

Document Title	Learner Engagement on Blended and Fully Online Programmes
Policy Area	Area 5: Teaching & Learning
Document Code (version #)	QAP5-3
Applies to	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> All <input type="checkbox"/> Specific
	<input type="checkbox"/> Staff only <input type="checkbox"/> Learners only <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Staff and Learners

Document Owner	Director of Quality and Academic Affairs
Approved by	Academic Council

Approval date	15 th November 2024
Effective date	18 th November 2024

Related legislation, policies, procedures, guidelines and local protocols	<p>This policy has been designed with due regard to the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines (2016), Quality and Qualifications Ireland - Sector Specific Independent/Private Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines (2016), Quality and Qualifications Ireland - Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act, 2012 - 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) - Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Blended and Fully Online Programmes (2023), Quality and Qualifications Ireland
--	---

Table of Contents

1. Context.....	3
2. Purpose	3
3. Scope/Application.....	3
4. Responsibility	3
5. Learner Participation Policy	4
6. Camera-on Policy	4
6.1. Rationale	4
6.2. Exceptions	5
6.3. Procedure.....	5
7. Attendance Policy	5
8. Learner Netiquette Guidelines on Synchronous Classes	6
9. Policy Monitoring.....	8
10. Document Control.....	8

1. CONTEXT

SQT delivers programmes through various modalities, including on-site, blended, and fully online formats. It is committed to replicating the face-to-face on-site environment as closely as possible for its online and blended courses. This ensures that learners remain actively engaged and benefit from a rich, interactive learning experience, regardless of the delivery format.

Active participation and engagement are crucial for achieving learning outcomes, and this policy outlines the expectations and procedures for fostering learner engagement across all programmes.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that learners participating on blended and fully online programmes remain actively engaged throughout the course. Active participation enhances the learning experience and is essential for achieving the intended learning outcomes.

Learner engagement is achieved through participation in synchronous online sessions, group activities, and completing assigned tasks. Tutors play a key role in monitoring learner participation during these sessions and ensuring that learners are engaged through interactive tools such as polls, breakout rooms, and group discussions.

3. SCOPE/APPLICATION

This policy applies to all learners and staff involved in SQT's blended and fully online programmes. It is relevant to all courses where synchronous online sessions and other interactive online activities are a part of the course structure.

4. RESPONSIBILITY

The following responsibilities apply:

- **Director of Quality and Academic Affairs:** Has overall responsibility for ensuring the effective implementation and adherence to this policy.
- **Learners:** Are responsible for actively engaging in all blended and online learning activities, completing assigned work, and participating in group activities.
- **Tutors:** Are responsible for monitoring learner engagement, facilitating interactive sessions, and ensuring that all learners are involved in discussions and activities.

5. LEARNER PARTICIPATION POLICY

Given the work-based nature of SQT programmes which are designed for learners in employment, active participation is crucial. Learners are expected to contribute meaningfully to discussions, complete assigned tasks on time and engage with both Tutors and fellow learners.

In synchronous sessions, where participation is required, learners are expected to engage in real-time discussions, group activities and collaborative learning. The Tutor will monitor participation and provide feedback to ensure all learners are actively involved. Live classes via Zoom or MS Teams are structured to maximise engagement through features like breakout rooms, polls, and Q&A sessions. These sessions provide real-time interaction between learners and Tutors encouraging practical discussions relevant to the learners' professional environments. The aim is to replicate the on-site classroom environment as closely as possible.

6. CAMERA-ON POLICY

SQT encourages a "camera-on" policy for all synchronous online sessions. Learners are encouraged to keep their cameras on during the session unless prior arrangements are made with the Tutor due to specific circumstances (refer to exceptional circumstances below).

6.1. Rationale

This policy supports active participation by encouraging visual interaction which helps Tutors gauge learner engagement and fosters a sense of connection amongst participants. Tutors will remind learners of this policy at the start of the course and at the beginning of each session.

The use of cameras during online training sessions has several benefits:

- **Enhanced Engagement:** Seeing each other's faces helps create a sense of presence and participation, making sessions more interactive and dynamic.
- **Improved Communication:** Visual cues such as facial expressions and gestures aid in better understanding and communication among participants and Tutors.
- **Accountability:** Having cameras on encourages participants to be more present and attentive during sessions.
- **Community Building:** Visual interaction helps build a sense of community and connection amongst participants, fostering a collaborative learning environment.

6.2. Exceptions

SQT understand that there may be legitimate reasons why a learner cannot have their camera on. These include, but are not limited to:

- **Technical Issues:** Problems with camera functionality or internet bandwidth that affect video quality.
- **Privacy Concerns:** Situations where participants are in locations where privacy cannot be maintained.
- **Personal Circumstances:** Personal or family situations that temporarily prevent the use of a camera.

Learners who need to turn off their cameras due to any of these reasons should inform the Tutor at the beginning of the session or as soon as the issue arises.

6.3. Procedure

1. **Notification:** Learners will be informed about the "Camera On" policy prior to the commencement of the programme. Tutors will also remind participants at the beginning of each session to ensure that everyone is aware of the policy.
2. **Technical Support:** If participants experience technical difficulties with their cameras, they should contact SQT's technical support team for assistance. Support details will be provided before the programme starts.
3. **Privacy Measures:** Participants who are concerned about privacy are encouraged to use virtual backgrounds. This option will be suggested during orientation, and guidance on setting up virtual backgrounds will be available.

7. ATTENDANCE POLICY

Given the short nature of SQT's courses, consistent attendance is essential for learners to fully engage with the course material and achieve the learning outcomes. In general, full attendance is expected at all synchronous sessions in blended and fully online programmes similar to that of on-site programmes.

Learners are expected to attend all scheduled online classes and attendance is monitored by the Tutor, a record of attendance is made at the end of each session. If a learner is unable to attend due to work or personal commitments, they must inform the Course Administration Manager or Tutor in advance and plan to catch up on any missed content. Attendance records will be reviewed as part of overall learner engagement and failure to attend sessions without valid reasons may affect the learner's ability to successfully complete the programme.

8. LEARNER NETIQUETTE GUIDELINES ON SYNCHRONOUS CLASSES

In a virtual environment, effective communication and mutual respect are essential to creating a positive and productive learning experience. Since the absence of face-to-face interaction can sometimes lead to misunderstandings or unintended conflicts, it is important to establish clear expectations of how learners should engage with one another and with Tutors. Observing the following guidelines ensures that online interactions remain professional, effective, and conducive to learning.

1. Respectful Communication

- Communicate respectfully with others at all times. Offensive, inappropriate, or discriminatory language and behaviour will not be tolerated.
- Listen attentively during discussions and avoid interrupting others when they are speaking.
- Keep your microphone off when not speaking to minimise background noise.
- Use the raise hand feature if you wish to contribute or ask a question during live sessions.

2. Camera and Background Setup

- Ensure your camera is turned on during live sessions, unless otherwise directed by the Tutor, to help create a more interactive and engaging learning environment.
- Choose a quiet, distraction-free location with an appropriate background when participating in online classes. If possible, use a neutral or blurred background to maintain a professional setting.
- Be mindful of your surroundings and minimise visual distractions for others by ensuring your workspace is organised and suitable for a learning environment.

3. Active Participation and Engagement

- Arrive on time for all sessions and remain fully engaged. Participation is key to a successful learning experience.
- Avoid multitasking (e.g., checking emails, browsing unrelated websites) during the session, as it reduces the quality of your engagement and may disrupt the learning process.

4. Use of Technology

- Familiarise yourself with the features of the online platform being used, such as mute, chat, screen sharing, and the raise hand feature, before the session begins.
- Test your audio and video equipment ahead of time to avoid disruptions. If you encounter technical issues, notify the Tutor via chat or email.

5. Environment and Noise Control

- Participate in a quiet location to avoid background noise that could disrupt the session for others.
- Minimise potential distractions by turning off TVs, silencing phones, and ensuring that any family members are not interrupting the session.

6. Constructive Participation

- Be concise and to the point when contributing to discussions. Keep your comments relevant to the topic at hand and avoid monopolising conversations.
- Provide constructive feedback when engaging with others and be open to receiving feedback in a positive and collaborative manner.

7. Privacy and Confidentiality

- Respect the privacy of other participants. Do not record or take screenshots of the session without the consent of the Tutor and participants.
- Avoid sharing sensitive personal or confidential information during the session.

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.

10. DOCUMENT CONTROL

Version No	Approval Date	Description of Revision	Originator	Approved By
1.0	Nov 24	New Document	Teaching and Learning Committee	Academic Council