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<b>Related legislation, policies, procedures, guidelines and local protocols</b>	<p>This policy has been designed with due regard to the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines (2016), Quality and Qualifications Ireland</li> <li>- Sector Specific Independent/Private Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines (2016), Quality and Qualifications Ireland</li> <li>- Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act, 2012</li> <li>- European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), et. al (2015), Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)</li> <li>- Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Blended and Fully Online Programmes (2023), Quality and Qualifications Ireland</li> </ul>
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## 1. CONTEXT

SQT's transition from classroom-based to virtual delivery in response to the global COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 required significant investment in both human and capital resources. This shift brought about major changes to SQT's business model, programme delivery methods, quality assurance processes, and support operations. In 2024, SQT undertook a comprehensive review of its QA Framework, updating its policies and procedures to align with QQI's Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Blended and Fully Online Programmes (2023). This policy outlines how SQT ensures the quality of its blended and fully online programmes are in accordance with these guidelines.

## 2. PURPOSE

This policy supports SQT's commitment to delivering high-quality, accessible, and compliant educational experiences across all formats of learning. In doing so it seeks to:

The purpose of this policy is as follows:

- establish a **clear framework** that guides staff in the effective delivery of blended and online programmes, ensuring consistency and quality across all learning modalities.
- ensure that SQT's learning environment has the necessary **operational supports, resources, and systems** in place to facilitate the successful delivery of blended and fully online programmes.
- ensure that SQT's IT infrastructure is robust enough to support the specific needs of blended and fully online programme delivery and providing learners and Tutors with the appropriate tools and platforms.
- offer clear guidance on the **instructional design** processes necessary for the effective creation and delivery of blended and online programmes, promoting high-quality learning experiences.
- ensure that SQT meets all **legal responsibilities** and **good practice recommendations** in accordance with the QQI Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Blended and Fully Online Programmes (2023).

## 3. SCOPE/APPLICATION

Whilst the policy has been developed in line with QQI's Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Blended and Fully Online Programmes (2023), it represents best practice and where relevant will be implemented across all SQT programmes.

## 4. RESPONSIBILITY

Responsibility for managing online provision has been clearly allocated to appropriate leadership roles. All roles and responsibilities are explicitly outlined in [QAP1-2 SQT Governance](#) ensuring clarity and accountability in the oversight and management of online learning.

## 5. DEFINITIONS<sup>1</sup>

The following are the appropriate definitions for terms used in the context of SQT.

- **Artificial Intelligence** - Refers to machine-based systems that can generate content, make predictions, recommendations, or decisions that influence real or virtual environments.
- **Asynchronous Online Learning** - Learners accessing online materials at their own pace and interacting with their teacher and peers at times that work around other commitments.
- **Blended Learning** - A type of education where teaching, learning and assessment occur using a mix of online and on-site learning with the online components taking place synchronously, asynchronously, or in combination.
- **Closed Captioning** - the display of text on a screen, providing a transcript of the spoken dialogue, sound effects, and other relevant audio elements for individuals who may be deaf or hard of hearing.
- **Digital Education** - A broad umbrella term which encompasses the use of technology to enhance teaching, learning and assessment and is inclusive of blended and online learning.
- **Electronic Proctoring** - A managed system that enables learners to sit online tests and exams using their own computer or one provided for them on a secure browser and webcam where their behaviour is monitored and recorded.
- **Fully Online Learning** - A type of education where teaching, learning and assessment occur online, either synchronously, asynchronously, or in combination and where no onsite instruction is required.
- **Learning Resources** - Includes both print and digital materials and may include text, audio, video, animations, simulations and other types of rich media content designed for learning.
- **On-site:** The delivery mode where instruction occurs in a physical, face-to-face setting, allowing real-time, synchronous interaction between learners and Tutors.
- **Open Educational Resources** - Digital materials in any format and medium that reside in the public domain or are under copyright that have been released under an open license, that permit no-cost access, re-use, re-purpose, adaptation and redistribution.
- **Management Information System** - A platform that enables educational providers to digitise and consequently manage learner information and track and record progress more efficiently usually with interoperability to other systems.

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- <sup>1</sup> Adapted from: Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Blended and Fully Online Programmes (2023), Quality and Qualifications Ireland

- **Synchronous Online Learning** - Teachers and learners gathering at the same time and virtual place and interacting in “real-time”.
- **Video Conferencing Platform** - A tool that facilitates online communication for synchronous video and audio meetings and live online classes (e.g., Teams, Zoom, etc.).
- **Virtual Learning Environment** - An online platform (Moodle), that provides tools and resources to support teaching, learning, and assessment. It enables learners and instructors to access course materials, participate in discussions, submit assignments, and track progress within a digital, interactive environment.

## 6. DOMAIN 1: ORGANISATIONAL CONTEXT

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*The Organisational Context focuses on strategic and institution-wide aspects of managing quality for programmes supported by blended and fully online provision. It establishes whether appropriate procedures are in place for strategy, policies, regulations and administrative processes, finance, infrastructure, resources, training and professional development, institutional support, strategic collaboration, and partnerships, and addressing issues related to learners studying outside of Ireland<sup>2</sup>.*

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### 6.1. Strategy, Management and Implementation Plans

SQT is committed to incorporating blended and fully online learning methodologies, where appropriate, across its programme offerings, aligning this approach with its mission to “*deliver impactful training and continuous skill enhancement for professionals and organisations in their evolving industries*” ([SQT Strategic Plan 2024–2029](#)). These modalities are fully integrated into its revised [Teaching and Learning Strategy \(2022–2026\)](#) and within [QAP5-1: Teaching and Learning Policy](#). This alignment demonstrates both coherence across educational plans and SQT’s ongoing commitment to resourcing blended and fully online programmes.

Comprehensive roles and responsibilities for the management and support of these programmes are documented in [QAP1-2: SQT Governance](#). SQT’s vision is shared and widely understood by staff, learners and other stakeholders through comprehensive communication strategies and regular reviews and updates by the relevant governance units, including the Board of Directors, Senior Management Team, Programme Boards and Teaching and Learning Committee.

The benefits of online learning have been clearly articulated and are available on a dedicated section of the SQT website ‘Virtual Training’. Additionally, potential risks associated with online learning have been identified and where relevant, included in the Risk Register to ensure they are actively monitored and addressed. Contingent implications have been identified and thoroughly considered in [Teaching and Learning Strategy \(2022–2026\)](#) with strategies developed to address them effectively should they arise.

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<sup>2</sup> Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Blended and Fully Online Programmes (2023), Quality and Qualifications Ireland

## 6.2. Policies, regulations and Administrative Processes

As is set out in the context above, this policy document has been organised within three core areas (domains) which mirror the QQI Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Blended and Fully Online programmes (2023) as follows:

- Organisational Context
- Programme Context
- Learner Experience Context

Relevant policies, procedures, guidelines and supporting documents associated with each of the above elements have been updated and integrated across SQT's QA Framework as set out in [QAP1-1 Quality Assurance Policy](#). Where necessary, new policies and procedures and supporting guidelines have been developed. These include the following six new policy documents:

- [QAP1-5 Blended and Online Learning Policy](#)
- [QAP3-5 Design and Implementation of Learning Resources](#)
- [QAP5-2 Universal Design for Learning \(UDL\) Policy](#)
- [QAP5-3 Learner Engagement on Blended and Fully Online Programmes](#)
- [QAP5-4 Recording of Online Synchronous Learning](#)
- [QAP6-2 Academic Integrity and Good Practice](#)

In addition, several important guideline documents have been developed to underpin the application of the overall policy framework. These include the following:

- Academic Integrity Guidelines
- Guidelines for the Design and Development of Blended and Fully Online Programmes
- UDL Guidelines for Tutors
- Guidelines for Developing Learning Resources

Relevant quality documentation is referenced within each specific area of this document. In addition, internal work instructions are maintained, which safeguard the implementation of all policies and procedures.

## 6.3. Finance, Infrastructure & Resources

SQT adopts a comprehensive approach to the procurement of services and IT infrastructure to support high-quality blended and fully online learning programmes. The necessary infrastructure and IT resources are carefully evaluated, planned and integrated to create a seamless and effective learning environment. This is set out in [QAP8-1: Information Management & IT Infrastructure Policy](#). Technologies include:

- **Virtual Learning Platform (VLE) / Learning Management System (LMS)** - Moodle is SQT's Virtual Learning Environment. The system is managed by a specialist Moodle vendor. The system is utilised for all QQI courses and additional courses of 5 days or more in duration.

- **Video Conferencing Platforms** - Zoom is the primary platform for delivering live synchronous learning, with MS Teams used for specific clients. Both platforms enable real-time interaction with features like breakout rooms, screen sharing, whiteboards and polling. Both also support session recording and closed captioning.
- **Digital Tools and Platforms** – Tutors utilise a variety of approved digital tools, a catalogue of recommended applications is maintained on the Tutor Portal.
- **Student Information System** - A cloud-based Student Information System (ADM) streamlines registration, learner progress tracking and communication with clients and learners.
- **Data Backups and Migration** - SLAs are in place with all IT vendors. During IT infrastructure changes, transitional plans are in place to minimise disruption for learners and staff. In addition regular data backups are in place to prevent data loss.
- **Cybersecurity** - Strong cybersecurity measures are in place to protect SQT's IT infrastructure, complemented by regular updates for stakeholders to safeguard against potential threats.
- **Coursecheck** – Coursecheck is a feedback platform designed specifically for training providers to collect, analyse and showcase customer feedback to improve the quality of their courses and enhance learner satisfaction.

Contingency protocols are in place to ensure the continuity of programmes, in particular in the case of online synchronous learning activities in the event of digital infrastructure failures. These protocols are available to all Tutors and include immediate response procedures, backup resources, and alternative communication channels to minimise disruption to learners.

## 6.4. Staff Training, Professional Development and Institutional Support

To maintain the highest standards of teaching and learning, SQT's Recruitment and Induction Policy requires that newly recruited teaching staff possess not only substantial subject matter expertise, experience, and academic qualifications but also demonstrate proficiency in facilitating online programmes before conducting synchronous classes. The induction process includes comprehensive shadowing and mentoring by Programme Directors and/or experienced Tutors, thereby ensuring that new Tutors are both capable and confident in delivering online instruction. The detailed requirements and processes for induction, incorporating both blended and fully online practices, are outlined in [QAP4-1: Recruitment and Induction of Teaching Staff](#).

SQT is committed to providing robust professional development and support to ensure Tutors excel in delivering all programmes through all methodologies including blended and fully online. This is set out in [QAP4-4: Professional Development of Teaching Staff](#), the focus is on continuous learning, collaboration and practical assistance to enhance teaching practices. Strategies for professional development include but are not limited to:

- **Specialist Training and One-to-One Support:** Specialist training is provided as required to Tutors and Support staff and is aligned with the Teaching and Learning Strategy. Participation in professional learning communities, external conferences, and one-to-one support is



actively encouraged to keep Tutors and support staff informed and prepared for evolving educational trends.

- **Tutor Community of Practice:** SQT fosters collaborative learning through the Tutor Community of Practice, a forum where Tutors connect, share knowledge and discuss best practices. Facilitated by internal 'T&L champions' and external guest speakers, the community promotes ongoing dialogue and professional development with a specific focus on online learning strategies.
- **Tutor Resource Portals:** Tutors are provided with access to a centralised Tutor portals on Moodle which contains all learning resources, QA guidelines and operational documents. The portal also encourages knowledge sharing and collaboration among Tutors through discussion forums and other collaborative tools. In addition, Tutors also have access to a specific UDL Portal, which has been designed to provide resources, tools, and guidance on implementing Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles in their teaching practices, ensuring accessible and inclusive learning experiences for all learners.
- **Peer Review of Teaching Staff:** Peer reviews are encouraged regularly to ensure alignment with SQT's standards and to promote professional growth. [QAP4-2: Peer Review of Teaching Staff](#) sets out a structured process that creates a safe space for constructive feedback and to foster reflective teaching.

## 6.5. Strategic Collaborations and Partnerships

Not applicable to SQT.

## 6.6. Learners Outside of Ireland

SQT is dedicated to ensuring that all learners, regardless of their location or background, have equal access to support services, resources, and opportunities. Special emphasis is placed on ensuring that learners studying outside of Ireland receive the same level of support as those within the country.

SQT offers two types of programmes:

- Public Programmes: These are open to learners from multiple organisations.
- In-house Programmes: These are tailored to learners from a single organisation.

In both cases, programmes are primarily funded by the learner's employer who also handles the internal selection of candidates before submitting applications to SQT. The risks and mitigation strategies for the admission and selection of learners on fully online programmes are consistent with those for traditional on-site settings.

This section outlines the quality assurance measures in place for learners participating in programmes outside of Ireland including the following headings:

- Pre-Course Information
- Admission & Selection
- Learner Supports
- Assessment & Certification

- Recognition & Usage of QQI Qualification

### **PRE-COURSE INFORMATION**

Learners are provided with comprehensive information prior to admission through multiple channels, including programme brochures available on the SQT website, as outlined in [QAP9-1: Public Information and Communication](#). Where necessary, learners can engage directly with the Course Administration Manager, Tutor, or Programme Director to clarify any questions or concerns in advance of registering or attending a programme. In addition, a dedicated webpage for virtual training has been developed, which includes video tutorials, FAQs, and other resources to support learners in navigating the online learning environment.

### **ADMISSION AND SELECTION**

SQT has a well-defined admissions policy and procedure ([QAP3-3: Access, Transfer and Progression](#)) that applies to all learners, including those based outside of Ireland. The same academic entry criteria are upheld, regardless of location or delivery method, ensuring a consistent and fair process. This includes meeting the programme's general entry requirements and demonstrating English language competency. In addition, there are specific technology requirements necessary for participation in online courses.

Since English is the primary language used in most organisations participating on SQT programmes, employers put forward learners with acceptable English language abilities. Additionally, SQT has successfully trialled translation tools within Zoom and MS Teams which are effectively utilised by learners.

### **Key Criteria for Specifying Countries Outside of Ireland from which Learners can be Enrolled**

SQT has established the following key criteria for specifying the countries outside of Ireland from which learners can be enrolled. These criteria ensure that learners, regardless of location, can effectively participate in our blended and fully online programmes while meeting the necessary regulatory and technical requirements.

- I. Demand from Multinational Organisations:** SQT prioritises countries where multinational organisations have established sites and seek global training partners. This aligns with SQT's goal of offering consistent training worldwide, especially in response to the shift in demand observed during the pandemic. For example, a pharmaceutical company based in Europe may have learners in Asia, Europe, America that require the same training.
- II. Learner Relocates Abroad during the Programme:** There may be a scenario where a learner starts a course in Ireland and moves abroad (in the case of blended programmes where classes are not recorded, the expectation is that the learner will return for the on-site sessions).
- III. Technology Infrastructure:** Only countries with stable internet access and a robust digital infrastructure capable of supporting fully online programmes are considered.
- IV. Denied Parties Screening:** Where necessary, screening is conducted to ensure compliance with international regulations and sanctions.

It is important to note that SQT operates in sectors where regulations do not restrict the ability to deliver online programmes internationally. Protected professions are those that require specific qualifications, certifications, or licenses to practice, often regulated by governing bodies to ensure public safety and maintain standards. For example, fields such as healthcare or law may have stringent regulations and accreditation requirements that limit how training can be delivered across borders. SQT ensures compliance by focusing on industries where these regulatory barriers do not hinder the delivery of its online programmes.

## LEARNER SUPPORTS

SQT is dedicated to fostering an inclusive and supportive learning environment for all learners, including those residing outside of Ireland and whose first language is not English. To enhance accessibility and comprehension for our diverse global learner base, the following strategies are in place:

- **Closed Captions:** Closed captions are available on Zoom and MS Teams to transcribe what is being said in real-time and they are meant for learners who need to read the spoken words for better understanding.
- **Translation:** The translation feature in Zoom and MS Teams is available to offer language interpretation features where an interpreter translates the spoken words into a different language in real-time. This is separate from captions, and learners can choose which language they wish to hear.
- **Google Translate and Other Translation Tools:** Tutors encourage the use of translation tools such as Google Translate, which allows learners to translate documents, webpages, and course content into their preferred language. While these tools have limitations, they provide an immediate resource for comprehension and help bridge the language gap for those whose first language is not English.
- **Use of Visuals and Graphics:** Tutors recognise that visuals and graphics are universal tools that can transcend language barriers. Wherever possible, diagrams, visual aids, infographics, and other visual resources are integrated within learner material to convey key information. This approach reduces reliance on extensive written content and makes learning more accessible to a broader audience.
- **Simplified Language and Clear Instructions:** Tutors are encouraged to use clear, simplified language and to avoid complex or idiomatic phrases that may be difficult for non-native speakers to understand. This is especially important for international learners who may not be familiar with specific English dialects or educational jargon.
- **Individualised Support:** Where necessary, individual learning support is offered to learners facing language barriers. This may include extended deadlines for assignments, extra time during assessments, or one-on-one clarification sessions with tutors to ensure they fully understand the material.
- **Access to Localised Technical Support:** SQT ensures that learners from outside of Ireland have access to the necessary technical assistance to resolve issues related to platform use, connectivity, and other technology-related challenges.

These strategies reflect SQT's commitment to fostering an inclusive, accessible, and global learning environment.

### **ASSESSMENT AND CERTIFICATION**

The assessment and certification processes for all learners, including those based outside of Ireland follow the same procedures as set out in [QAP6-1: Assessment of Learners](#) and [QAP6-2: Academic Integrity and Good Practice](#). Learners are presented to the Examination Board with the same internal and external verification processes in place to ensure consistency and integrity in assessments. SQT also follows QQI-approved processes for generating alternative identification numbers (in place of PPS numbers) for international learners. This process is completed well in advance of certificate deadlines, ensuring that any potential issues with the QBS system are resolved promptly.

### **RECOGNITION AND USAGE OF QQI QUALIFICATION**

SQT's client organisations and learners place a high value on QQI qualifications. All QQI certificates are placed on the *National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ)*, ensuring that these qualifications are recognised both nationally and internationally. SQT takes additional steps to ensure that the value and recognition of QQI qualifications are communicated clearly to learners and organisations, highlighting their relevance across multiple sectors and geographic locations. Such measures include providing detailed documentation on the international recognition of qualifications and offering guidance on how learners can showcase their QQI certification in global contexts and in different working environments.

## 7. DOMAIN 2: PROGRAMME CONTEXT

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*The Programme Context focuses on the programme as a whole and the approval and validation processes. Whether the level, duration, and volume of credit are appropriate, the degree to which learning outcomes are responsive to changing work, industry or community needs and the study mode is fit-for-purpose. It establishes whether appropriate procedures are in place to follow the principles of good practice for blended and/or fully online learning provision with overall coherence and constructive alignment between the learning outcomes and the curriculum design, including the teaching methods, learner interactivity, learning materials and resources, assessment and feedback practices, and evaluation strategies<sup>3</sup>.*

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### 7.1. Programme Outcomes

SQT is committed to ensuring that programme outcomes are fully achievable and demonstrable, regardless of the mode of delivery and that online programmes are developed in alignment with the organisation's strategic goals and adult learner-centred principles. programme learning outcomes (LOs) are not negatively impacted by the online mode of delivery. To support the consistency and quality of online programme delivery an internal SQT reference document has been developed, [Guidelines for the Development of Blended and Fully Online Programmes](#). This provides programme development staff with best practices for designing learner-centred, high-quality online learning experiences.

Before any programme is submitted for validation, it undergoes a comprehensive review process to ensure full adherence to organisational strategy and principles of online learning. This review includes internal audits by the relevant Programme Board, QA Committee and external peer review, where appropriate. This multi-stage process ensures that the programme design is aligned with SQT's standards, supporting a seamless and engaging online learning experience.

### 7.2. Approval and Validation Processes

Clear principles and criteria are set out in [QAP3-1: Development and Validation of Programmes](#) to guide the decision-making process regarding the appropriateness of blended or fully online modes of delivery for new programmes. The programme documentation clearly reflects the specific implications of online provision, including aspects such as duration, learner effort, and the strategies for teaching, learning, and assessment.

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<sup>3</sup> Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Blended and Fully Online Programmes (2023), Quality and Qualifications Ireland

Prior to submission for validation all relevant implications of offering a programme online are thoroughly reviewed and articulated in the programme documentation. This includes compliance with guidelines outlined in the QQI Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Blended and Fully Online Programmes (2023) Ref. Pg 30 and 31. These are referenced as a checklist in [QAP3-1: Development and Validation of Programmes](#). Additionally, the maximum intake sizes for fully online programmes are carefully evaluated against resource implications. While SQT typically maintains small class sizes, averaging 10 learners per programme, the maximum intake is set at 16 learners to ensure effective learner support and resource management.

### 7.3. Learning & Curriculum Design

SQT is committed to delivering high-quality, learner-centred blended and fully online programmes that promote alignment with programme learning outcomes, interactivity, active engagement. Learning and curriculum design principles are grounded in the Constructive Alignment model (Biggs, 1996), ensuring that all learning activities and assessments are directly tied to intended learning outcomes, regardless of the mode of delivery. These are addressed below.

#### **ALIGNMENT OF LEARNING DESIGN WITH PROGRAMME OUTCOMES**

The learning design model underpinning SQT’s online content is fully aligned with programme learning outcomes. By adopting a flexible learning model that incorporates both blended and fully online approaches, we ensure that content, activities, and assessments—whether delivered synchronously or asynchronously—meet the intended outcomes. This cohesive approach, outlined in [QAP5-1: Teaching and Learning Policy](#) promotes active learner participation and ensures the quality of educational experiences in an online environment.

#### **INTERACTIVITY AND COLLABORATION IN CURRICULUM DESIGN**

SQT’s curriculum design prioritises interactivity and strong engagement between learners and tutors as well as peer-to-peer collaboration. Recognising the needs of adult learners SQT’s blended and online programmes are designed to encourage active participation through the following strategies:

- **Synchronous Sessions:** Live sessions on platforms like Zoom or MS Teams are structured to maximise interaction through breakout rooms, polls, Q&A sessions, and case studies. These sessions are designed around real-world applications, enabling learners to apply new knowledge directly to their professional environments.
- **Asynchronous Activities:** Learners engage with content and collaborate with peers on their own schedules. This approach supports meaningful interaction outside of live sessions, reinforcing learning through collaboration and peer feedback.
- **Group Projects and Peer Learning:** By incorporating group tasks, and peer activities into the curriculum, learners can collaborate on practical, workplace-relevant issues, enhancing problem-solving skills and fostering teamwork.
- **Practical Application and Reflection:** Assessments and assignments are designed to encourage learners to apply their knowledge in real-world scenarios and reflect on their

experiences. This approach promotes continuous interaction and collaboration between learners as they share insights and reflections from their professional environments.

- **Continuous Feedback:** All learning environments incorporate regular feedback loops, ensuring that learners are supported throughout their learning journey. Tutors provide timely feedback on draft assignments and formative feedback throughout the programme fostering a strong connection between learners and Tutors.

### ACTIVE INVOLVEMENT IN SYNCHRONOUS LEARNING

SQT strives to replicate the on-site environment as closely as possible in its online programme delivery, ensuring that learners experience high levels of involvement in the learning process. These efforts are supported by maintaining small class sizes, which fosters a more personalised learning experience. The strategies outlined below, detailed in [QAP5-3: Learner Engagement on Blended and Fully Online Programmes](#), help to create a dynamic and engaging virtual learning environment:

- **Camera-On Policy:** To enhance involvement and accountability, all learners are encouraged to have their cameras on during live sessions. This policy fosters a collaborative and interactive environment.
- **Interactive Tools:** Synchronous sessions incorporate interactive tools such as polls, breakout rooms, and shared whiteboards, which facilitate real-time engagement and keep the learning experience dynamic and interactive.
- **Practical Case Studies and Group Discussions:** Real-world case studies and group discussions are a key feature of synchronous sessions, allowing learners to immediately apply concepts to their professional contexts, enhancing motivation and participation.
- **Breakout Rooms:** Small group discussions in breakout rooms encourage deeper interaction, enabling learners to engage in problem-solving and peer-to-peer learning on specific tasks or scenarios relevant to their work environments.

### FACILITATING SELF-PACED & ASYNCHRONOUS LEARNING

Whilst SQT's delivery model focuses on synchronous online learning, the design of asynchronous material will be aimed at fostering active learner engagement using interactive tools available on the Moodle platform such as:

- **Interactive Content:** Asynchronous materials, including recorded lectures, multimedia content, quizzes, and self-assessments, are designed (when appropriate) to engage learners actively.
- **Checkpoints and Feedback:** Regular quizzes, assignments, and self-assessments helping learners track their progress and receive immediate feedback. This keeps learners focused and encourages active participation.
- **Collaborative Group Work:** Group projects and / or collaborative tasks are incorporated into asynchronous learning, allowing learners to work together even when they are in different time zones. This promotes a sense of community and peer engagement throughout the learning process.

## 7.4. Learning Materials & Resources

SQT is committed to providing high-quality, accessible, and engaging learning materials that support the needs of all learners. To achieve this, it employs a range of strategies and resources which include the below.

### DIGITAL MEDIA PRODUCTION TOOLS

A suite of digital media production tools and facilities are available to create and edit online learning materials. Where necessary, the Multimedia Content Developer works closely with programme teams to support the development and enhancement of digital content. Additionally, staff utilise various tools to produce and edit high-quality online learning materials, ensuring that content is engaging and effectively supports the learning outcomes.

### DEVELOPMENT OF DIGITAL RESOURCES

The process and procedure for developing learning resources is set out in [QAP3-5: Design and Implementation of Learning Resources](#). Digital resources are tested before being deployed to learners to ensure they are fit for purpose. This testing process involves subject matter experts and potential users. Revisions are made based on this feedback to ensure that the materials are clear, accessible, and effective for learners. This process ensures that the materials meet the high standards expected of SQT's online and blended programmes.

### UNIVERSAL DESIGN FOR LEARNING (UDL) PRINCIPLES

SQT is committed to applying Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles to the development of all learning materials. Tutors receive both formal and informal training on UDL implementation, as set out in [QAP5-2: Universal Design for Learning \(UDL\) Policy](#), with internal guidelines for its application. This supports one of SQT's Teaching and Learning priorities as set out in the [Teaching and Learning Strategy \(2021- 2026\)](#) - PRIORITY AREA 7: UNIVERSAL DESIGN FOR LEARNING (UDL) – *“Develop a coordinated approach to integrating UDL principles that enhances tutor expertise, promotes inclusivity in teaching materials and practices, and ensures accessible learning environments for all learners”*.

### OPEN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES (OER) MANAGEMENT

The use of Open Educational Resources (OER) by programme staff is carefully managed through established guidelines to ensure compliance with copyright and licensing requirements set out in [QAP3-5: Design and Implementation of Learning Resources](#). Guidelines are provided on how to select OER that align with course learning objectives, properly attribute these resources according to their licenses and ensure they meet quality and relevance standards. This approach ensures that OER materials used in SQT programmes are of high quality and contribute effectively to the learning experience.



## 7.5. Assessment and Feedback Processes

SQT is committed to delivering a fair, transparent, and flexible assessment process that aligns with the needs of its learners, while upholding academic integrity and ensuring the highest standards of quality in both online and blended programmes. The following outlines the key areas of assessment design, implementation, and quality assurance:

**Guidance on Assessment Formats:** Programme developers receive clear guidance on selecting the most appropriate formats for summative assessments, whether delivered online or on-site. This process is guided by the internal document, **Guidelines for the Development of Blended and Fully Online Programmes**. In all cases, the proposed assessment strategy is reviewed collaboratively with the programme team and the Director of Quality and Academic Affairs. In certain instances, input from the relevant External Examiner is also sought prior to programme validation to ensure a comprehensive review and alignment with quality standards. The decision is based on the nature of the assessment, learning outcomes, and the specific needs of learners. For instance, while practical assessments may require onsite demonstration, skills-based demonstrations and assignments can often be effectively completed online via platforms such as Zoom or MS Teams. This flexibility ensures that assessments are accessible and aligned with programme objectives.

**Formative Assessment and Feedback:** Programme developers are encouraged to integrate formative assessment tools into course design to provide learners with ongoing feedback and support self-monitoring. Formative assessments, such as quizzes, reflection activities and peer activities offer learners immediate feedback on their progress allowing them to identify areas for improvement throughout the programme. This continuous feedback loop fosters deeper learning and aligns with SQT's learner-centred approach to education.

**Group Assessments and Collaboration:** To promote interaction and collaboration between learners, the inclusion of group assessments is encouraged, where appropriate. While formal group projects are integrated in specific courses, collaboration is emphasised across all programmes through peer-to-peer activities, discussions, and interactive exercises. These activities mirror the collaborative environments learners often experience in their workplaces and support the development of teamwork and knowledge-sharing skills.

**Online Submission and Feedback:** All assessments are submitted securely via the Moodle platform, which provides a streamlined process for both learners and Tutors. Upon submission, learners receive automatic notifications confirming receipt. Feedback to draft assessments is delivered directly through Moodle, ensuring timely and organised responses to submitted work. This system ensures the integrity and security of the assessment process and provides a centralised location for managing submissions and feedback.

**Academic Integrity:** QA of the assessment process is addressed in both **QAP6-1: Assessment of Learners** and **QAP6-2: Academic Integrity and Good Practice**. These policies ensure that academic integrity is consistently upheld across all QQI programmes, fostering a culture of honesty, fairness,

and responsibility within the learning environment. By aligning with the NAIN Academic Integrity Guidelines and the NAIN Framework for Academic Misconduct Investigation and Case Management, the policy aims to provide a clear, structured approach for identifying, investigating, and addressing instances of academic misconduct. In addition, internal guidelines have been developed to provide Tutors with a clear understanding of their role in promoting academic integrity within the learning environment – [Academic Integrity Guidelines for Tutors](#). By offering practical strategies for designing assessments, identifying potential cases of academic misconduct and fostering a culture of honesty, these guidelines aim to ensure that Tutors are equipped to support learners in maintaining ethical academic standards.

## 7.6. Evaluation and Continuous Improvement

SQT implements comprehensive evaluation and review mechanisms to continuously assess the effectiveness of all programmes and all delivery modes. Feedback is collected from learners across all programmes using the Coursecheck system. This feedback is essential for driving continuous improvement and addressing any learner concerns. Evaluation of online provision is conducted both as part of the formal programme review process and thematically across all programmes throughout the year. This enables comparisons of learner experiences across different delivery modes, thereby ensuring improvements are targeted and effective.

A combination of systems, including the Coursecheck Learner Feedback system, Management Information system, Moodle, and Custom-built dashboards, are utilised to monitor key performance indicators (KPIs) and assess programme effectiveness across all delivery modes. These tools provide real-time insights into learner performance and feedback, allowing for data-driven decisions that enhance programme quality and learner outcomes. Ongoing monitoring and review processes identify areas for improvement, thereby guiding incremental enhancements over time.

In summary, the policies and procedures governing the processes of evaluation and continuous improvement are outlined in Section 11 of the Quality Framework, namely:

- [QAP11-1: Ongoing Monitoring of Programmes and QA Framework](#)
- [QAP11-2: Periodic Programme Review and Revalidation of Programmes](#)
- [QAP11-3: External Cyclical Review \(QQI Institutional Review\)](#)

These policies ensure that blended and fully online programmes are continuously evaluated and enhanced, thereby maintaining high standards of quality and learner satisfaction.

## 8. DOMAIN 3: LEARNER EXPERIENCE CONTEXT

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*The Learner Experience Context focuses on the learner, their choices, and whether the support and development services and related digital resources designed to promote high levels of engagement, learner success and well-being are fit-for-purpose. It establishes whether procedures are in place to ensure learners are adequately informed about the programme and aware of both online and offline learning support and development services available to them, with a particular focus on supporting study readiness, equality of opportunity and positive outcomes for learners based on learner-centred and good practice principles for blended and/or fully online learning provision<sup>4</sup>.*

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### 8.1. Thinking about Study

To ensure learners are fully prepared for blended and fully online study, several measures are implemented to assess and support their readiness in advance of the programme. This includes discussions with Course Administration Managers and Tutors or Programme Directors, where necessary, to identify any specific learner needs or challenges. Learners are provided with guidance and preparatory resources designed to build their confidence and competence in navigating digital platforms and learning technologies, thereby ensuring a smooth transition into the online learning environment. Comprehensive information is readily available in each course brochure. This is set out in [QAP9-1: Public Information and Communication](#). Additional information in relation to online training is available on the Virtual Training section of the website. These proactive measures help promote learner success from the outset.

### 8.2. Learning Support and Development

SQT seeks to ensure that support services for remote learners in blended and fully online programmes are fully comparable to those offered in on-site courses. This includes technical assistance, Tutor access, and administrative support, ensuring that all learners have equal access to resources regardless of their physical location. SQT's policies on learner support are clearly outlined in Section 7 of its QA Framework. This demonstrates its commitment to ensuring appropriate support for learners across all programmes. This includes both programme-specific and additional support services to address the unique needs of blended and fully online learners.

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<sup>4</sup> Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Blended and Fully Online Programmes (2023), Quality and Qualifications Ireland

## TECHNICAL SUPPORT

- **Pre-Course Technical Support** - To ensure that learners are prepared for the technical requirements of online and blended learning, SQT offers a 'Tech Check' session approximately one week prior to course commencement. During this session, potential IT issues are identified and resolved, allowing learners to focus fully on the course content from day one.
- **On-the-Day Support** - On the morning of course commencement, SQT support staff assist with the initial login process, ensuring that all learners can access the virtual classroom successfully. Throughout the session, dedicated IT support staff are available to troubleshoot any technical issues related to Zoom or Moodle, ensuring minimal disruption to the learning experience. A comprehensive Tutor and Learner Zoom Guide have been developed which are regularly updated and made available to all learners via a dedicated virtual training webpage. A number of videos and FAQ resources are also available on this page.

## SYNCHRONOUS INTERACTION

Learners on both blended and fully online programmes are guaranteed direct synchronous interactions with programme Tutors. These interactions occur regularly throughout the programme, ensuring that learners have ongoing opportunities to engage, clarify doubts, and receive guidance during or outside of the scheduled online sessions. The first synchronous session typically takes place at the start of the course, helping learners establish expectations and build connections with both Tutors and peers.

### 8.3. Equality of Opportunity

As is set out in the Learner Support section above, SQT is dedicated to providing equitable learning support and development services for all learners, regardless of the mode of study. For fully online programmes, it seeks to provide equivalency in the provision of learning support and development services to ensure that online learners have the same access to resources and assistance as those studying through traditional on-site modes. A safe online learning environment is maintained with protocols that promote dignity, courtesy, and respect in digital interactions. These are set out in [QAP5-3: Learner Engagement on Blended and Fully Online Programmes](#).

SQT's UDL policy [QAP5-2: Universal Design for Learning \(UDL\)](#) mandates that all materials are designed to be flexible and accessible, ensuring that all learners can fully participate in and benefit from their programme.

### 8.4. Learning Experience and Outcomes

A comprehensive approach to monitoring learner engagement, progression, and completion data ensures that our blended and fully online programmes meet their intended learning objectives, while also providing valuable insights to continuously improve programme delivery and learner outcomes. Relevant strategies are set out below.

## **MONITORING LEARNER ENGAGEMENT AND PROGRESSION**

Learner engagement, progression, and completion data for blended and fully online programmes are tracked and reviewed regularly. SQT utilises a combination of systems including the MIS, Moodle, and custom-built dashboards to monitor Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) across all programmes. These systems allow for ongoing review of learner engagement in real-time, ensuring that any issues are promptly identified and addressed. This data-driven approach supports decision-making and helps improve programme effectiveness.

## **EVALUATION OF ONLINE LEARNING EFFECTIVENESS**

Consistent evaluation processes are applied for all programmes, irrespective of delivery mode, as outlined in our Quality Assurance Framework ([QAP11-1: Ongoing Monitoring of Programmes](#)). SQT systematically collects and reviews feedback from learners regarding their experience with blended and fully online learning modes. This feedback is gathered through the Coursecheck system at the end of each course and is reviewed by the Programme Tutor, Course Administration Manager, and the Director of Quality and Academic Affairs. A summary of learner feedback is presented at Programme Board meetings for discussion and further action. Specific questions related to the mode of delivery and the technology used are incorporated into both learner and tutor feedback forms. This allows for an in-depth analysis of the relative effectiveness of blended and fully online learning in achieving programme outcomes and objectives. The effectiveness of online delivery modes is also considered by the Teaching and Learning Committee and within the Tutor Community of Practice, where tutors engage in a collaborative review of feedback and share insights to further enhance the learner experience. This structured process ensures that learner experience is continuously evaluated and improvements are made to benefit future cohorts.

## **EMPLOYER AND WORKPLACE FEEDBACK**

SQT maintains strong relationships with client companies and incorporates employer and employee feedback into its general learner feedback processes. Given the significant proportion of our learners who are workplace-based professionals, the ongoing feedback from employers plays a critical role in assessing the effectiveness of online training. Employers, having experienced both on-site and online delivery modes since 2020, provide informed feedback that allows SQT to better align its blended and fully online programmes with industry needs. This continuous feedback loop ensures that SQT programmes not only meet academic standards but also deliver practical value to the workplace.

## **DATA-DRIVEN IMPROVEMENTS**

The combination of real-time learner data, systematic feedback collection, and employer engagement enables SQT to take a holistic view of the learning experience and outcomes. By leveraging this data, SQT can make informed decisions to enhance both the content and delivery of its online and blended learning programmes, ensuring that learners achieve their desired outcomes while maintaining a high level of satisfaction with their learning experience.

## 9. POLICY MONITORING

Responsibility	Frequency	Methods
Director of Quality and Academic Affairs – Document Update	Per QA audit schedule	- Review of documentation as set out in QAP2-1: Ongoing Review and Update of QA Documents.
Director of Quality and Academic Affairs	Ongoing	- Review of output from governance unit meetings.

## 10. DOCUMENT CONTROL

Version No	Approval Date	Description of Revision	Originator	Approved By
1.0	15 <sup>th</sup> November 2024	New Document	Director of Quality and Academic Affairs	Academic Council