representatives;
 - ii. The implementation of oversight arrangements for the relationship with the collaborative providers and the assessment process;
 - iii. The establishment of a routine monitoring process for the delivery and assessment of the Advanced Certificate Craft – Electrical;
 - iv. The security of all stages and aspects assessment practice;
 - v. The currency and accuracy of assessment instruments;
 - vi. The appropriateness of assessment instruments;
 - vii. Plans for engagement and consultation with collaborative providers generally (individually and collectively) and with particular reference to the

development and roll-out of alternative assessment systems to ensure their appropriateness and their feasibility;

- viii. Feedback mechanisms for collaborative providers and other stakeholders of the Advanced Certificate Craft – Electrical;
- ix. Document control arrangements within SOLAS relating to the Advanced Certificate Craft – Electrical; and
- x. Effective utilisation of data to inform continuous enhancement of the Advanced Certificate Craft – Electrical programme and its assessment.

6.2 Recommendations

The review team makes the following recommendations to QQI and SOLAS:

1. To ensure that the necessary improvements and adjustments are made promptly, and in order to maintain confidence in the Craft Electrical award, the review team recommends that QQI immediately convene a steering group of relevant parties to support SOLAS in the realisation of the aforementioned directives in a timely manner as quickly and effectively as possible.
2. The review team recommends that SOLAS move towards compliance with ISO 9000; however, efforts taken towards ISO 9000 compliance should not take precedence over, or detract from, the development and implementation of the aforementioned quality improvement plan.

7. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The review team finds that nine of the ten broad areas of concern identified by QQI in the terms of reference for the review are substantiated in full. Based on the evidence received, the review team was unable to determine whether QQI's concerns regarding the extent to which assessment instruments adequately capture all relevant learning outcomes and enable assessors to differentiate apprentice achievement are substantiated. Additionally, the review team concludes that there are numerous and serious deficiencies in the implementation and effectiveness of SOLAS' quality assurance procedures relating to assessment on Phases 4 and 6 of the Advanced Certificate Craft – Electrical programme. The review team recognises the efforts that have been, and continue to be, made by executive staff at SOLAS to address assessment issues. Nonetheless, the review team has concerns that these corrective actions appear to be undertaken in the absence of clear, full and appropriate QA oversight for craft apprenticeships within SOLAS and in the absence of dialogue with collaborating HEIs. This gives rise to the imposition of individual, unilateral solutions which are not always fully effective.²⁴ These concerns notwithstanding, the review team is conscious of the value in ensuring that SOLAS is provided with every opportunity to address these gaps and vulnerabilities in order to ensure the continuation of the apprenticeship system nationally.

²⁴ For example, the revised assessment instruments introduced in December 2024 and March 2025 which contained errors in both the assessment papers and the model answers.

APPENDIX A: Terms of Reference for the Focused Review



Review of Quality Assurance under Section 34(1)(b) of the Qualifications and Quality Assurance Act 2012

SOLAS

Terms of Reference

February 2025

Contents

Context.....	40
SOLAS	40
Causes for Concern.....	41
QQI's Policy on Monitoring and Causes for Concern	41
Areas of Concern with regard to SOLAS' Quality Assurance of Phases 4 and 6 of the Advanced Certificate Craft – Electrical	42
Focused Review	43
Section 34 (1)(b).....	43
This Focused Review Process.....	44
Scope of the Review	44
Terms of Reference for the Review	44
Purpose and Objectives of the Review	44
Purpose	44
Objectives.....	45
Areas for Special Consideration	45
Review Team	47
Review Report and Possible Outcomes.....	47
Provider Response to the Review Report.....	48
Consideration of the Outcomes of Review by QQI.....	48
Follow up.....	49
Organisation of the Review.....	49
The Review Team	49
Inputs to the Review	49
Indicative Timeline.....	50

Context

SOLAS

[An tSeirbhís Oideachais Leanúnaigh agus Scileanna \(SOLAS\)](#) is the State agency with authority for the setting of national policy and allocation of funding for the Irish Further Education and Training (FET) sector, as provided for by the [Further Education and Training Act 2013](#). SOLAS is also responsible for all matters relating to the regulation, registration, employment and education of apprentices as provided for by the [Industrial Training Act 1967](#). As a ‘relevant provider’ under the [Qualifications and Quality Assurance \(Education and Training\) Act 2012](#), SOLAS is required by Section 28 of the Act to prepare quality assurance procedures in relation to the programmes of education and training it provides that lead to QQI awards. In SOLAS’ case, this includes the national craft apprenticeship programmes, for which SOLAS is coordinating provider. Under Section 30 of the 2012 Act, these quality assurance procedures must be furnished in draft form to QQI for approval.

At a national level, the [Action Plan for Apprenticeship 2021-2025](#) sets out a five-year pathway to embed apprenticeship in enterprise and increase the diversity of learners who choose apprenticeship programmes. At the time of the action plan’s launch, it was noted that, while current programmes were being delivered on an ongoing basis and would need effective and transparent quality assurance by SOLAS, the governance configuration for the craft apprenticeship programmes could change significantly in the medium term. If this were to happen, the overarching QA and governance would need to be restructured and would require further approval by QQI when developed. QQI recognised that SOLAS’ quality assurance would need to evolve to adapt to this new scenario and that QQI’s approval of the then current QA procedures would reflect this reality. In December 2020, following a series of senior level interactions between the two organisations, QQI approved, subject to four conditions, SOLAS’ interim QA procedures for craft apprenticeships. The conditions related to the:

1. expansion of the high-level governance framework specified in the 2020 QA Handbook to incorporate formal and informal stakeholder engagement within the management and oversight structures,
2. updating of all relevant MOUs and SLAs to reflect the cultural change towards a more flexible, dynamic and collaborative model of apprenticeship,

3. clarification of SOLAS' roles and responsibilities with regard to internal QA, its role as regulator for craft and consortium-led apprenticeships, and as a coordinating provider, and
4. publication of the 2020 QA Handbook and other relevant policies and procedures on SOLAS' website.

In April 2023, SOLAS confirmed that it had addressed each of the special conditions of approval, and, in doing so, had reviewed, revised and augmented the 2020 QA Handbook. This revised version of the handbook (the 2023 QA Handbook) was approved by QQI on 8 June 2023 and is [published on SOLAS' website](#) alongside ancillary documents that are to be used by apprenticeship providers in conjunction with the QA procedures. These include SOLAS' [Craft Apprenticeship Assessment Rules \(2023\)](#).

Causes for Concern

QQI's Policy on Monitoring and Causes for Concern

As per QQI's [Policy on Monitoring](#), QQI may become aware of causes for concerns about a provider that necessitate action by QQI. Causes for concern provided for by the policy include:

- failure by a provider to effectively implement QA procedures as agreed with/notified to QQI, and
- concerns regarding the quality of education and training provision and standards attained by learners.

Causes of concern may arise from the provision of information about providers under QQI's routine monitoring processes. These include:

- complaints made by third parties,
- concerns raised by another body, and
- protected disclosures by employees of a provider.

Having become aware of causes for concern in respect of a provider and the implementation and/or effectiveness of its QA procedures, QQI will:

- seek to establish the veracity of the cause for concern,
- investigate the cause for concern,
- protect the confidentiality of the source of the cause (where possible and appropriate).

If it establishes that the cause for concern is legitimate, QQI will begin a series of engagements with the provider to address the issue. The outcomes of all QQI monitoring activities may be published, including the provider's response.

Possible consequences of such monitoring activities include (but are not limited to):

- the provider undertaking a self-evaluation using independent peer review,
- the imposition of additional conditions on a provider,
- re-validation of a programme,
- a requirement to provide additional information to QQI,
- withdrawal of programme validation,
- withholding of learner certification,
- initiation of a statutory review under the 2012 Act (hereinafter referred to as 'focused re-view'),
- a moratorium on further access to QQI services (for example, validation of new programmes).

Areas of Concern with regard to SOLAS' Quality Assurance of Phases 4 and 6 of the Advanced Certificate Craft – Electrical

Through the provision of information to QQI as part of its routine provider monitoring processes, QQI was given cause for concern about the quality assurance of assessment of phases 4 and 6 of the Advanced Certificate Craft – Electrical (the national electrical craft apprenticeship). These concerns relate to:

1. The validity of an assessment system that relies on a limited number of assessment instrument versions (in some cases, there is only one version used) for use at a national level by all students undertaking phases 4 and 6 of the Advanced Certificate Craft – Electrical and the re-use of the same assessment instruments across examination cycles.
2. The infrequent updating by SOLAS of assessment instruments for use at a national level by all students undertaking phases 4 and 6 of the Advanced Certificate Craft – Electrical.
3. Following from 1 and 2, the predictability of assessment and the associated risks to assessment integrity and validity.
4. The extent to which assessment instruments adequately capture all relevant learning outcomes and enable assessors to differentiate student achievement.

5. Clarity about the expected standards of attainment for grades, marking criteria and weighting and duration of assessments.
6. The effectiveness of SOLAS monitoring and reporting processes for apprenticeship programme delivery.
7. The effectiveness of the interface between SOLAS' assessment procedures for the programme and each collaborating provider's approved quality assurance procedures.
8. The effectiveness of measures to ensure the security and confidentiality of assessment instruments.
9. The operation of feedback mechanisms between teaching/tutoring staff within collaborating providers and SOLAS assessment staff.
10. Engagement by and between collaborating providers and SOLAS in the ongoing development and review of assessment instruments.

In accordance with the process set out in QQI's Policy on Monitoring and summarised above, QQI has, during the period from November 2024 to January 2025, engaged constructively with SOLAS to investigate and establish the veracity of the causes for concern brought to its attention. Based on the outcomes of this engagement, QQI is now initiating a statutory (focused) review of the effectiveness and implementation of the quality assurance procedures established by SOLAS in respect of phases 4 and 6 of the national electrical craft apprenticeship programmes.

Focused Review

Section 34 (1)(b)

As set out in [section 34 \(1\)\(b\) of the Qualifications and Quality Assurance Act 2012](#), Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) may conduct a review (a focused review) of the effectiveness of a provider's quality assurance procedures and their implementation from time to time as it thinks appropriate. As noted above, this type of review may be triggered by the identification of a specific cause (or causes) for concern and QQI's investigations are initiated on the basis of same. To guide the conduct of focused reviews, QQI has established [Procedures for Focused Reviews on the Implementation and Effectiveness of Provider QA Procedures](#).

This Focused Review Process

This focused review will focus on SOLAS' role as coordinating provider of the Advanced Certificate Craft – Electrical, which entails *inter alia* responsibility for the development and implementation of quality assurance procedures for the programme, **including with regard to the development and distribution of assessment instruments**. Provision of the Advanced Certificate Craft – Electrical is undertaken by **collaborating providers**²⁵. The review will also consider how SOLAS assures itself that collaborating providers are implementing appropriate quality assurance measures to ensure the security, integrity and validity of assessment administered in phases 4 and 6 of the programme.

Scope of the Review

As set out directly above, QQI is initiating a focused review that will consider explicitly the effectiveness of the quality assurance procedures established by SOLAS in respect of the assessment of phases 4 and 6 of the Advanced Certificate Craft – Electrical programme, as well as the implementation of these procedures. This will include consideration of the interface between SOLAS quality assurance procedures and those of the collaborating providers responsible for the delivery and assessment of phases 4 and 6 of the programme to ensure the security, currency, validity and integrity of the content and the delivery of the relevant assessments.

Terms of Reference for the Review

Purpose and Objectives of the Review

Purpose

The purpose of this focused review is to:

1. Evaluate the effectiveness of the quality assurance procedures established by SOLAS and approved by QQI in relation to the assessment of phases 4 and 6 of the Advanced Certificate Craft – Electrical programme, including **procedures and processes that have been designed**

²⁵ **Collaborating providers** are organisations (technological universities, institutes of technology, and education and training boards) that work in partnership with SOLAS, as coordinating provider, to support delivery of the apprenticeship. This review will consider the assessment of phases 4 and 6 of the Advanced Certificate Craft – Electrical programme, for which the relevant collaborating providers are Atlantic Technological University, Dundalk Institute of Technology, Munster Technological University, South East Technological University, TU Dublin, and Technological University of the Shannon.

and implemented by SOLAS to ensure oversight of the interface between SOLAS' QA procedures and those of collaborating providers with regard to the assessment of phases 4 and 6.

This will incorporate consideration of whether the related channels of communication between SOLAS and the collaborating providers are appropriate, sufficient and effective.

2. Determine whether or not these procedures are being fully and effectively implemented.

Objectives

The objectives of the review are to:

- determine whether or not the quality assurance procedures established by SOLAS under Section 28 of the 2012 Act in relation to the **development and approval of assessment instruments** relating to phases 4 and 6 of the Advanced Certificate Craft – Electrical programme are being implemented, and whether or not they are fit for purpose and appropriate.
- determine whether or not the quality assurance procedures established by SOLAS under Section 28 of the 2012 Act in relation to the **distribution of assessment instruments** relating to phases 4 and 6 of the Advanced Certificate Craft – Electrical programme are being implemented, and whether or not they are fit for purpose and appropriate.
- determine whether or not the procedures and processes that have been designed by SOLAS under section 28 of the 2012 Act are appropriate and fit for purpose **to ensure an effective interface between SOLAS' QA procedures and those of collaborating providers** with regard to the assessment of phases 4 and 6 of the Advanced Certificate Craft – Electrical programme, and whether the procedures and processes are being implemented effectively.

Areas for Special Consideration

While addressing the objectives of the review, the review team should give special consideration to the following areas, along with any other activities consistent with the terms of reference for the review that it considers necessary or expedient:

- The **procedures and associated processes that SOLAS has established to manage and coordinate the development and approval of assessment instruments** for phases 4 and 6 of the Advanced Certificate Craft – Electrical programme, including the procedures (and associated processes) in place to ensure the availability of:

- **Timely, sufficient appropriate and current subject-matter expertise** to inform the development of reliable, up-to-date assessment instruments that will facilitate collaborating providers to determine whether or not apprentices have demonstrated the relevant minimum intended learning outcomes.
- **A sufficient number of distinct and varied assessment instruments** appropriate to the number of collaborating providers conducting assessment at a national level to support the integrity of the assessment process.
- The procedures and associated processes that SOLAS has established to support the **distribution to collaborating providers of assessment instruments** for phases 4 and 6 of the Advanced Certificate Craft – Electrical programme, including the means by which SOLAS:
 - assures itself of the **integrity and security** of the assessment development and distribution process.
 - **identifies potential vulnerabilities** in the distribution process that may compromise the integrity of the assessment process.
 - designs and implements measures to **mitigate the risks** inherent in any potential vulnerabilities identified.
 - takes **action to respond to any security breaches** identified and prevent similar breaches from arising in future.
- The **procedures and processes that have been developed and implemented by SOLAS to ensure oversight of the interface between SOLAS' QA procedures and those of collaborating providers** – in particular with regard to collaborating providers' administration of assessment processes for phases 4 and 6 of the Advanced Certificate Craft – Electrical programme, and including how SOLAS assures itself that the collaborating providers:
 - **apply their routine quality assurance infrastructure to the assessment** of phases 4 and 6 of the Advanced Certificate Craft – Electrical programme.
 - assure themselves of the **security and validity** of the assessment process.
 - **identify potential vulnerabilities** in the assessment process that may compromise the integrity of the process.
 - design and implement measures to **mitigate the risks** inherent in any potential vulnerabilities identified.

- **take action to respond to any security breaches** identified and prevent similar breaches from arising in future.

Review Team

QQI will appoint an independent external review team to undertake this focused review.

The review team will comprise both national and international expertise, as well as representation from both the higher education and further education and training sectors, including:

1. A **chairperson**, who is a current or former senior leader of a higher education or further education and training provider and who has significant experience of the governance and quality assurance of tertiary education providers and their provision of education and training.
2. A **coordinating reviewer** with experience and understanding of the quality assurance of apprenticeship programmes and a comprehensive understanding of quality assurance in the tertiary education sector.
3. A **quality assurance expert**, who has demonstrable experience and understanding of the quality assurance of work-based learning, franchising and/or collaborative provision, and assessment, as well as quality assurance in the tertiary education sector, and a knowledge and understanding of QQI processes.
4. At least two **subject-matter experts** with experience of and expertise in the teaching and assessment of the off-the-job phases of electrical apprenticeship programmes in jurisdictions other than Ireland.
5. An apprentice **learner** (from the construction area).

Review Report and Possible Outcomes

Following its evaluation of SOLAS' quality assurance procedures, the review team will produce a report outlining its findings. The coordinating reviewer will take responsibility for producing the report on behalf of the review team and in consultation with QQI. In the interests of equity and reliability, the review team will set out in its report the grounds for each of its findings and recommendations.

The report will set out the key findings of the review team in relation to:

- i) *the implementation of QA procedures by (coordinating and collaborating) providers with regard to the development and distribution of assessment instruments associated with phases 4 and 6 of the Advanced Certificate Craft – Electrical programme.*
- ii) *the governance measures in place in SOLAS and within the collaborating providers with regard to the development and distribution of assessment instruments associated with phases 4 and 6 of the Advanced Certificate Craft – Electrical programme.*
- iii) *the effectiveness of those quality assurance procedures, with particular reference to any areas of concern identified in the terms of reference.*
- iv) *the implementation by SOLAS of any conditions made by QQI with regard to its quality assurance procedures.*
- v) *any other matters identified in the terms of reference or areas for special consideration.*

Based on its findings, the review team will make recommendations to QQI regarding any potential directions to be issued to SOLAS concerning the implementation and effectiveness of its quality assurance procedures. The review team may also make recommendations to QQI about its oversight of the effectiveness of SOLAS' QA procedures and to the collaborating providers involved in the delivery of the programme.

Provider Response to the Review Report

The provider will receive a copy of the draft review report and will have two weeks to comment on matters of factual accuracy contained therein.

The provider will also be invited to prepare a response to the review team report. The response may include a plan for the implementation of any recommendations made by the review team. That response and implementation plan will be subject to the approval through SOLAS' academic governance procedures prior to submission to QQI for its consideration.

Consideration of the Outcomes of Review by QQI

QQI will publish the terms of reference, the review team report, and any response to the report provided by SOLAS. All relevant agencies and bodies with a vested interest in SOLAS or its programmes, e.g. the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and

Science (DFHERIS), the Higher Education Authority, and the collaborating providers involved in the delivery of these phases of the programme will be informed of the review and its outcomes.

Follow up

At the conclusion of the review, QQI will agree with SOLAS a timeline and process to follow up on any recommendations made or directions arising from the focused review report. Initial follow-up will occur not later than 12 months following the publication of the review report. If required, shorter timelines for implementation will apply.

Organisation of the Review

The Review Team

As above, the review team will be appointed by QQI. Team members will undertake their roles in accordance with QQI's [Roles, Responsibilities and Code of Conduct for Reviewers and Evaluators](#). Secretarial support to the review team will be provided by QQI.

Inputs to the Review

QQI will provide to the review team information relevant to the terms of reference that it holds on record, for example:

- documentation relating to the approval of SOLAS' QA procedures and validation of craft apprenticeship programmes and details of QQI's oversight of the implementation and effectiveness of same,
- formal QA agreements between SOLAS as coordinating provider of the Advanced Certificate Craft – Electrical and the collaborating providers,
- correspondence with SOLAS in relation to craft apprenticeship programmes and their assessment,
- relevant Annual Quality Reports from the collaborating providers,
- monitoring information and data relating to the apprenticeship programmes,
- certification data, and any other information held by QQI that is sought by the review team.

SOLAS will submit by the agreed date(s) to the review team:

- a) A provider statement, no longer than 30 pages, which will:

- i. provide a brief overview of SOLAS' operating context, its functions in relation to craft apprenticeship programmes (with specific reference to the Advance Certificate Craft – Electrical programme), including discrete responsibilities, as well as those shared with collaborating providers, and details of communication and engagement with collaborating providers.
- ii. provide a brief self-assessment by SOLAS of the effectiveness and implementation of its quality assurance procedures relating to assessment of phases 4 and 6 of the Advanced Certificate Craft – Electrical programme.
- iii. address each of the objectives and special considerations for the review team set out in the terms of reference.

b) Any additional information or evidence sought by the review team.

Indicative Timeline

Milestone	When
Establishment of review panel	Mid-end February
Completion of the Provider Statement and submission to QQI for circulation to the review team	7 March
Finalisation of review site visit schedule – to include meetings with: - SOLAS key executives involved in the quality assurance and assessment of phases 4 and 6 of the Advanced Certificate Craft – Electrical programme, - Representatives of relevant SOLAS governance entities (board, programme board and relevant sub-committees), - Representatives of senior leadership from all collaborating providers for phases 4 and 6 of the Advanced Certificate Craft – Electrical programme, - Representatives of lecturers/instructors who deliver and assess these phases from all	Beginning-mid March

collaborating providers for phases 4 and 6 of the Advanced Certificate Craft – Electrical programme, - Representatives of the examinations office and academic administration from all collaborating providers for phases 4 and 6 of the Advanced Certificate Craft – Electrical programme, - Representatives of employers who provide on-the-job instruction for apprentices on the Advanced Certificate Craft – Electrical programme, - Representatives of learners enrolled on and recent graduates of the Advanced Certificate Craft – Electrical programme.	
Review team site visit, entailing a series of meetings with key stakeholders involved in the delivery of the Advanced Certificate Craft – Electrical programme (see above), to take place over a period of not less than three days.	End March/beginning April
Drafting of report by the review team (iterative process, with drafts submitted to QQI for comment)	Mid-April – end-May
Submission of final report to QQI by the review team Sharing of report with SOLAS	End May Beginning June
Submission of SOLAS' factual accuracy check of the report to QQI	Mid-June
Formal response by SOLAS to the review team's report, to include implementation plan from SOLAS, approved through SOLAS governance processes and submitted to QQI	End June
Submission of the review report, together with SOLAS' response and implementation plan, to QQI's Approvals and Reviews Committee for approval Submission of any directions recommended by the review team to QQI's Board for approval	Beginning July August Board Meeting

Publication of final report together with terms of reference, and SOLAS' response and implementation plan, if appropriate	End August
Follow up by QQI on the implementation of any directions and/or recommendations issued as outcomes of the review process	September 2026

APPENDIX B: List of Documentation Considered by the Review Team

No.	Document Title	Shared on	Shared by
1	Terms of Reference for the Review of QA under S. 34(1)(b) of the Qualifications and Quality Assurance Act 2012 – SOLAS	Document finalised in February 2025 and shared with reviewers as they confirmed the absence of any conflict of interest (Feb/March 2025)	QQI
2	Provider briefing slides (SOLAS)	14.03.2025	QQI
3	Review site visit schedule template	14.03.2025	QQI
4	SOLAS Provider Statement	14.03.2025	SOLAS
5	Programme Descriptor for Advanced Certificate Craft – Electrical	14.03.2025	QQI
6	Independent evaluation report for revalidation of Advanced Certificate Craft – Electrical programme	14.03.2025	QQI
7	(DUPLICATE) Programme Descriptor for Advanced Certificate Craft - Electrical	19.03.2025	SOLAS
8	Current Brochure for Advanced Certificate Craft – Electrical	19.03.2025	SOLAS
9	Current Occupational Profile - Advanced Certificate Craft – Electrical	19.03.2025	SOLAS
10	Sample assessment: EPh4 P1A Rev 6	19.03.2025	SOLAS
11	Sample assessment: EPh4 T1 Rev 6	19.03.2025	SOLAS
12	Sample assessment: EPh4 T2 Rev 6	19.03.2025	SOLAS
13	Sample assessment: Eph6 T1 Rev 6	19.03.2025	SOLAS
14	Sample assessment: Eph6 T2 Rev 6	19.03.2025	SOLAS
15	ELE (On-the-Job) Rev 6 – DRAFT	19.03.2025	SOLAS
16	QQI Foc Rev Additional Info	19.03.2025	SOLAS
17	Revision of the Programme – Advanced Certificate (Craft) Electrical	19.03.2025	SOLAS
18	POL-QA-001 QA Business Policy	27.03.2025	SOLAS
19	E [001-438] Rev 5.2	01.04.2025	SOLAS
20	Electrical – Curriculum and Assessment Revision System	01.04.2025	SOLAS
21	Electrical-v4-a4-brochure	01.04.2025	SOLAS
22	Focussed Review Additional Information (email)	01.04.2025	SOLAS
23	Fw_Assessment Breach – Electrical Assessments_Change to Assessment Distribution Process - Term 2 2024_25	01.04.2025	SOLAS
24	PROC-OPS-003 Test Bank Development Procedure Effective	01.04.2025	SOLAS
25	(DUPLICATE) Advanced Certificate Craft – Electrical Programme Descriptor	03.04.2025	SOLAS
26	Apprentices LogBook	03.04.2025	SOLAS
27	E Ph 4 & 6 Assessments Inventory	03.04.2025	SOLAS

28	Timeline regarding communication of alleged assessment breaches	03.04.2025	SOLAS
29	Fw_Electrical Breach (email)	03.04.2025	SOLAS
30	Screenshot of Fw_Assessment Breach – Electrical Assessments_Change to Assessment Distribution Process - Term 2 2024_25 (email) – with distribution list visible	03.04.2025	SOLAS
31	Online Exams Proposal 2025	03.04.2025	SOLAS
32	Phase 4 Broadsheet	03.04.2025	SOLAS
33	Phase 6 Electrical	03.04.2025	SOLAS
34	Provider Distribution Term 2 March 2025	03.04.2025	SOLAS
35	Re_Focused review_Review team documentation requests_Revisions required to site visit schedule (email of 3 April)	03.04.2025	SOLAS
36	2022-2025 Electrical PHASE 4&6 assessment versions uploaded to CASCADE for delivery and versions used by TU_IOTs into the ACSS	04.04.2025	SOLAS
37	Assessment Log QQI Review	04.04.2025	SOLAS
38	Curriculum and Assessment Revision System – Electrical	04.04.2025	SOLAS
39	Re_Focused review_Review team documentation requests_revisions required to site visit schedule (email of 4 April)	04.04.2025	SOLAS
40	SOLAS Terms of Reference for Craft Apprenticeships Programme Review and Revalidation	04.04.2025	SOLAS
41	SOLAS draft site visit schedule (revision of 4 April 2025)	04.04.2025	SOLAS
42	Timeline of QQI interaction with SOLAS on assessment concerns re Advanced Certificate Craft – Electrical	03.04.2025	QQI
43	Email thread between QQI and SOLAS (18 October) re breach/sale of assessment instruments	03.04.2025	QQI
44	Email thread between QQI re issues with P6 T3 assessment	03.04.2025	QQI
45	Email thread between SOLAS and QQI relating to issues with assessment (November 13 2024)	03.04.2025	QQI
46	Email from Head of QA to SOLAS on 6 December, following consideration of applications for revalidation of apprenticeship programmes by QQI's Programmes and Awards Executive Committee, highlighting concerns re	03.04.2025	QQI

	assessment and related conditions of validation.		
47	Email to SOLAS from QQI on 6 December following initial request of Head of QA for follow-up to December PAEC.	03.04.2025	QQI
48	Queries sent to SOLAS by QQI on 11 December 2025 (email) - with attached Word document with queries	03.04.2025	QQI
49	Response from SOLAS to QQI queries of 11 December 2025 (18 December 2024)	03.04.2025	QQI
50	Note from QQI to SOLAS concerning Phase 6 T3 exam (18 December 2025)	03.04.2025	QQI
51	Email SOLAS response to QQI queries of 18 December 2024 re P6 T3 exam (plus attachment)	03.04.2025	QQI
52	Note of meeting between QQI and SOLAS – 23 January 2025	03.04.2025	QQI
53	Email thread between QQI and SOLAS (11 February 2025) re development of new assessment instruments and QA of assessment instruments.	03.04.2025	QQI
54	Email from SOLAS to QQI Head of QA advising of further breach of assessment instrument Phase 6 Electrical P1 (March 2025) a. Phase 6 assessment materials list Practical Paper PLC (subject of breach) b. Phase 6 Assessment Practical Paper PLC (subject of breach) c. Photos of mock assessment circulated in [institution] in Wk 8 2025	03.04.2025	QQI
55	Note from QQI's Senior Strategic Advisor on all concerns and allegations made to QQI by third parties about SOLAS assessment (redacted)	03.04.2025	QQI
56	Ph4 and Ph6 assessments for all craft apprenticeships (see tab 'E' for Advanced Cert Craft – Electrical)	03.04.2025	QQI
57	Email from QQI to SOLAS following initial submission of provider statement	03.04.2025	QQI
58	Series of feedback sheets on assessment instruments (with log of same) from collaborating providers	06.04.2025	QQI

59	Documents with detail re difficulties obtaining and procuring SMEs: - Narrative summary on the difficulties in obtaining and procuring the services of SMEs in writing and updating assessments - Email response from HEA (03.09.2024)	06.04.2025	QQI
60	Assessment instruments shared by SOLAS with QQI: - E Ph6 P1A Materials List Rev 5. - E Ph6 P1A Rev 5.2 - E Ph6 T1H Rev 5.2 - E Ph6 T1J Rev 5 [Lines] - E Ph6 T2H Rev 5.2 - E Ph6 T2J Rev 5 [Lines] - E Ph6 T3C PLC Rev 5.2 - Sample Theory Rubric - T2 Q1 and Q2 Questions	06.04.2025	QQI
61	CASCADE SOLAS Assessment Distribution Procedure	06.04.2025	QQI
62	SOLAS Review Team Briefing Presentation	31.03.2025	QQI

APPENDIX C: Site Visit Schedule

SOLAS Focused Review - Site Visit

Day 1: 7th April 2025

Time (GMT)	Group
8.45 - 9.15	<i>Private Review Team Meeting</i>
9.15 - 9.30	CEO & SOLAS Coordinators: Welcome and Introductions
9.30 - 10:45	SOLAS Senior Leadership Team CEO, SOLAS Director, National Apprenticeship Office Programme Director for Apprenticeship Director, Research, Future Skills Needs, Statistics and Risk
10:45-11:05	<i>Private Review Team Meeting / Break</i>
11:05-12:20	SOLAS key executives Manager, Apprenticeship x2 Assistant Manager, Apprenticeship QA x 2 Assistant Manager, Apprenticeship Development Officer, Electrical Project Officer
12:20-12:40	<i>Private Review Team Meeting</i>
12:40-13:40	Lunch
13:40-14:10	SOLAS key executives Session 2 Manager, Apprenticeship (x2) Assistant Manager, Apprenticeship QA (x2) Assistant Manager, Apprenticeship Development Officer, Electrical Project Officer
14:10-14:30	<i>Private Review Team Meeting / Break</i>
14:30-15:30	Learners Apprentices - recently completed Phase 4 (x 3) Apprentices - recently Completed Phase 6 (x2)

Apprentices - recently qualified (x3)

15:30-15:45 Private Review Team Meeting / Break

15:45-17:00 Representatives of senior leadership within collaborating providers

Heads of relevant Departments/Schools/Functions x 7

17:00-17:15 Private review team meeting

SOLAS Focused Review - Site Visit

Day 2: 8th April 2025

8.45 - 9.15	<i>Private Review Team Meeting</i>
9.15 - 9.30	Meeting with SOLAS coordinator to discuss any additional documentation required
9.30-10.45	Tutors and lecturers from the collaborating providers involved in the teaching and the design and delivery of assessment of phases 4 and 6 of the Advanced Certificate Craft - Electrical, including past and present members of the Programme Advisory Board for the programme Lectures x 11 from ATU, DkIT, MTU, SETU and TU Dublin
10.45-11.00	<i>Private Review Team Meeting</i>
11.00-12.00	Representatives of academic administration (incl. examinations offices) from collaborating providers Exams Officer, Dundalk IoT Senior Staff Officer for the School of Engineering, Examinations Officer for Apprenticeships, Dundalk IoT Administrative Assistant for Apprenticeships, Dundalk IoT Examination Administration, TU Dublin Faculty Administrator, SETU Examination Management, MTU
12.00-12.15	<i>Private Review Team Meeting / Break</i>
12.15-13.15	Lunch
13.15-14.15	Meeting with Chair of SOLAS Board
14.15 – 14.45	Employers Representative of 1 Major Employer
14.45-17.00	<i>Private Review Team Meeting / Break</i>
17.15-17.30	Presentation of Initial Findings and Recommendations to SOLAS Director, National Apprenticeship Office Programme Director for Apprenticeship Manager, Apprenticeship (x2) Manager Apprenticeship

APPENDIX D: Employer Survey

Focused review of SOLAS quality assurance of SOLAS phases 4 and 6 assessments

This questionnaire is being issued to employers of apprentices enrolled on the Advanced Certificate Craft - Electrical programme. The quality assurance of phase 4 and 6 assessments is currently being reviewed by Quality and Qualifications Ireland and your views and experience as an employer will contribute to ensuring that apprentices enrolled on the Advanced Certificate Craft – Electrical are subject to robust and fair assessment processes that allow them to demonstrate their knowledge, skill and competence and support the integrity of the qualification and the profession.

Your responses are completely anonymous.

We would be grateful if you could complete this survey by close of business on Thursday, 17 April.

1. Are you aware of issues related to the integrity and security of the assessment process for the Advanced Certificate Craft - Electrical programme?
2. If you answered 'yes' to Q1, when did you first become aware of these issues?
3. What was the source of these concerns?
4. Did you discuss these concerns with SOLAS?
5. If you answered 'yes' to Q4, what was SOLAS' response?
6. Based on what you know about the assessment system and any issues/challenges observed during on-the-job phases, do you have any concerns about the integrity of the qualification/profession? If 'yes', please describe these concerns.
7. Please provide any other comments you have on this matter, including any comments on the on-the-job element of assessment, supports for apprentices, etc.



***SOLAS Provider Response to the
Report of the Independent Review Team on the QQI Focused Review on the
Implementation and Effectiveness of Quality Assurance Procedures by SOLAS for
Phase 4 and 6 of the Advanced Certificate Craft – Electrical programme***

22nd October 2025

1. Introduction

This report sets out the Provider Response to the Report of the Independent Review Team on Electrical Assessment at Phases 4 and 6 which was circulated to SOLAS as the final version on 15th October 2025. The Provider Response as intended sets out material that we believe is essential in demonstrating the response to issues highlighted and sets out the plan to address remaining findings as part of this process.

SOLAS would like to acknowledge the work of the review panel and QQI in the production of this report, which articulates the complexities of the system, current challenges and opportunities for improvement.

SOLAS has taken the engagement with the review team and QQI colleagues extremely seriously and has been working with QQI colleagues intensively since the emerging recommendations were made clear to us on 17th April 2025. This provider response will provide opportunity to demonstrate the attention and action already put in place for some of the matters raised. Reforms and developments around quality assurance of wider craft apprenticeship programmes have been discussed and agreed with QQI continuously over the last few years, and we would hope to maintain this close working relationship as we move into this critical period of further change for electrical and wider craft apprenticeship provision. We remain wholly and absolutely committed to taking the necessary action to address these recommendations and will highlight the significant progress already made across many areas of concern and outline the plan with timelines for continuous quality improvement throughout this provider response.

In order to address the matters raised, we have developed this provider response in a structured way as outlined below:

- Section 2 sets out the critical context around SOLAS and apprenticeship and the scale of resources, commitment and operations which has driven both national and international recognition of the quality of apprentices produced.
- Section 3 discusses the review process, and the need to take account of a range of factors in considering the findings of the report.
- Section 4 makes clear SOLAS' commitment to addressing the recommendations, the oversight arrangements to ensure full delivery, and the quality improvement plan being agreed with QQI. Reference to wider reform of the apprenticeship system is also referred to here.
- Section 5 sets out other actions being progressed in response to the issues raised.

2. SOLAS and Apprenticeships

2.1 SOLAS and the Evolving Apprenticeship System

SOLAS, and its previous organisational incarnations, Fás and AnCo, has been the primary driver of the apprenticeship system as we know it in Ireland. The Industrial Training Act 1967 established AnCo as the coordinator of apprenticeship, with it then setting up the structured four year craft apprenticeship programme. Although regional technical colleges (RTCs) – which later became Institutes of Technology and then merged into Technological Universities – took on responsibility for some off-the-job apprenticeship training in the 1970's. AnCo directly delivered a significant base of craft apprenticeship training directly. This practice continued with the establishment of Fás in 1988, and it was only when Fás was dissolved in 2013 and SOLAS established as a funding, strategy and accountability body, that training activity was no longer directly delivered by the organisation. All Phase 2 off-the-job craft apprenticeship training was then delivered by newly formed Education and Training Boards (ETBs), and all Phase 4 and Phase 6 training by Higher Education Institutions (HEI's). The transformation journey across the system has continued ever since, with key developments including:

- The very first action plan for apprenticeship in 2015 charging SOLAS with the development of new consortia-led apprenticeship established via the approval of industrial training orders by the SOLAS Board. To date, some 53 diverse new apprenticeship programmes have been set up, on top of the 25 craft apprenticeship programmes which were already in existence.
- The transition to a craft apprenticeship training approach where training was delivered by independent providers across FET (Further Education and Training) and HE with their own respective quality assurance infrastructure, while SOLAS retained the overall status as coordinating provider. This included establishment of MoUs with HEIs to embed quality approaches, and the transfer of training infrastructure (including staff) from SOLAS to ETBs.
- The impact of COVID restrictions, with apprenticeship training facilities closed for 9 out of the first 15 months of the pandemic, and restrictions on capacity in place for two full years, creating a massive backlog of demand for off-the-job training.
- The policy commitment, set out in the Action Plan for Apprenticeship 2021-2025, to move the coordinating provider responsibility for crafts from SOLAS to education and training providers, framed by a consortia-led approach.
- The establishment of a National Apprenticeship Office (NAO) in 2022, to ensure oversight of the apprenticeship system reflective of its span across both FET and HE sectors, and to drive growth and development of apprenticeships.

From 2023, addressing apprenticeship waiting lists became the system's top priority, with significant resources redirected, new delivery models adopted, and additional workshops and instructors provided. This limited progress on broader curriculum and quality assurance reforms.

Amidst all of this change and growth in apprenticeship, the maintenance and modernisation of robust high quality craft apprenticeship provision in line with rapidly evolving industry needs has been a core driver. We have worked very closely with QQI to agree approaches and work programmes throughout this period, and a QQI revalidation exercise of 5 craft apprenticeship programmes commenced in 2023, with an accelerated revalidation approach for 17 others being provided by QQI throughout 2024. Throughout this period there was mutual acknowledgement by both agencies of the complexities of quality assurance in a multi-stakeholder environment where coordinating provider and training delivery organisations were separated; and of the ongoing challenges noted above, particularly around COVID and its aftermath. Indeed, some of the work planned in response to this report was already in the pipeline as part of an agreed approach with QQI.

The above demonstrates the extent to which SOLAS is, and has always been, completely immersed and committed to all of its responsibilities with regard to apprenticeship, and indeed the proactive partnership with QQI which has existed throughout that time. There are currently 69 posts dedicated to supporting apprenticeship within SOLAS, while over €250million is distributed to ETBs to deliver training (with the HEA allocating resources for Phase 4 and 6 delivery in HEIs) The focused review report must be read and understood in this context, and in line with the ongoing quality enhancement agenda with which SOLAS and QQI have been intensively engaged in recent years. We remain absolutely committed to continuing to ensure the quality, success and excellence of a globally recognised apprenticeship system, delivering on the recommendations of the review, and working to maintain a good working relationship with QQI, built on mutual respect and acknowledgement of our respective responsibilities.

2.2 SOLAS Governance of Apprenticeships

The focused review as it stands provides commentary around the role of the SOLAS Board in oversight of the issues in hand. While education providers have Governing Body and Academic Council structures, SOLAS has a corporate board, with specific legislative responsibilities in relation to apprenticeships. The SOLAS Board ensures strong oversight of all aspects of craft apprenticeship provision, and has evolved its approach to reflect apprenticeship system developments, including:

- Approval of Industrial Training Orders to allow the establishment of new apprenticeship programmes, and ensuring statutory duties are fulfilled around maintaining employer and apprentice registers.
- Board representation on the National Apprenticeship Alliance, which is the national advisory committee overseeing the overall apprenticeship system.
- Regular consideration of the craft apprenticeship matters as part of the main SOLAS board agenda, including most recently on assessment issues, the revalidation of craft programmes, capacity and waiting lists, and modernisation of curricula.
- A sub-committee of the Board, the National Apprenticeship Advisory Committee, with specific responsibility for oversight of craft apprenticeship, involving employer, union and provider stakeholders. This met until September 2023, when it was wound down to reflect the overlapping role of the alliance. Craft apprenticeship matters are regularly brought to the SOLAS Board on relevant matters.

With regard to this focused review and the protected disclosure that promoted it, the Board has continued to be informed of its progress and its implications for SOLAS, with key points including:

- The Chair of SOLAS meeting with the review panel
- The SOLAS Audit and Risk Committee (ARC) informed of the disclosure within our annual protected disclosures report.
- The Board being regularly updated on assessment issues as part of Board updates on the intensive revalidation and curriculum modernisation process on which we are currently engaging (updates took place for Board meetings on 27 March, 24 April, 5 June, 10 July and 18 September)
- One of the long standing risks on our corporate risk register, which is overseen by the ARC and discussed regularly by the Board, is the need to move to a single integrated apprenticeship system, and to migrate the coordinating provider role held by SOLAS to the actual education and training providers (Education and Training Boards and the Technological Universities).
- Updates on the focused review process provided to the Board in April, June, July and September 25 and were discussed in detail.

In line with the recommendations of the review, and to ensure continued Board focus on the implementation of the quality improvements required, a Board sub-group has now been set up to specifically monitor progress in this regard.

The first meeting of this sub-group is taking place on 23rd October and will agree areas of focus within the wider apprenticeship system but also being provided with updates at each meeting on the progress of the Quality Improvement Plan.

2.3 The Quality of the Electrical Apprenticeship Programme

SOLAS has a team of 34 staff members working on craft apprenticeship and 28 of these roles are directly linked to ensuring the ongoing quality of the programmes. Each craft programme, including Electrical, has a dedicated Development Officer to oversee the ongoing development of the curricula and assessment.

Working in parallel with the Development Officers is a team of Quality Assurance staff who carry out work around the integrity and validity of all aspects of the craft apprenticeship programmes and their assessments. This work involves –

- Selection and secure distribution of assessment materials to delivery providers
- Monitoring and actioning feedback mechanisms and engaging with relevant stakeholders where required

- Document control and maintenance of records
- Liaising with QA partners, such as QQI
- Preparing reports and updates for internal and external stakeholders, such as the SOLAS board, Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS) and QQI
- Participation on the Programme Boards
- Preparing programmes for validation / revalidation with QQI within the required timeframe

Curriculum content is monitored for currency and validity by the Development Officer. Observations around potential improvements to programmes are captured and brought to a Programme Board for consideration and action. In the case of Electrical, the Programme Board has recently been refreshed and membership updated to reflect the ongoing needs of industry, delivery partners, apprentices and employers. Scheduled to meet 4 times per annum, this mechanism is the vehicle for successful programme updates, sample assessment reviews, relevant occupational profiling and continuous monitoring of best practice.

Work arising from Programme Board meetings is actioned by the Development Officers and / or the Quality Assurance team where the assistance of subject matter experts may also be sought to bring the required changes or improvements to fruition and implementation stage. At the time of this response, there are currently 16 Electrical subject matter experts working with SOLAS in the development of programme materials.

To assist subject matter experts in their work, test specifications are developed alongside curricula documents. This details the range of skills and knowledge to be assessed as part of the Electrical. This informs both the Development Officer and the subject matter expert of assessment content and allows for a closed loop validation process, with questions being mapped back to learning outcomes. Assessments are monitored and refreshed on an ongoing basis across all programmes, including Electrical. For the Trade of Electrician, there are number of assessment versions for each phase is currently as follows:

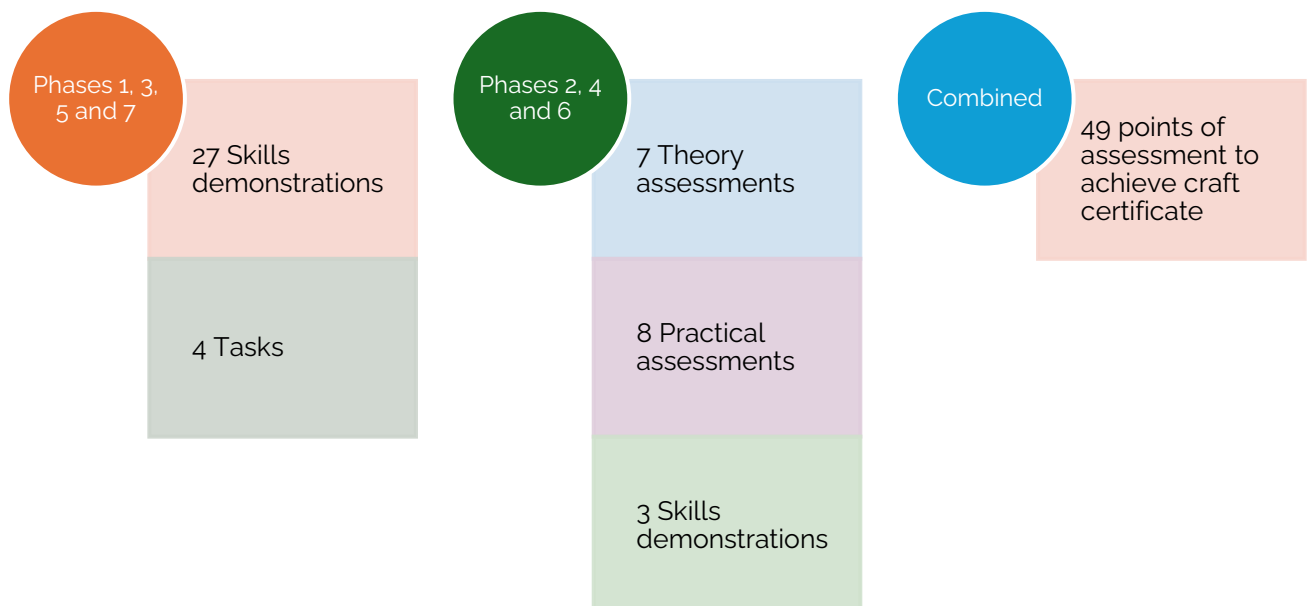
Phase Number	No. of Assessment events	Version of theory paper available	Versions of practical paper available
2	2 Theory 3 Practical	8	10
4	2 Theory 4 Practical	16	10
6	3 Theory	16	10

	1 Practical		
--	-------------	--	--

Each group of craft programmes are overseen by a management structure, who report into a line Director. The Director responsible for craft apprenticeship then provides regular updates to the SOLAS Executive, Senior Leadership Team, National Apprenticeship Alliance and to the SOLAS Board.

While accepting the recommendations in relation to Phase 4 and Phase 6 assessments, it is critically important that these issues are understood in the context of the entire robust, comprehensive and skills centred 4-year electrical apprenticeship programme. All craft apprenticeships involve a programme of a minimum 4 years which comprises 7 intensive on-the-job and off-the-job training phases.

The infographic below demonstrates the number of skills demonstrations, tasks required to complete the on the job phases 1, 3, 5 and 7. There are also 7 theory, 8 practical and 3 skills demonstrations required to complete off-the-job phases 2, 4 and 6. This means 49 individual check-in points across the electrical apprenticeship to validate the skills developed. Furthermore, in order to fully complete and sign off on electrical work post qualification, all tradespeople must complete the Safe Electric course successfully, or have their completed work tested by a Safe Electric Qualified Certifier. This is in addition to having completed their craft certificate.



Further important context, given the focus of the review, is the difference between practical and theory assessments at Phase 4 and Phase 6. For practical assessments, the focus is very much on the quality and standard of work being presented by learners, ensuring that it is in line with the relevant standards. This is generally drawn from set tasks in each section, such as domestic, industrial or commercial. Owing to the requirement for learners to successfully perform completion of these tasks, the predictability is less of a concern, as they will meet the standard, or not. Nevertheless any predictability issues identified in practical assessments are being fully addressed in the same way as theory assessments, with action further detailed in Section 4.

As one of the steps taken by SOLAS to assure the integrity and quality of the electrical apprenticeship programme and in order to take immediate action as the emerging findings and recommendations from the review first emerged, the Dean of the Faculty of Nautical and STEM at City of Glasgow College, supported by experts in electrical apprenticeship and engineering, undertook an evaluation of the programme.

This independent expert team were asked to verify the integrity of the learning and assessment pathway across all seven phases of the apprenticeship. The work involved a comprehensive review of how learning outcomes and competencies are developed, assessed, and reinforced throughout the four-year programme. The expert team submitted its final report in August 2025 which confirmed that "the skills developed and assessed align well with those required of a competent electrical craftsperson...A diverse group of professionals oversees and evaluates competence across all subject areas, giving confidence in the system's ability to produce qualified electrical craftsperson."

3. The Focused Review Process

As highlighted in the context piece set out in Section 2, SOLAS has an almost 60 year history at the heart of the apprenticeship system in Ireland. It is part of our DNA, we have driven its development, growth and reform, and it remains a critical and core part of our governance, strategy and operations. We believe that the report's suggestions regarding SOLAS' responsibility for aspects of apprenticeship programmes does not accurately reflect our ongoing commitment and could be misconstrued. SOLAS remains fully engaged with and accountable for all elements of apprenticeship. With apprenticeship issues always at the top of the agenda of our Board, Senior Leadership Team and corporate and business plans, and resources prioritised to target growth and improvement in the apprenticeship system, there should be no doubt as to the commitment of SOLAS to the success of apprenticeships in Ireland.

There are some elements of the report that need to be addressed directly as outlined below:

- The misrepresentation of SOLAS' commitment to apprenticeship and its role as coordinating provider for craft apprenticeship
- The commentary regarding the SOLAS Board's role, and the suggestion of insufficient Board oversight of craft apprenticeship, does not align with the evidence presented to the review or with the governance arrangements outlined in Section 2 of this response
- Some areas identified as outside the scope of the review are nonetheless referenced in a critical manner, without the opportunity for SOLAS to provide additional context or evidence to balance the analysis

4. Provider Responses & Commitments to Review Recommendations

4.1 Acceptance of Recommendations

SOLAS fully accepts the recommendations set out in the final report of the QQI focused review on the implementation and effectiveness of quality assurance procedures by SOLAS for Phase 4 and 6 of the Advanced Certificate Craft – Electrical programme. SOLAS has continued to meet QQI regularly to agree actions and the overall quality improvement plan (QIP) with meetings on 30th May, 20th June, 30th June, 17th July, 3rd September, and 10th October and we will continue this regular engagement as the plan is finalised and delivered.

This will be supplemented by an Oversight Group with an independent chair (to be decided by QQI) and proposed membership of DFHERIS, Higher Education Authority (HEA), QQI, SOLAS will monitor progress against the plan. As noted in Section 2, SOLAS has also established a sub-group of its Board to ensure clear governance around implementation of the recommendations and the QIP.

4.2 Quality Improvement Plan

As with any review of this nature, the review recommends that SOLAS produces a quality improvement plan (QIP) with associated roles, responsibilities and timelines clearly identified to address ten specified areas. The plan has had a number of iterations discussed with QQI, a full communications plan has also been drafted and discussed with QQI. The final version of the QIP has been approved by QQI as of 20 October 2025.

The structural complexity of the craft apprenticeship model must also be recognised in considering the review findings and how recommendations can be

effectively addressed within this QIP. Coordinating quality assurance across a diverse network of independent collaborating providers, each with its own established QA assurance frameworks and procedures, is challenging, with effective solutions only possible with full support of these providers. While SOLAS accepts full responsibility as coordinating provider for the electrical and other craft apprenticeships, it will only be possible to fully address the review recommendations through collective effort of all the key stakeholders. To facilitate this and address the need for greater and more structured engagement with collaborating providers, SOLAS has convened a Craft Apprenticeship Quality Taskforce, with an independent Chair. This group brings together SOLAS, HEA, NAO, HEIs, ETBs, employers, staff representatives, unions and QQI to develop and agree short-term solutions to electrical and wider craft assessment and quality issues. The group met on 1st July and 2nd September and 14th October, with a sub-group established that brought specific proposals to address assessment leak and predictability issues in the short-term as an initial draft for discussion.

Conclusion

SOLAS remains fully committed to working with QQI, HEA and other stakeholders to continue to improve the governance and oversight role necessary to ensure the integrity of the system. While SOLAS notes that certain aspects of the report may not fully reflect our position, we remain deeply committed to addressing the recommendations and have made significant progress across many areas of concern. SOLAS welcomes the review team's recognition of staff commitment and constructive engagement throughout the review process, as well as the acknowledgement of recent efforts to strengthen quality assurance, develop new assessment instruments and the security of the existing assessment distribution system. These positives are noted as we continue our work to further enhance the integrity and effectiveness of the apprenticeship programmes. We have approached this process as an opportunity for learning and development. Accordingly, we welcome the recommendations and are implementing changes to strengthen governance, quality assurance, and assessment integrity within the Electrical craft programme. We thank the review team for its work and constructive engagement and look forward to continued collaboration with QQI as we implement these improvements.



SOLAS Quality Improvement Plan

Version 1.0
October 2025



	Title	Date
Author	Manager – Quality Assurance	22/10/2025
Owner	SOLAS Executive	22/10/2025

Effective Date:	22/10/2025
Review Date:	22/10/2026

DOCUMENT CHANGE HISTORY

This is version 1.0 of the SOLAS Quality Improvement Plan. This document is subject to revision and maintained electronically. Electronic copies are version controlled. Printed or downloaded copies are not subject to this control.

Version	Date	Description of change



Purpose

This Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) has been drafted by SOLAS to directly address the areas of concern identified by QQI in the panel terms of reference, and the directions and recommendations issued by the panel in their draft report. The purpose of the QIP is to help identify quality assurance improvements and ensure they are implemented for phases 4 and 6 of the Electrical craft apprenticeship, and to work towards ongoing quality improvement and enhancement, in compliance with QQI requirements. In particular, the QIP includes actions to investigate and address the root causes of the issues identified by the review panel. Using the directions and recommendations from the QQI report, the SOLAS/ management team is committed to the quality improvement area(s) to be completed within the plan.

QIP Approval

Approval of the draft QIP is to have two stages:

1. Approval by the SOLAS Executive
2. Approval by QQI, to ensure that the actions outlined in the QIP are aligned with the recommendations of the review panel

QIP Governance

SOLAS/ is committed to working in partnership with QQI and DFHERIS as members of an oversight group, to provide structured monitoring and governance of the QIP, as envisaged in the QQI report. The proposed governance is outlined below:

- An oversight group is to be convened by SOLAS and the QQI Executive by mid November
- Terms of Reference to be agreed by SOLAS and QQI by early November
- The membership of the oversight group is to include the below, and will report back to both the SOLAS and QQI Executives:
 - SOLAS

- QQI
- DFHERIS
- HEA
- An independent representative from outside the State (to be selected by QQI)

Oversight Group Purpose:

- To support SOLAS in implementing the panel's recommendations in the timeliest manner possible.
- To maintain the required focus of SOLAS on assuring the integrity of the Electrical Craft Apprenticeship
- To provide independent monitoring of the implementation of the QIP, ensuring that actions remain focussed and within timeframes, and to provide direction to SOLAS on the implementation of the QIP

SOLAS governance of QIP:

- The SOLAS Executive shall be responsible for:
 - Approving the QIP internally
 - Ensuring timely implementation of the QIP and approval of its deliverables
 - Recording the QIP on the internal SOLAS risk register
 - Reporting progress and/or issues related to the QIP to the SOLAS Board

QQI Areas of Concern:

In the terms of reference for the Electrical focussed review, QQI identified ten areas of concern to be investigated by the review panel. The areas of concern are listed below, with the high-level findings of the panel:

#	Concern	Panel Finding
1	The validity of an assessment system that relies on a limited number of assessment instrument versions (in some cases, there is only one version used) for use at a national level by all students undertaking phases 4 and 6 of the 4 Advanced Certificate Craft – Electrical and the re-use of the same assessment instruments across examination cycles.	Substantiated
2	The infrequent updating by SOLAS of assessment instruments for use at a national level by all students undertaking phases 4 and 6 of the Advanced Certificate Craft – Electrical.	Substantiated
3	Following from 1 and 2, the predictability of assessment and the associated risks to assessment integrity and validity.	Substantiated
4	The extent to which assessment instruments adequately capture all relevant learning outcomes and enable assessors to differentiate student achievement.	Unable to determine
5	Clarity about the expected standards of attainment for grades, marking criteria and weighting and duration of assessments.	Substantiated
6	The effectiveness of SOLAS monitoring and reporting processes for apprenticeship programme delivery.	Substantiated
7	The effectiveness of the interface between SOLAS' assessment procedures for the programme and each collaborating provider's approved quality assurance procedures.	Substantiated
8	The effectiveness of measures to ensure the security and confidentiality of assessment instruments.	Substantiated
9	The operation of feedback mechanisms between teaching/tutoring staff within collaborating providers and SOLAS assessment staff.	Substantiated
10	Engagement by and between collaborating providers and SOLAS in the ongoing development and review of assessment instruments.	Substantiated

Directions and Recommendations made by the Review Panel:

Reference	Direction/recommendation
D1	SOLAS, as a matter of utmost urgency, takes full ownership and accountability for the complete implementation of its QA processes for the assessment of the Advanced Certificate Craft – Electrical
D2	The implementation of governance arrangements for oversight of the programme, its delivery and assessment, including that the national Programme Board (PB) be reconvened and meet on a regular basis and include apprentice representatives;
D2 (i)	The implementation of oversight arrangements for the relationship with the collaborative providers and the assessment process;
D2 (ii)	The establishment of a routine monitoring process for the delivery and assessment of the Advanced Certificate Craft – Electrical;
D2 (iii)	The security of all stages and aspects assessment practice;
D2 (iv)	The currency and accuracy of assessment instruments;
D2 (v)	The appropriateness of assessment instruments;
D2 (vi)	Plans for engagement and consultation with collaborative providers generally (individually and collectively) and with particular reference to the development and roll-out of alternative assessment systems to ensure their appropriateness and their feasibility;
D2 (vii)	Feedback mechanisms for collaborative providers and other stakeholders of the Advanced Certificate Craft – Electrical;
D2 (viii)	Document control arrangements within SOLAS relating to the Advanced Certificate Craft – Electrical; and
D2 (ix)	Effective utilisation of data to inform continuous enhancement of the Advanced Certificate Craft – Electrical programme and its assessment.
R1	To ensure that the necessary improvements and adjustments are made promptly, and in order to maintain confidence in the Craft Electrical award, the review team recommends that QQI immediately convene a steering group of relevant parties to support SOLAS in the realisation of the aforementioned directives in a timely manner as quickly and effectively as possible.
R2 ¹	The review team recommends that SOLAS move towards compliance with ISO 9000; however, efforts taken towards ISO 9000 compliance should not take precedence over, or detract from, the development and implementation of the aforementioned quality improvement plan

¹ While SOLAS acknowledges the ISO recommendation, it is not seen as a practical option at this point. As the review panel noted, the focus must be on the implementation of the QIP. Obtaining ISO 9000 is a costly and time-consuming process which would divert attention and resources away from the immediate priorities for the Electrical craft

QIP actions

The table below lists each of the SMART actions to be taken by SOLAS and maps them to the directions and recommendations from QQI.

#	Specific Action	Measure	Achievement	Relevance	Timeline	Owner	Directions covered
1	Re-constitution of the Programme Board (PB) for the Electrical Craft, with increased membership and scope to better reflect stakeholder diversity and programme needs	• Increase PB membership and secure Apprentice participation • Update and publish revised Terms of Reference and standing orders. • Hold quarterly meetings with documented minutes and attendance records. • Appoint a Chairperson	• Initial proposal for reconstitution accepted on 9 July 2025. • Terms of Reference and standing orders updated and completed on 9 July 2025. • Resources and stakeholder engagement in place to support quarterly meetings (remote meetings where necessary)	Supports the requirement to improve programme governance, expand sector representation and programme responsiveness to industry needs	• Chairperson to be appointed by 30 November 2025. • First quarterly meeting of the revised PB to take place by 30 November 2025, with subsequent meetings scheduled every three months	Assistant Manager – Electrical Family of Trades	D1 D2 D2 (iv) D2 (v) D2 (vii)

#	Specific Action	Measure	Achievement	Relevance	Timeline	Owner	Directions covered
2	Establish a multi-agency Oversight Group to monitor and guide the implementation of the QIP for the Electrical Craft Apprenticeship	- Oversight Group formally convened by 15 October 2025. - Terms of Reference agreed and signed off by SOLAS and QQI by 30 October 2025. - Membership confirmed to include representatives from SOLAS, QQI, DFHERIS, HEA, and one independent international expert (selected by QQI). - Quarterly reports submitted to both the SOLAS and QQI Executives,	- Initial discussions between SOLAS and QQI have taken place. - Resources and stakeholder engagement are available to support group formation and operation. - Governance structures within SOLAS are prepared to integrate oversight recommendations	Supports the integrity and transparency of the Electrical Craft Apprenticeship programme and aligns with QQI's recommendations for improved governance and accountability	- Oversight Group convened by 15 November 2025. - Terms of Reference finalised by 30 November 2025. - First formal meeting held by 15 December 2025. - QIP progress updates reported quarterly starting December 2025.	QQI	D1 D2 D2 (i)

#	Specific Action	Measure	Achievement	Relevance	Timeline	Owner	Directions covered
		beginning Q4 2025.					
3	SOLAS will convene a formal all-provider forum to address assessment security, including academic heads of electrical apprenticeship programmes, exams office/Academic Registry representatives, and collaborating HEIs. The forum will also explore the possibility of a migration to a secure online platform for theory assessments.	- Initial all-provider meeting scheduled and held by 31 October 2025. - Forum membership confirmed, with representation from all phase 2, 4, and 6 electrical providers. - Agreement reached on interim assessment security protocols by 30 November 2025	- Stakeholders have expressed willingness to collaborate. - SOLAS has capacity to convene and facilitate the forum.	Addresses the complexity of a multi-provider system and ensures a collaborative approach to integrity and consistency in assessment practices across the electrical craft apprenticeship.	- First formal forum meeting held by 30 November 2025. (date to be agreed with HEIs) - Interim security protocols agreed by 30 December 2025. (date to be agreed with HEIs)	Programme Director - Apprenticeship	D2 (ii) D2 (iii) D2 (vi) D2 (ix)

#	Specific Action	Measure	Achievement	Relevance	Timeline	Owner	Directions covered
4	SOLAS will operationalise a minor change to assessment process for assessment updates, governed by a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) and overseen by the Programme Board ²	- Minor change to assessment SOP drafted and reviewed by PB in July 2025. - Minor change to assessment SOP to be finalised by 30 Sept 2025 - Proposed minor change to assessments to be reviewed and presented at each quarterly Programme Board meeting. - Assessment Feedback from providers and learners monitored and	- SOP is drafted and near completion - Programme Board structure supports quarterly review and decision-making. - Programme Board structure additionally supports extraordinary non-corporeal meetings where required - Feedback mechanisms from providers and learners are subject to frequent	Ensures a structured and responsive process for the continual revision of assessments within the Electrical Craft apprenticeship, ensuring alignment with programme developments and relevant stakeholder feedback. Provides level of PB oversight and approval to changes to assessments	- First round of feedback analysis and proposed changes expected to be presented at the first Programme Board meeting following term 1 assessments - Ongoing quarterly reviews to continue through 2026 and beyond, with updates implemented within one month of	Assistant Manager - QA	D2 (iii) D2 (iv) D2 (v) D2 (viii)

² The minor change to assessment process refers to updates made to existing assessment instruments and is overseen by the Programme Board. These changes are typically informed by the revised feedback mechanism. This process is distinct from the development and approval of entirely new assessments, which are managed by the relevant SOLAS Development Officer in collaboration with a pool of sectoral subject matter experts (SMEs) responsible for drafting and peer-reviewing new assessment content.

#	Specific Action	Measure	Achievement	Relevance	Timeline	Owner	Directions covered
		logged for review. Feedback may invoke minor change to assessment process At least two minor assessment updates implemented per year based on feedback and Programme Board approval	review and improvement		Programme Board approval.		
5	SOLAS will implement a version rotation procedure for written assessments, supported by a secure question bank system to reduce predictability. The Programme Board will oversee the ongoing review of both written and practical assessments, using the minor change to	- Full review of past electrical papers completed. - No assessment paper reused across Phase 4 and Phase 6 from September 2025 onward. - At least one new version of	- Revised papers already introduced following breaches. - Programme Board has expanded scope and authority to oversee assessment quality.	Supports the credibility of the Electrical Craft apprenticeship programme and aligns with QQI recommendations for robust assessment governance. Addresses the inherent	- Rotation procedure for assessment versions implemented by 30 September 2025. - Deployment of new papers generated from	Assistant Manager – Electrical Family of Trades	D2 (iii) D2 (iv) D2 (v) D2 (viii)

#	Specific Action	Measure	Achievement	Relevance	Timeline	Owner	Directions covered
	assessment SOP to approve updates. Special attention will be given to the design and rotation of MCQs should the deployment of an online national system be feasible.	- each assessment paper introduced per term. - Quarterly Programme Board meetings to include review of assessment currency and accuracy	SOP provides a clear mechanism for implementing updates.	predictability in assessments.	question bank from January 2026.		
6	As per action 3, SOLAS will work jointly with collaborating providers to implement measures that reduce the risk of assessment breaches. This includes legal follow-up on confirmed leaks, proactive communication with provider organisations, removal of online assessment materials, and exploring the development of shared or complementary	- Initial all-provider meeting scheduled and held by 31 October 2025. - Forum membership confirmed, with representation from all phase 2, 4, and 6 electrical providers. - Agreement reached on interim assessment	- Stakeholders have expressed willingness to collaborate. - SOLAS has capacity to convene and facilitate the forum. - Legal and technical resources are available to support monitoring and enforcement	Addresses the complexity of a multi-provider system and ensures a collaborative approach to integrity and consistency in assessment practices across the electrical craft apprenticeship. Promotes a shared responsibility model for assessment	- First formal forum meeting held by 30 November 2025. (date to be agreed with HEIs) - Interim security protocols agreed by 30 December 2025. (date to be agreed with HEIs)	Programme Director - Apprenticeship	D2 (ii) D2 (iii) D2 (iv) D2 (vi) D2 (vii) D2 (ix)

#	Specific Action	Measure	Achievement	Relevance	Timeline	Owner	Directions covered
	protocols for examination security.	security protocols by 30 November 2025		integrity, reduces reputational risk, and aligns with QQI expectations for secure and fair assessment practices			
7	SOLAS has implemented a document control policy and SOP to govern the review and updating of QA documentation, including curriculum, assessments, and promotional materials. All documents will be reviewed at least every two years	- Document control policy and SOP approved by 30 Oct 2025. - Initial review of all electrical apprenticeship QA documentation completed by 30 Sept 2025. - Second review cycle completed by 30 January 2026. - A tracking system to be established to log review dates,	- SOP and policy already drafted and ready for approval. - Resources and governance structures in place to support scheduled reviews.	Ensures all QA documentation for the Electrical Craft apprenticeship is current, controlled, and reviewed regularly to reflect evolving programme needs and maintain compliance with best practice.	- SOP and policy approved by 30 Oct 2025 - First full review completed by 15 Nov 2025. - Second review completed by 30 January 2026, with ongoing biennial reviews scheduled thereafter	Assistant Manager - QA	D2 (viii)

#	Specific Action	Measure	Achievement	Relevance	Timeline	Owner	Directions covered
		responsible parties, and update status for each document by 1 December 2025					
8	SOLAS will engage with HEI providers and the contracted EA service to explore and agree on the most appropriate model for independent QA of Phase 4 and 6 assessments. This may involve extending EA coverage or supporting/enhancing existing internal QA mechanisms, such as external examiner input. A Power BI dashboard will be developed to support monitoring and analysis of assessment performance and QA activity.	• Consultation with HEIs completed by 15 October 2025 to determine preferred QA approach, and submitted to QQI for approval • QA oversight model (EA or external examiner-based) agreed and documented by 30 October 2025. • Briefing session for Phase 4/6 providers delivered by 15	• Existing EA contract can be adapted if needed. • HEI providers have established QA processes that can be supported or aligned with SOLAS oversight. • SOLAS has internal capacity to develop and maintain the dashboard	Establishes a collaborative and independent quality assurance framework for Phase 4 and 6 assessments, ensuring coverage, currency, and integrity. This approach respects provider autonomy while promoting shared responsibility for assessment quality, and aligns with national QA	• Consultation and decision-making completed by 30 December 2025. • QA oversight operational by February/March 2026. • Dashboard live by March 2026, with quarterly reporting cycles starting Q2 2026	Assistant Manager - QA	D1 D2 (ii) D2 (iii) D2 (vii) D2 (ix)

#	Specific Action	Measure	Achievement	Relevance	Timeline	Owner	Directions covered
		November 2025. • QA oversight implemented by November/December 2025. • Power BI dashboard developed and operational by 30 September 2025, with quarterly data updates.		expectations for independent oversight			