Annual Quality Report (SQT Training)
Reporting Period 2020-2021

[SQT Training]

2022

Annual Quality Report (SQT Training)
PART A: INTERNAL QA SYSTEM
Reporting Period 2020-2021

PREFACE

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

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

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

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

CONTENTS

Guidelines on Completing the Report

The AQR is aligned with QQI's Core, Sector and Topic-specific Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines and with the ESG (2015). A mapping of the ESG to QQI Core QA Guidelines is included in Table 1 below; the structure of Part A of this report template aligns with the first column of the table. Additional guidance on completing this template and reference material is included in each section. Institutions should adhere to this guidance and have regard to QQI Core, Sector and Topic-specific Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines. **The guide text within each section should be deleted before submission of the report.**

Submission Process and Timeline

The deadline for submission of the AQR each year is in February of the relevant year, with the call for submission sent to institutions in November of the preceding year. Once the call for submission has been made, QQI will provide access to QQI's provider portal, QHub, to the designated institution contact(s) to facilitate submission of the report. Through QHub, each institution will have access to an editable version of its AQR for the previous reporting period. This document can then be amended/updated to reflect any changes or developments that occurred during the current reporting period before submitting the final report to QQI.

Completing the AQR

- When completing the AQR template, all relevant colleagues in the institution should be consulted.
- Consider whether external audiences will be able to understand the terminology used (particularly local abbreviations and acronyms); it may be helpful to include a glossary.
- Aim to avoid duplication in the report – where information is relevant to more than one section, the first mention may be referenced in subsequent sections.
- Provide reflections on what worked well, but also what may have been tried but did not work.

Report Structure

Part A: Internal QA System

Part A of the AQR comprises a record of each institution's current QA policies and procedures and should provide links to those policies and procedures. Private HEIs may provide links to the policies and procedures approved by QQI during initial access to validation (IAV) or reengagement. It is the responsibility of each HEI to ensure before submission of the AQR that all links are correct and functional, and that the policies and procedures referred to are the most up-to-date versions available. Given that the AQR is submitted in respect of a discrete reporting period, it may be helpful for institutions to establish a SharePoint/OneDrive folder (or similar) for each reporting period that contains the current versions of their policies and procedures, and that hyperlinks to these versions of the documents be provided in the AQR

Part A is to be completed only if there have been **material** changes to QA policies and procedures during the reporting period. Such changes may include the approval and implementation of new polices or procedures, or significant amendments to existing ones.

Part B: Quality Assurance (QA) and Quality Enhancement (QE)

Part B of the AQR documents and captures QA activities, developments and enhancements undertaken by institutions **during the reporting period** and their **impact**. Insofar as is possible, institutions should demonstrate in Part B how plans set out in the previous AQR were progressed during the reporting period – these may be plans linked to strategic objectives, to reengagement advices, or to institutional review recommendations.

Case Studies

In each reporting period, QQI may request updates on specific thematic areas or may invite the institution to submit case studies in response to specific topics. Further, institutions may include case studies to share good practice on topics of their choosing, demonstrating QA and QE in action. In formulating case studies, institutions are encouraged to reflect on and highlight areas that may be of interest to other institutions and would benefit from wider dissemination. Further guidance is provided in Part B.

Links to Reference Documents Cited in this Template[1]

Legislation

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

QQI Documents

Statutory QA Guidelines (QAG)

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

Other QQI Policy Documents

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

Other National/International References

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

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[1] These links will be updated as further guidance documents are published.

PART A: INTERNAL QA SYSTEM

Table 1

Table 1 Mapping of ESG (2015) to QQI QA Guidelines (QAG)

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

Introduction and Overview of Institution

This is the AQR for SQT Training for the reporting period 1 January to 31st December 2021. It is to be submitted by Friday, 25 February 2022.

The AQR has been approved by SQT's Academic Council and is submitted by the Director of Quality and Academic Affairs.

SQT Profile

SQT was founded in 1989. Its primary goal is to develop and deliver high quality, focused, responsive, and innovative training and educational programmes for learners. The organisation has built an extensive portfolio of quality clients across both the public and private sector. To date the company has delivered programmes to in excess of 90,000 learners across hundreds of organisations spanning a wide range of industries.

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

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

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

SQT offers a range of accredited and non-accredited programmes. Programmes range from 0.5 to 20 teaching days across twelve broad subject areas, categorised as follows:
- Lean Six Sigma
- Continual Process Improvement
- Project & Programme Management
- Quality
- Environment & Energy Management
- Health & Safety
- Food Safety
- Life Sciences
- Laboratory
- Hospitals / Medical
- Train the Trainer

- Leadership & Personal Development

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

In the context of QQI, SQT secured initial QA approval from FETAC in 2007 and, subsequently, HETAC in 2008. The scope of QQI provision is presently limited to the following subject areas:
- Lean Six Sigma (3 HET Special Purpose Awards and 1 FET Special Purpose Award)
- Food Safety (3 FET Special Purpose Awards)
- Leadership & Personal Development (1 Minor and 2 Special Purpose Awards)

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

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

AQR Development and Reporting Period

Preparation for the submission of this AQR began in November 2021. A project plan was developed and presented to Academic Council. The Director of Quality and Academic Affairs oversaw the completion of the document and several iterations was reviewed by the Quality Committee prior to review and final approval by the Academic Council in February 2022.

Due to SQT's profile and rolling intake on its programmes, all reporting and analysis is carried out based on a calendar year (January to December). Following discussion with QQI, it was agreed that the reporting period for SQT would be for the calendar year January – December 2021, rather than September 2020 to August 2021 which is typical of traditional HE institutions.

1.0 Internal QA Framework

1.1 Governance and Management of Quality

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

1. **QA Strategy** 'Quality Assurance and Enhancement' is a key pillar in SQT's Strategic Plan. Goals and targets associated with this pillar have been clearly aligned with SQT's mission and vision.
2. **QA Implementation** of quality assurance through documented quality assurance policies, procedures, work instructions and supporting documents.
3. **QA Monitoring and Self-Evaluation** through a wide variety of methods which encapsulate feedback from all relevant stakeholders.
4. **Continuous Improvement** through systematic methods such as PIN's (potential for improvement notices), programme and quality improvement plans and ongoing corrective actions.
5. **Publication of Findings / Outcomes** via SQT's website and other relevant channels.

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

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

This revised framework has been informed by the following:

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

1 QA Strategy

QA STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

- Strategic Pillar
- QA Governance, Units, Responsibilities
- QA Systems
- QA Planning

QA Policies & Procedures

Policy Areas

1. Governance & Management of QA
2. Documented Approach to QA
3. Programmes of Education & Training
4. Staff Recruitment, Management & Development
5. Teaching & Learning
5. Assessment of Learners
6. Supports for Learners
6. Information & Data Management
7. Public Information & Communication
10. Other Parties Involved
11. Self Evaluation, Monitoring & Review

Supporting Documents

- Work Instructions
- Records
- Specifications
- Resources
- Forms

2 QA Implementation

In built Monitoring Mechanisms	Ongoing Course Review
Annual QA Audits	Learner and Programme Data
External Cyclical Review	Graduate Survey
Other Surveys	Company Feedback
KPI'S	Periodic Self - Evaluation
Class Rep System	External Examiner Feedback
Actions arising from Boards & Committees	Continuous Learner and Tutor Feedback

3 QA Monitoring & Self- Evaluation

Quality Improvement

PINS	ONGOING CORRECTIVE ACTION	IMPROVEMENT PLANS (Programme & QA)

4 Continuous Improvement
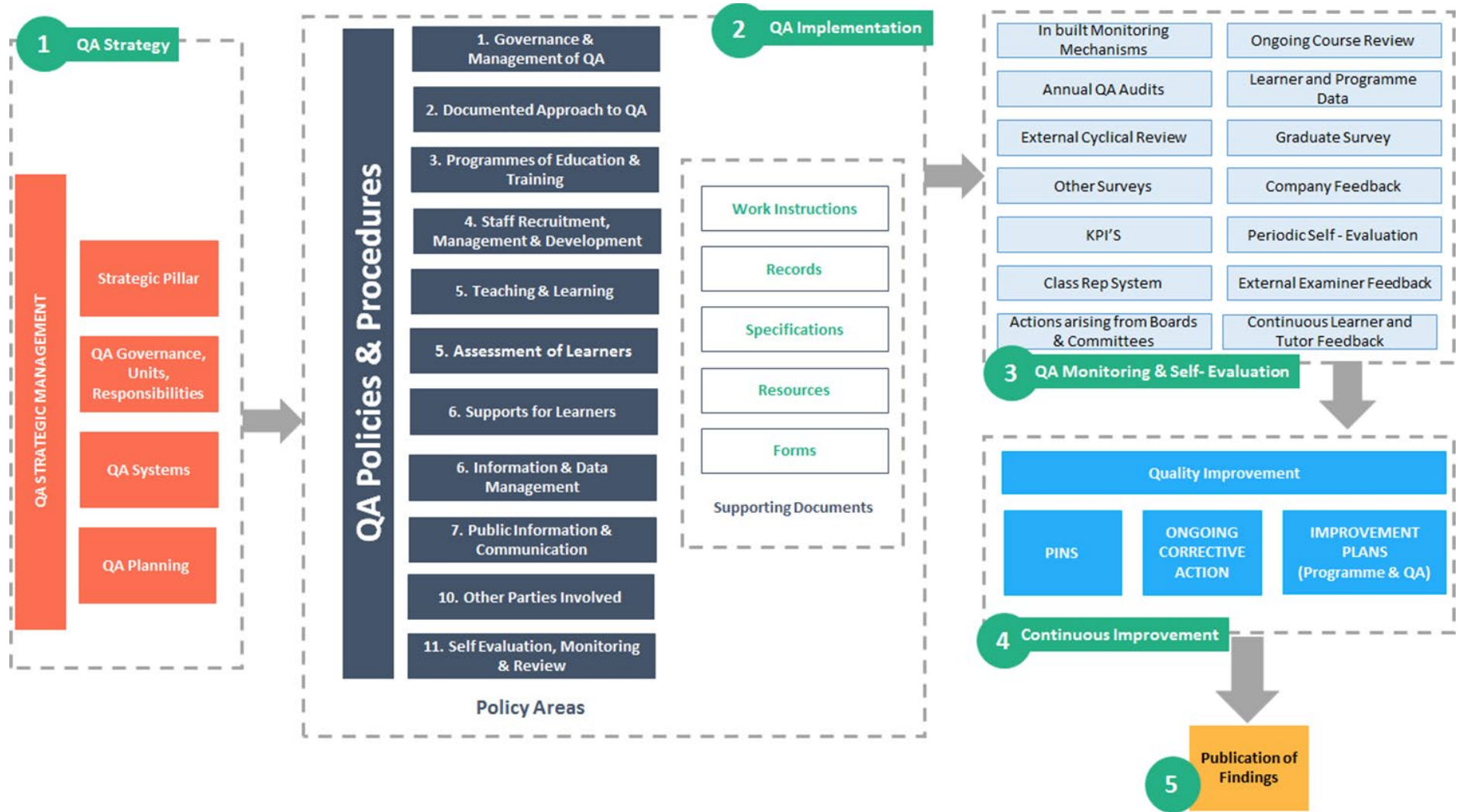
5 Publication of Findings

Figure 1: SQT's QA Framework

1.1 Governance and Management of Quality

SQT's governance structure spans both corporate and academic domains. This is comprehensively set out in **QAP1-2 SQT Governance** and its operation in practice is described in Part B: Section 1.3.2, QA Leadership and Management Structural Developments, below.

Note: AC denotes Academic Council and BOD denotes Board of Directors in the tables below.

The policies and procedures specific to governance and management of quality are, as follows.

QA Area	Code	Document Title	Approving Unit
1. Governance and Management of Quality	QAP1-1	Quality Assurance Policy	AC
	QAP1-2	SQT Governance	BOD
	QAP1-3	Risk Management	BOD
	QAP1-4	Strategic Planning	BOD
2. Documented approach to Quality Assurance	QAP2-1	Ongoing Review and Update of QA Documents	AC

2.0 Programme Development and Delivery

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

2.1 Programme Development and Approval

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

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

QA Area	Code	Document Title	Approving Unit
3. Programmes of Education and Training	QAP3-1	Development and Validation of Programmes	AC
	QAP3-2	Updating Programmes and Course Material	AC

2.2 Admission, Progression, Recognition & Certification

Given the mature profile of SQT's learner cohort and the specific programme focus there are a number of progression opportunities across a range of third level providers. These providers deal with exemptions and RPL on a case-by-case basis. QAP3-3 and QAP3-4 address Access, Transfer and Progression and RPL.

QA Area	Code	Document Title	Approving Unit
3. Programmes of Education and Training	QAP3-3	Access, Transfer and Progression	AC
	QAP3-4	Recognition of Prior Learning	AC

2.3 Teaching, Learning and Assessment

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

It is important to note that learners on the SQT LSS programmes are enrolled on an on-going basis, unlike many academic institutions, who accept intakes typically twice per year in September and January. In the case of public programmes, learners are generally scheduled for the next available programme. In the case of in-house learners, programmes are scheduled, based on tutor availability and specific company requirements. Consequently, learners do not form unique cohorts or follow an exact sequential enrolment and completion pattern. If learners are unable to complete the teaching days as scheduled, they are re-scheduled to the next available teaching slot.

QA Area	Code	Document Title	Approving Unit
5. Teaching and Learning	QAP5-1	Teaching and Learning Policy	AC
6. Assessment of Learners	QAP6-1	Assessment of Learners (QQI Programmes)	AC

3.0 Learner Resources and Support

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

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

4.0 Staff Recruitment, Development and Support

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

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

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

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

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

QA Area	Code	Document Title	Approving Unit
4. Staff Recruitment, Management and Development	QAP4-1	Recruitment and Induction of Teaching Staff	AC
	QAP4-2	Peer Review of Teaching Staff	AC
	QAP4-3	Monitoring the Effectiveness of Teaching Staff	AC
	QAP4-4	Professional Development of Teaching Staff	AC

5.0 Information and Data Management

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

QA Area	Code	Document Title	Approving Unit
8. Information and Data Management	QAP8-1	Information Management Policy	BOD
	QAP8-2	Data Protection Policy	BOD
	QAP8-3	Management of Data Breaches	BOD
	QAP8-4	Subject Access Requests	BOD

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

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

6.0 Public Information and Communication

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

QA Area	Code	Document Title	Approving Unit
9. Public Information and Communication	QAP9-1	Public Information and Communication	AC
10. Other parties involved in Education and Training	QAP10-1	Other parties involved in Education and Training	AC

7.0 Monitoring and Periodic Review

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

QA Area	Code	Document Title	Approving Unit
11. Self-Evaluation, Monitoring and Review	QAP11-1	Ongoing Monitoring of Programmes and QA Framework	AC
	QAP11-2	Periodic Programme Review and Revalidation of Programmes (QQI Programmes)	AC
	QAP11-3	External Cyclical Review	AC

From an operational perspective, the effectiveness of all SQT programmes (virtual or classroom based) is monitored through a variety of mechanisms on an ongoing basis. These mechanisms are integrated in SQT's policy: *QAP11-1 Ongoing Monitoring of Programmes and QA Framework* and are reviewed on a regular basis. This is illustrated in Figure 2 below.
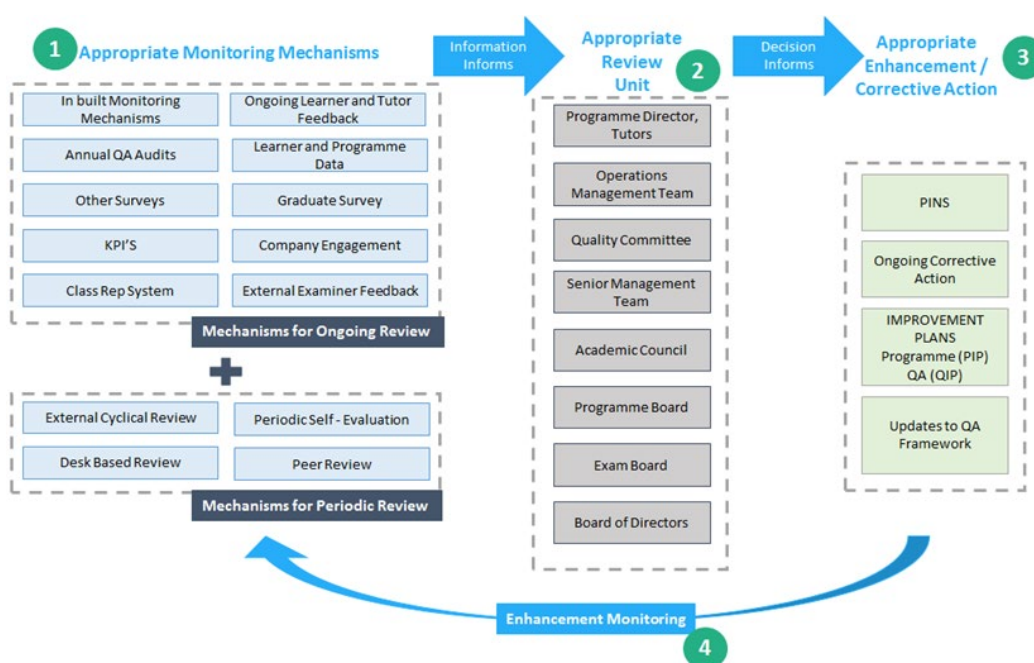

Figure 2: Ongoing Monitoring, Periodic Review and Continuous Improvement Cycle

8.0 Updates to Quality Assurance during the Reporting Period

A comprehensive gap analysis against QQI's Guidelines for Blended Learning Programmes has been undertaken. As a result, the SQT QA framework has been updated to incorporate these guidelines. These will remain as interim guidelines in practice until such time as they are formally approved by QQI, as part of their extension of scope process.

Further information pertaining to this extension of scope project is set out in the following section of the report Part B: 2.1 Review of Internal Quality Framework.

In addition, the Programmatic Review Panel (2021) review and recommendations wrt virtual delivery and SQT's response is provided in Appendix 1: Programmatic Review Panel Response to Review of Virtual Delivery.

Finally, minor updates to QA documentation arose out of the programmatic review including updates to APEL and criteria specific to English Language Requirements. These have been implemented in full.

9.0   Details of Arrangements with Third Parties

9.1   Arrangements with PRSBs, Awarding Bodies, QA Bodies

Type of arrangement	Total Number
PRSBs	0
Awarding bodies	1
QA bodies	0

1. Type of arrangement	Awarding body
Name of body:	NEBOSH
Programme titles and links to publications	International Diploma in Health and Safety International General Certificate in H&S Certificate in Fire Safety Certificate in Environmental Management Award in Environmental Awareness at Work
Date of accreditation or last review	01/02/2020
Date of next review	

9.2   Collaborative Provision

Type of arrangement	Total Number
Joint research degrees	0
Joint/double/multiple awards	0
Collaborative programmes	0
Franchise programmes	0
Linked providers (DABs only)	0

9.3   Articulation Agreements

Articulation agreements - Total number	0

SQT Training
2022

Annual Quality Report (SQT Training)
PART B: INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE
ENHANCEMENT & IMPACT
Reporting Period 2020-2021

PART B: INTERNAL QA SYSTEM

Guidelines on Completing Part B

As outlined in the general guidelines for this template (p.5), **Part B** of the AQR documents and captures QA activities, developments and enhancements undertaken by institutions **during the reporting period** and their **impact**.

Insofar as is possible, institutions should demonstrate in Part B how plans set out in the previous AQR submission were progressed during the reporting period – these may be plans linked to strategic objectives, to reengagement advices, or to institutional review recommendations.

Part B of the AQR is an opportunity for self-reflection and critical evaluation of the effectiveness of QA activities over the reporting period. Institutions are encouraged to reflect both on what worked well and what did not work well, and to consider impact measures, using both quantitative and qualitative evidence (metrics, benchmarks and feedback/judgement) in how they led to specific QA improvements and enhancement.

Part B provides evidence of quality improvement and enhancement and impact[2] of QA activities within the totality of an institution's QA system.

Section 1 pertains to internal quality assurance implementation and developments since the previous reporting period.

Section 2 deals with institutional analysis of IQA enhancements and impacts including activities undertaken in respect of academic integrity, and the enhancements and impacts resulting from same.

Section 3 relates to IQA developments and plans for the next reporting period.

Section 4 provides an opportunity for institutions to illustrate IQA in action through case studies in relevant thematic areas.

Institutions are invited, if they wish to do so, to use case studies to demonstrate quality in action and to highlight areas of practice for dissemination at any point in this part of the report.

Case Studies

QQI recommends that written case studies should:
- Be between half a page and two pages in length;
- Relate to a specific time- and subject-bound issue;
- Include an introduction that sets out a brief overview of contextual matters;
- Include any relevant supporting data and data analysis;
- Include links to any sources cited;
- Include a clear concluding paragraph with overview of key outcomes/learning.

Although case studies will generally be in written form, institutions may also provide links to audio-visual/multimedia case studies. QQI does not prescribe a format for case studies.

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[2] The National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education have considered impact and measures leading to development and improvement specifically in terms of teaching and learning. See: https://www.teachingandlearning.ie/wp-content/uploads/NF-2020-Insights-from-Practice-About-Impact-in-Teaching-and-Learning-web-ready.pdf.This is a very useful reference, though impact in the context of this report should be considered

1.0 Quality Implementation and Developments

1.1 Strategic QA Updates

Several key strategic developments took place during the reporting period. This section outlines these developments which include:

- Update of Strategic Plan (2022-2025)
- Update of Teaching and Learning Strategy (2022-2025)
- LSS Revalidation Activity and Development of Feeder Programme

1.1.1 UPDATE OF STRATEGIC PLAN (2022-2025)

Out of adversity has come opportunity for SQT. The Covid pandemic has catalyzed the successful implementation of new and innovative approaches to programme delivery which has been part of SQT's longer term strategy for many years.

Of significance is that approximately 64% of learners surveyed during the reporting period noted their preference for online programmes over a face-to-face classroom setting. There is a now a real expectation from learners and industry that this flexible approach to programme delivery will remain a prominent feature of future teaching and learning practice at SQT.

SQT's learner profile include large multi-national organisations with sites located worldwide. There is a now a growing demand for global programme deployment whereby the same programme is deployed across some or all client sites. Whilst this approach had gained traction before Covid, the effectiveness of virtual delivery which became common practice during the pandemic has accelerated this demand. SQT witnessed a two-fold growth in learners outside of Ireland on non-accredited programmes in 2021 and a five-fold growth when compared to pre-pandemic numbers.

The constraint of not being able to offer QQI programmes to learners outside of Ireland has presented significant challenges for SQT. An important strategic focus in the medium to long term is to offer its entire suite of programmes to all learners irrespective of their location. SQT has had ongoing dialogue with QQI with respect to these challenges and will be guided by them in terms of the actions required to extend its scope of provision.

During 2021 SQT's Senior Management Team commenced the process of developing a new Strategic Plan in line with its strategic planning process set out in Figure 3 below. The strategic plan for the next three years is influenced by the fundamental and long-lasting changes which have been brought about by the pandemic. The updated three-year strategy takes account of the new modes of delivery, new programme offerings and the changing landscape of SQT's clients and learners.
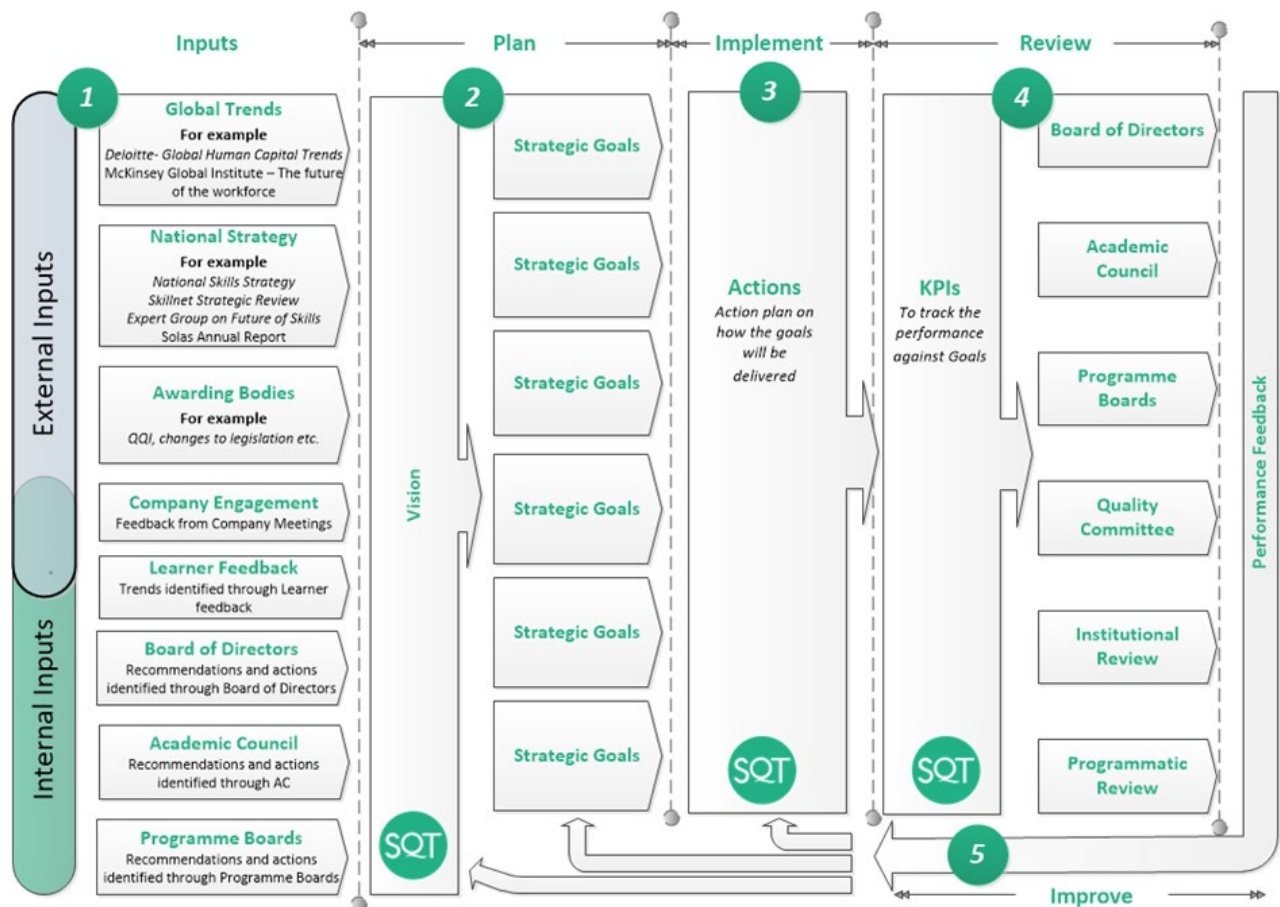
Figure 3: Strategic Planning Framework

1.1.1 UPDATE OF TEACHING AND LEARNING STRATEGY (2022 – 2025)

The Teaching and Learning (T&L) strategy sets out SQT's strategic priorities in relation to teaching, learning and assessment and seeks to provide a framework and focus for T&L related activities within SQT. It incorporates relevant overlapping T&L objectives which are set out in the overarching organisational Strategic Plan 2022-2025. This strategy represents an update to the preceding T&L strategy and reflects the significant modifications which have resulted from the Covid-19 pandemic, most notably the introduction of virtual delivery. Five priority areas and associated goals have been developed as follows:

I.   Programme Development
II. Modes of Programme Delivery
III. Teaching and Assessment Methods
IV. Learner Experience
V.   Staff Development

Related objectives, actions and timelines are set out in this document. In addition, SQT's updated T&L Policy includes updated teaching and learning strategies informed by best practice in blended and online provision as well as the experience of SQT's staff in successfully pivoting to virtual delivery.

1.1.2 LSS REVALIDATION ACTIVITY AND DEVELOPMENT OF FEEDER PROGRAMME

During the reporting period, SQT undertook its quinquennial Programmatic Review and successful revalidation of its suite of QQI accredited Lean Six Sigma Special Purpose Award programmes as follows:

I. Lean Six Sigma Green Belt, Certificate in Process Engineering (NFQ Level 6) – 10 ECTS Credits
II. Lean Six Sigma Green Belt, Certificate in Process Engineering (NFQ Level 7) – 15 ECTS Credits
III. Lean Six Sigma Black Belt, Diploma in Process Engineering (NFQ Level 8) - 60 ECTS Credits

Following extensive stakeholder feedback and market research, it took the decision not to revalidate the Lean Six Sigma Black Belt (Service & Transaction), Certificate in Process Engineering (NFQ Level 8) – 40 ECTS Credits. The programme had not been delivered since 2011. Learners interested in a Black Belt programme have chosen the generic full 20-day Level 8 programme (60 ECTS Credits) as a more suitable progression option.

The process also included the development and approval of a Lean Six Sigma Yellow Belt (FET Level 6 SPA). This new programme seeks to prepare learners for progression to SQT's suite of Lean Six Sigma Level 6 or Level 7 HET Green Belt programmes. Figure 4 below seeks to illustrate this progression.
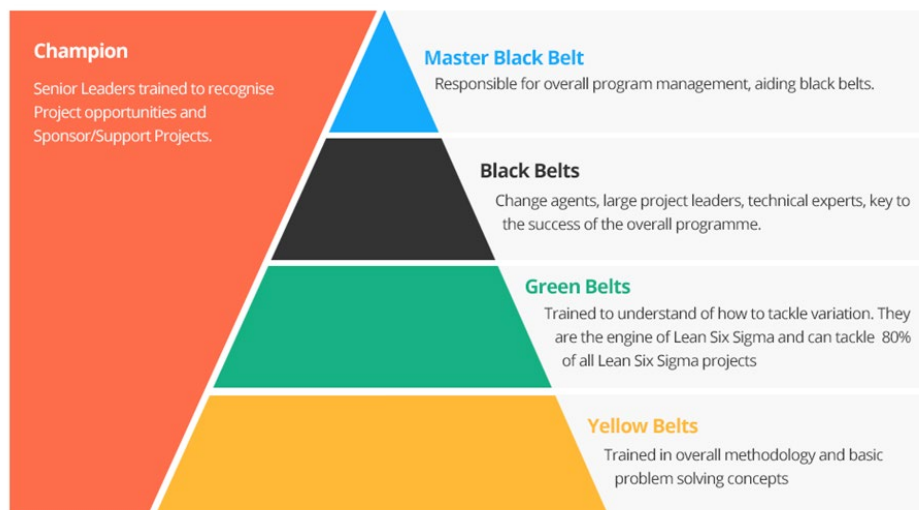

Figure 4: Lean Six Sigma Progression Model

1.2   Update on Planned QA Objectives identified in Previous AQR

No.	Planned objectives (Previous AQR) Note: Include reference to the relevant section of the preceding AQR, where applicable	Update on Status Provide brief update on status, whether completed or in progress. If an action was planned in the previous AQR, but not completed, provide reasons/short reflections for the delay/non-completion.
1	Extend scope of provision to implement blended and online modalities for the delivery of SQT's suite of QQI programmes in the longer term	**Status:** Ongoing At the time of submitting the 2021 AQR, SQT had anticipated that extension of scope of delivery for full online delivery would be required following publication of such guidelines by QQI. It was anticipated that guidelines would be published during 2021. Consequently, extension of scope was included as a key objective for this reporting period. Of note is that recent communication from QQI in early February 2022 (outside of this reporting period) has confirmed that QQI approval is not required for providers that utilise technology to offer synchronous learning. At the time of finalising this report, SQT is awaiting further clarification and guidance from QQI with respect to extension of scope.
2	Information Management / Dashboards etc (ADM)	**Status:** Completed Substantial progress has been made in this area including enhanced reporting across various governance units and refinement of bespoke dashboards which provide important live metrics and KPI's to support both the T&L and operations functions. Continuous enhancements in this area will remain an ongoing objective for SQT.

3	Technology Enhanced Learning Roadmap	**Status:** Completed SQT's Technology Enhancement Roadmap is a key action within its T&L strategy and is kept under review by the Teaching and Learning Committee. Continuous enhancements in this area will remain an ongoing objective for SQT.
4	Exploit the full potential of its bespoke MIS system in order to drive process efficiency	**Status:** Phase 1 Completed To date, significant progress has been made in this area. Further projects are underway in Phase 2, in order to exploit the full benefits of SQT's systems to drive process efficiencies across all areas of the business.
5	Periodic Internal Review of SQT's QQI FET Programmes	**Status:** Ongoing As discussed with QQI, the review and revalidation of QQI FET programmes will be aligned to the QA application for full online programme provision. SQT is awaiting further guidance from QQI with respect to the short to medium term actions required.

1.3 Governance and Management

SQT`s governance structure spans both corporate and academic domains. *QAP1-2: SQT Governance* policy sets out the overall governance framework and the key functions and decision-making processes of all governance units. It describes the roles and responsibilities of individuals within the governance structure and the documentation requirements for both corporate and academic domains.

1.3.1 QA Governance Meetings Schedule

The following is a summary of the meetings that took place during this AQR reporting period 1 January `21 to 31 December `21.

Body	Meeting dates (2021)
Academic Council	28th May, 26th June Extraordinary Meetings 19th March, 27th May
Quality Committee	21st January, 19th May, 2nd September, 2nd October
Teaching and Learning Committee	22nd January, 26th March, 21st May, 20th December
Programme Boards	Food Safety: 24th June Leadership and Personal Development: 22nd June Lean Six Sigma: 7th May, 5th November Life Sciences: 1st July Laboratory: 23rd June CPI: 15th June Quality, Health & Safety, Energy & Environment: 22nd June
Examination Board	HET: 14th January, 7th May, 5th November
Board of Directors	15th April, 15th July, 21st October
Senior Management Team	Monthly

1.3.2 QA Leadership and Management Structural Developments

SQT is committed to developing and maintaining a governance structure that is effective, fit for purpose and appropriate to the scale and scope of the organisation. It is controlled by a Board of Directors, whose key function is to manage the overall strategic direction of the organisation, consistent with its corporate and academic responsibilities and objectives. An Academic Council is appointed by the Board of Directors. It has ultimate responsibility for both academic standards and quality assurance. Its structure is shown in Figure 5 below. This structure ensures that the organisations academic activity is managed effectively with clear and appropriate lines of responsibilities and accountability.
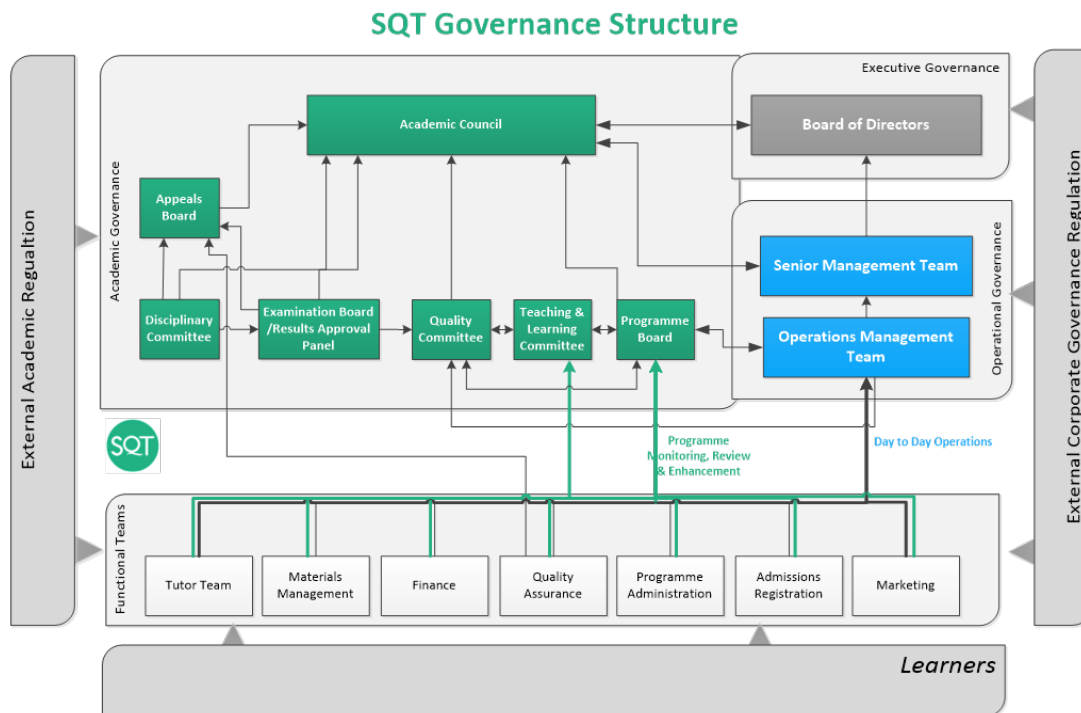

Figure 5: SQT Governance Structure

The role of the Academic Council is to assist the Board of Directors in planning, coordinating, overseeing and developing the educational work of SQT in order to protect, maintain and develop academic standards. This responsibility is discharged by means of a series of sub committees such as Quality Committee, Examination Board and Programme Board. The Examination Board is supported in its functions by an Appeals Board and Disciplinary Board, as necessary. Each of these governance units has clearly defined terms of reference and each committee reports to, and is answerable to the Academic Council. Therefore, Academic Council has an explicit function in the development and quality assurance of all programmes delivered by SQT. Further, there is a clear delineation of responsibility and decision making between the Board of Directors and the Academic Council. The Board of Directors and the Academic Council is chaired by an independent Non-Executive Director. This independent oversight ensures that academic decision-making processes

are independent of commercial decisions and, therefore, do not impact on the integrity of the academic process.

The executive management of SQT rests with the Managing Director, who reports to the Board of Directors. The governance structure is diagrammatically represented below in Figure 6. The day-to-day running of the organisation rests with the Operations Management Team under the direction of the Senior Management Team. Quality Assurance and enhancement is the responsibility of the Director of Quality and Academic Affairs. Programme Directors have responsibilities for the management of programme content and delivery, whilst the academic management of programmes is the responsibility of the Programme Board.

SQT Organisation Chart

Board of Directors

| Independent Non-Executiive Director | Managing Director | Executive Director | Non-Executive Director |

Academic Oversight

Director of Quality & Academic Affairs — Academic Reporting — Programme Director(s)

Academic Reporting

| Office Administrator | Accreditation & Analytics Manager | Programme Tutor(s) | Course Administration Manager(s) | Marketing Manager | Finance Manager | Projects Manager |

Key

Direct Reporting line – directly accountable to

Dotted line reporting – accountable for sepecific responsibilities
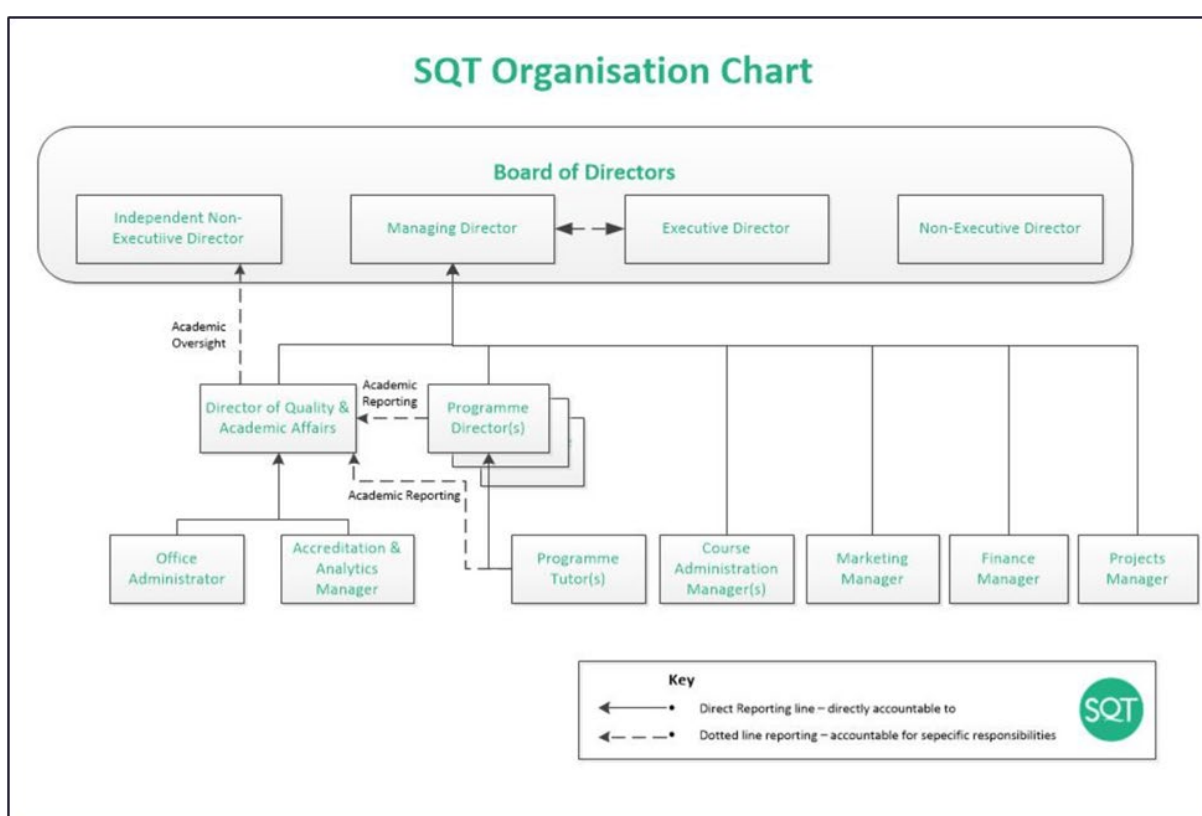
SQT

Figure 6: Organisation Chart

1.4   Internal Monitoring and Review

1.4.1 Overview of Periodic Reviews

Unit of review for which report has been published during reporting period	Date of completion/reason for conducting review (if not planned) or non-completion (if planned but not conducted)	Links to relevant publications
Programmatic Review of SQT's suite of Lean Six Sigma Programmes I. PG24701: Lean Six Sigma Green Belt, Certificate in Process Engineering (NFQ Level 6) – 10 ECTS Credits II. PG24703: Lean Six Sigma Green Belt, Certificate in Process Engineering (NFQ Level 7) – 15 ECTS Credits PG24704: Lean Six Sigma Black Belt, Diploma in Process Engineering (NFQ Level 8) - 60 ECTS Credits	PAEC Date: 9th September 2021	1.https://qsearch.qqi.ie/WebPart/ValidationReportDetails?programmeCode=PG24701 2.https://qsearch.qqi.ie/WebPart/ValidationReportDetails?programmeCode=PG24703 3.https://qsearch.qqi.ie/WebPart/ValidationReportDetails?programmeCode=PG24704

1.4.2 Expert Review Teams/Panels[3] involved in IQA

(i) Expert Review Team/Panel Size and Related Processes

Guide

Details in respect of review/evaluation processes that concluded during the reporting period should be set out below.

Please use whole numbers rather than percentages.

	Total	Academic Schools/ Department	Professional Services/Support Unit	Approval/Review of Linked Provider	Programme Approval	Programme Review	Other
Number of review/ evaluation processes	1				1 (3 programmes))		
of those:							
On-site processes							
Desk reviews							
Virtual processes	1				1		
Average panel size for each process type*	6				6		

* excluding secretary if not a full panel member

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[3] QQI acknowledges that the terminology used to describe the groups of individuals that conduct peer review/evaluation varies from institution to institution.

(ii) Composition of Expert Review Teams/Panels involved in IQA

Type of Expert/ Role on Panel	Total	Gender			Internal	National	International			Institution Type	
		Male	*Female*	*Other, or unspecified*			*UK, incl. NI*	*Other European*	*Outside of Europe*	*Similar*	*Different*
Chair			1			1				1	
Secretary			1			1					1
Academic/Discipline Specific			1			1					1
Student Representative		1				1					1
QA											
Teaching & Learning		1				1					1
External Industry /Third Mission						1					1

2.0 IQA System – Enhancement and Impacts

This section of the previous AQR addressed the impact of the 2019 Re-engagement process as well as some enhancements across the internal QA system arising from SQT`s transition to virtual delivery. This report seeks to detail how the organisation has continued to develop and enhance its IQA, particularly with respect to virtual provision during the reporting period.

2.1 Review of Internal Quality Framework

A comprehensive gap analysis against QQI's Guidelines for Blended Learning Programmes has been undertaken. As a result, the QA framework including policies and procedures have been updated to incorporate these guidelines. These will remain as interim guidelines in practice until such time as they are formally approved by QQI.

As is mentioned elsewhere in this report, SQT has had ongoing communication and consultation with QQI since May 2020 with respect to extending its scope of provision for blended and online (synchronous) delivery on a permanent basis. It is presently working with QQI to seek guidance on specific actions based on SQT's current mode of 'synchronous virtual delivery' and to establish a suitable timeline for the process.

Approval of this process is of critical strategic importance to SQT and, based on the evidence to date, sustainable from a stakeholder perspective.

2.2 Virtual Delivery – Evaluation and Ongoing Enhancement

CONTINUOUS ENHANCEMENT OF VIRTUAL DELIVERY

As with most other training and education providers, the predominant shift in programme delivery that occurred was the transition to video conferencing software to support remote teaching. Zoom has remained the preferred platform by SQT. However, Microsoft Teams and WebEx are used when requested by some clients. In summary, SQT has successfully adopted a synchronous approach to programme delivery whereby traditional class-room sessions are now delivered remotely. Programme schedules have been redesigned in some cases to avoid 'Zoom fatigue', for example full day sessions are now delivered over 2 half days with short breaks throughout the session.

In addition, the short programme duration and predominantly project-based programme assessment strategies have been advantageous factors during the pivot to virtual delivery. These factors alleviated some of the complexities which arose within the traditional HE institutions offering programmes of a much longer duration. During 2021 89% of programmes were delivered virtually using a synchronous approach.

During the initial pivot to emergency remote provision in March 2020, programme teams collaborated to redesign their programmes and create the best possible learning experiences for their learners. As much of this activity happened during an unfolding pandemic, Tutors adopted an agile approach to trialing new digital resources and software. The reporting period represented a time of reflection and refinement and has presented an opportunity for staff to continue to build

confidence in virtual delivery and trial and integrate new and innovative approaches. Examples of the resulting teaching innovations and instructional strategies include the flipped classroom approach, digital whiteboards, use of breakout rooms within Zoom, expanded use of features within Moodle, and various other discipline-specific software programmes.

In July 2021, SQT upgraded its Moodle system to version 3.9. Feedback from administration staff and Tutors has been very positive noting improvements in accessibility, efficiency and overall usability. Further work is required to exploit the vast functionality of Moodle suitable for the context of SQT and its learners. It is presently working on integrating with other technologies where appropriate to make the learning experience as effective and streamlined as possible.

A number of enhancement projects have been identified and prioritised for 2022 including the development of an Online Teaching Toolkit customized for SQT Tutors. An update on these projects will be provided in next AQR.

Finally, SQT welcomed feedback from its Independent Expert Programmatic Review Panel (2021) which commended its successful transition to emergency remote learning arising from the COVID-19 pandemic.

> *"It commends SQT on the stepped, cautionary approach that they employed to ensure maintenance of standards and fulfilment of commitments to learners. In addition the panel commended SQT on its openly apparent commitment to a high quality, student-centred learning experience and the dedicated learner support and mentoring extended to each learner. The positive impact of the extent of student engagement that SQT facilitates through its model of small group sizes was clearly evident and endorsed by stakeholders that the panel met at the virtual visit".*
>
> Programmatic Review – Independent Panel Report (2021)

INDEPENDENT REVIEW OF VIRTUAL DELIVERY

QQI proposed that new desired modes of delivery should be presented as part of the programmatic review of SQT's suite of HET programmes which took place in 2021. Whilst extended scope of provision was outside the remit of the programme revalidation process in 2021, the review was considered an ideal opportunity to seek formal views from learners and other stakeholders relating to blended and virtual delivery. It also enabled preliminary approval from the Expert Panel. This approval will be subject to institutional approval of SQT's QA for blended and online delivery at a later stage. The independent expert panel noted

> *"The panel noted the work undertaken by SQT to successfully transition current programmes to emergency remote learning and the positive feedback from students in respect of this. The panel further noted the strategic intention of SQT to secure extension of scope of provision for delivery of programmes through blended learning (and ultimately virtual delivery, subject to publication of QQI policy and guidelines)".*
>
> Programmatic Review – Independent Panel Report (2021)

An Extract of the panel's recommendations together with SQT's response is presented in Appendix 1: Programmatic Review Panel Response to Review of Virtual Delivery.

SQT SELF EVALUATION OF VIRTUAL DELIVERY (MARCH 2020 – DECEMBER 2021)

SQT undertook an evaluation of its virtual delivery approach during the period March 2020 to December 2021. Throughout this timeframe approximately 900 virtual programmes were delivered to more than 8,500 learners. Findings have been captured in a separate internal self-evaluation report. Feedback from learners has confirmed that their learning experience was not compromised by the use of virtual delivery. On the contrary, many learners commented that this new approach to programme delivery was in fact more effective than traditional face-to-face programmes. Many have cited benefits such as:

- Increased flexibility
- No travel time
- Less distractions (particularly evident for learners on in-company programmes where face-to-face training takes place on the client site)
- New schedule (10 half days instead of 5 full days for example) allows for more time for learning and project work to take place between sessions.

The table below presents a summary of the teaching and learning quality indicators from course evaluation forms for the current (2021) and preceding reporting period (2020). Whilst 2020 indicators were extremely positive, ratings across all quality indicators have increased in 2021. These ratings verify the continued enhancement of SQT's implementation of virtual delivery.

Results of Learner Course Evaluation Forms 2020 and 2021

Note: Some questions were added to the survey in 2021 to further capture feedback on the transition to virtual delivery. SQT use a 1-5 scale, for consistency, weighted average results have been presented in the table below.

Question	2020	2021
Overall Rating		
Considering the general objectives of the course, what was your overall rating?	88%	90.2%
How well did the course deliver to the "Learning Outcomes"?	Very Well: 79%	Very Well: 82.5%
	Well: 20.5%	Well: 17%
	Not Well 0.5%	Not Well: 0.5%
How would you rate the subject level?		About Right: 95%
Will you apply the new skills learned?	Yes: 98.5%	Yes: 99%
Would you recommend this course to a colleague?	Yes: 97.4%	Yes: 98.1%
Pre-Course Information & Supports		
Pre-course information provided (brochure, pre-course reading - if relevant)		89%
Tech Check (completed in advance of course to test technology)	90%	91.4%
If you contacted SQT, what was your experience of our Customer Support? (enquiry response, booking confirmation etc)?	92.60%	93.2%
Tutor		
Tutor's presentation skills	93%	94.3%
Tutor's knowledge of the subject area		97%
Tutor's ability to answer questions	94.3%	95.8%
Encouragement to participate	92.8%	94.6%
Use of technology to aid learning (eg Zoom)	89%	92.2%
Pace of course delivery	86.6%	88.2%
Technology and Course Materials		
Please specify your preferred delivery method for this programme		Virtual: 64.0%
Course Materials Provided (inc layout - easy to follow etc)		89.8%
Quality of course material (sufficient to course)		90.8%
Moodle System (please rate the functionality of the platform, if applicable)		89.6%
Ease of access to the virtual classroom (eg Zoom)	90.6%	93.2%
Which virtual platform is preferred within your organisation?		62%: Teams 32%: Zoom 6%: Other
Assessment		
How would you rate the clarity of assessment requirements (only applicable if course is assessed)?	88.8%	90.4%

2.3 Tutor Development and Support Initiatives

At the time of transitioning to emergency remote provision in March 2020, Tutors completed an external training programme which provided them with the initial knowledge and skills required to convert their traditional onsite programmes for virtual delivery. A number of initiatives have been put in place to address the changing Tutor development and support needs brought about by the shift to virtual delivery. These initiatives include:

- Tutor Community of Practice
- Tutor Portal
- Peer Review of Teaching Staff
- LinkedIn Learning

TUTOR COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

SQT's Teaching and Learning (T&L) Committee was officially formed in December 2020. The agreed remit of the committee was as follows:

- Provide a forum for discussion and collegial support amongst Tutors
- Promote Excellence in Teaching and Learning
- Implementation of Technology Enhanced Learning
- Ongoing review and update of the Teaching and Learning Strategy
- Recommend quality enhancement initiatives

Whilst the committee worked well in fulfilling its intended remit it became apparent that a broader Tutor forum was necessary to fulfil the objective of a 'forum for discussion and collegial support amongst all Tutors'. This led to the creation of the Tutor Community of Practice which was officially launched in April 2021.

The Community of Practice forum seeks to provide a space for Tutors to connect in an informal Tutor-led meeting. It seeks to enable the sharing of knowledge and provide support to all Tutors. The key intention is to share, discuss, challenge and collaborate. Thus far, the forum has been facilitated by 'Digital Champions' within the Tutor group. During 2022, it is intended to introduce external guest speakers to address topics of interest identified throughout the year. Several planned enhancement projects have emerged within the Community of Practice forum outside of this reporting period. The impact of these projects will be evaluated in the next AQR.

TUTOR PORTAL

A key information resource for Tutors is the Tutor portal. An important action item is the design, development and redeployment of this portal from its current location on Moodle to a more accessible platform on MS Sharepoint. The aim of the portal is to support staff in bringing together all the learning and development resources in one central location in addition to an area where Tutors can share their knowledge and learnings with colleagues. In addition, QA guidelines, internal documents, forms and operational items will be easily accessible within the portal.

Although work is underway on the new portal, slower progress than anticipated was made in 2021. It is anticipated that the portal will be launched in Q1 2022.

PEER REVIEW OF TEACHING STAFF

Cross functional learning, collaboration and collegiality amongst all Tutors and the management team has been a key factor in the success of SQT's virtual programmes to date. SQT's policy on *QAP4-2: Peer Review of Teaching Staff* is primarily oriented towards the improvement of teaching and is a critical part of instructional mentorship and development. It complements the information gathered as part of the learner feedback process. The introduction of virtual delivery and use of video conferencing platforms offers further opportunities for both Tutor induction and peer review of teaching activities. Whilst voluntary peer review has been encouraged across the Tutor teams during the period under review, it has mainly been utilised within Tutor teams and carried out in an ad-hoc informal manner. Further action is required in this area to explore mechanisms, which will encourage and incentivize all Tutors to implement this process.

LINKEDIN LEARNING

The organisation has invested in an institutional license for LinkedIn Learning with the objective of facilitating opportunities for skills enhancement across all SQT staff and Tutors. It is presently researching ways in which to capitalize on the use of LinkedIn Learning to bridge skills gaps and provide CPD opportunities through pre-defined learning pathways for both Tutors and administrative staff.

2.4 Stakeholder Engagement

SQT is continuously engaging with a wide variety of organisations and is aware of the challenges they face. It welcomed the following commendation from the LSS Programmatic Review Expert Panel (2021)

> *"the independent review panel commends SQT for its highly effective approach to the management of relationships with all stakeholders which has resulted in its tutors and staff being held in high regard and SQT being the provider of choice for a range of organisations across multiple industries".*

Programmatic Review – Independent Panel Report (2021)

It proactively fosters strong links with employers and other relevant industry stakeholders. Tutors operate independent consultancy businesses and provide specialist services to national and international clients. Therefore, they are regularly involved in helping to solve real industry problems. This process is further developed by meetings with senior management from client firms and the canvassing of new clients through responses to tenders and referrals. Throughout the year, SQT senior management and / or the Programme Leader(s) / Tutors meet with senior management from various industries. The purpose of these meetings is to evaluate the programme, its impact on the organisation, the results being achieved on the ground, feedback from learners and changes (if any), which need to be considered to ensure its relevance and success.

Of note is that this interaction and meetings with clients and other industry stakeholders has become much more accessible with the widespread use of virtual conferencing platforms such as Zoom and MS Teams. Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, meetings generally involved travelling to client companies which was time consuming and at times difficult to plan. In addition, the adoption of virtual delivery has led to a substantial increase in queries from international clients during the reporting period.

2.5 Programme Assessment

Minor adjustments to assessment strategies which were implemented as part of the contingency arrangements in April 2020 have been kept under review and have continued to work extremely well. In fact, some of the revised assessment methodologies have been built into the updated assessment strategy, as part of the LSS programmatic review and revalidation process. Further, both External Examiners (FET and HET) have commended and fully support the revised programme assessment strategies and methodologies.

In summary, the following adaptations were implemented:
- Replacement of in class examinations with appropriate alternatives such as Moodle quizzes and the redistribution of assessment weighting.
- All assessments are now submitted via Moodle. Prior to March 2020, some FET programmes were submitted as hard copy assessments.
- The Lean Six Sigma Black Belt final presentation which was traditionally delivered in a face-to-face setting is now caried out via Zoom.

Given the development of the virtual learning mode of delivery, it was considered useful to add additional features to the External Examiner Report template, in order to obtain additional independent feedback in a structured manner. The External Examiner Report template was updated in November 2021.

2.6 Monitoring and Reporting

Key developments in this area include the deployment and refinement of innovative dashboards and the automation of learner feedback via Survey Monkey, which is then integrated within SQT's bespoke MIS system.

INNOVATIVE DASHBOARDS / METRICS

Further progress has been made in the automation of KPI's, QA indicators and relevant reports, which have led to timely and accurate information being available to relevant personnel and governance units. This has been achieved through the development of innovative dashboards providing live metrics in key areas such as learner feedback and accreditation statistics. In addition, real time reporting from SQT's bespoke system has made daily operational tasks more agile and streamlined. Enhancements are ongoing in this area.

AUTOMATION OF LEARNER FEEDBACK

Traditionally, hardcopy interim and final course evaluation forms were completed by learners. These were reviewed by the Tutor and sent back to SQT, where they were manually reviewed

and recorded. This was a critical aspect of SQT's quality assurance mechanism. However, it was extremely labour intensive. Since March 2020 (coinciding with Covid-19 and the move to virtual delivery), SQT have replaced hard copy forms with SurveyMonkey, which is integrated within its MIS system. This integration allows Tutors and other relevant staff to login to the Tutor area of the MIS system and view the learner feedback immediately after it has been collected. This data is supplemented with a bespoke dashboard which has enabled academic and operational staff to intervene with learner engagement on all programmes and take appropriate action if necessary.

2.1 Initiatives within the Institution related to Academic Integrity

The organisation is committed to promoting and embedding academic integrity across all of its programmes.

Of note is that none of SQT's QQI validated programmes involve terminal examinations, therefore the adaption of programme assessment strategies were less complex. In addition, the predominant focus on applied project-based assessment also reduces the likelihood and risk of academic misconduct.

SQT continuously monitors issues in relation to academic integrity formally in terms of reviews, revalidations, external examining, internal moderation, Programme Boards and Examination Boards. It is committed to collaborative engagement with learners and staff in supporting and assuring academic integrity and promoting a culture of learning. In that regard, SQT offers several initiatives as follows:

- **Comparative analysis of grades and academic performances:** Assessment outcomes and trends including comparative analysis of benchmarking data is reviewed by the relevant Examination Board, Programme Board and summary reports are also presented to Academic Council. Should concern arise regarding trends in assessment outcomes, it is the responsibility of the relevant Programme Board to explore potential explanations for such trends and to propose corrective actions, as appropriate. The Director of Quality and Academic Affairs can bring any issues that arise in this area to the Independent Chair of the Academic Council, in their academic oversight role.
- **Awareness:** SQT have developed programme specific guidance regarding what constitutes malpractice. This information is provided on Moodle and is also introduced by the Tutor at the commencement of these programmes.
- **Cross moderation practices:** An internal moderation procedure seeks to ensure consistency of standards and fairness across all Tutors delivering and assessing a programme. It allows them to discuss and reach agreement in a transparent, valid and consistent manner. Specifically -
  i. Tutors on programmes with multiple Tutors must have a sample of their assessments internally moderated at least once in a 12-month period. This process is managed by the Accreditation and Analytics Manager and Programme Director with oversight from the Director of Quality and Academic Affairs. In addition, internal moderation is also carried out in the following cases:
     a. Where an External Examiner has noted inconsistencies in the grading of particular learners or by specific Tutors.
     b. In all borderline cases (+ / - 5%)
  ii. Internal moderation is undertaken by a Tutor who was not involved in marking the original assessment.
  iii. The moderator reviews all the assessment material related to the module in question and completes a new learner marking sheet. The original learner marking sheet is not made available to the moderator.
  iv. Having completed the moderation, both marking sheets are reviewed and both parties should seek to reach agreement on any matters identified and adjust grades / marks, if required.

v.   Where agreement cannot be reached, the matter should be referred to the Director of Academic Affairs. In such cases the decision to adjust the mark will be made by the External Examiner.

vi.   In all cases, an Internal Moderation Report Form (F48) is completed and made available to the External Examiner in advance of his/her review of assessment material.

vii. All forms are stored and retained in accordance with the data retention register.

-   **Policies and Procedures for Remote Invigilation (Non-QQI programmes):** SQT has developed and successfully implemented policies and procedures for the remote invigilation of examinations, which are certified by other awarding bodies. These have been approved and audited by the relevant awarding bodies.

3.0 QA Improvement and Enhancement Plans for Upcoming Reporting Period

3.1   QA and QE supporting the Achievement of Strategic Objectives

No.	Relevant objectives Note: Include reference to the relevant section of the preceding AQR, where applicable	Planned actions and indicators *Note: Include details of unit responsible, and how planned action will address the relevant strategic priority and/or reengagement advice/CINNTE recommendation.* *If the institution is preparing for cyclical review, include how the planned actions will address the relevant review objective(s).*
1	Extension of scope of provision to include blended and online provision (latter is subject to timeline of publication of QQI guidelines)	Indicator – Extension of scope of delivery to allow for blended and fully online (synchronous delivery of all QQI programmes) to all learners.
2	Roll out and integration of New Tutor Portal	Indicator – Accessible Tutor Portal in place which efficiently supports both day-to-day operations and ongoing enhancement across all areas of the organisation.
3	Micro credential(s) Development	Indicator – At least one micro credential programme successfully validated.
4	New QA Documentation Platform	Indicator – Research and implement a robust, secure and accessible system which supports the ongoing review and updates to SQT's live QA documentation.
5	Ongoing Enhancement of Virtual Delivery	Indicator – Roll out specific initiatives as set out in SQT's T&L Strategy

3.2   Reviews planned for Upcoming Reporting Periods

This section includes reviews associated with QQI HET activities only.

3.2.1   Reviews planned for Next Reporting Period

Unit to be reviewed	Date of planned review	Date of last review
2022 Annual Quality Review	2022	2021

3.2.2   Reviews planned beyond Next Reporting Period

Provide a link to the published review schedule for any reviews beyond the upcoming reporting period.

Unit to be reviewed	Date of planned review	Date of last review
Institutional Review	TBC	2017
Suite of Lean Six Sigma Programmes	2026	2021

4.0 Additional Themes and Case Studies

The Future of Blended and Online Delivery at SQT

The pivot to virtual delivery in response to the global COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 involved significant investment in terms of resources (human and capital). It also involved fundamental changes to SQT's business model, programme delivery, quality assurance and support operations which are now well established and sustainable from a stakeholder perspective.

In 2021, 89% of programmes were delivered virtually using a synchronous delivery strategy. Stakeholder feedback on these virtual programmes to date has been overwhelmingly positive and has confirmed that the quality of SQT programmes has not been compromised by this new mode of provision. To date, 93% of learners have rated their virtual programme 4 or 5 stars and 98% would recommend their programme to a colleague.

Of critical importance is that feedback from client companies indicates that many have made the decision that learning within their organisations will need to change in line with new ways of working and upskilling their employees. This implies that blended and virtual learning will become the new normal for industry. Figure 7 illustrates that 64% of learners prefer virtual delivery over the traditional classroom approach, whilst Figure 8 demonstrates the varying preference for virtual delivery at an industry level.
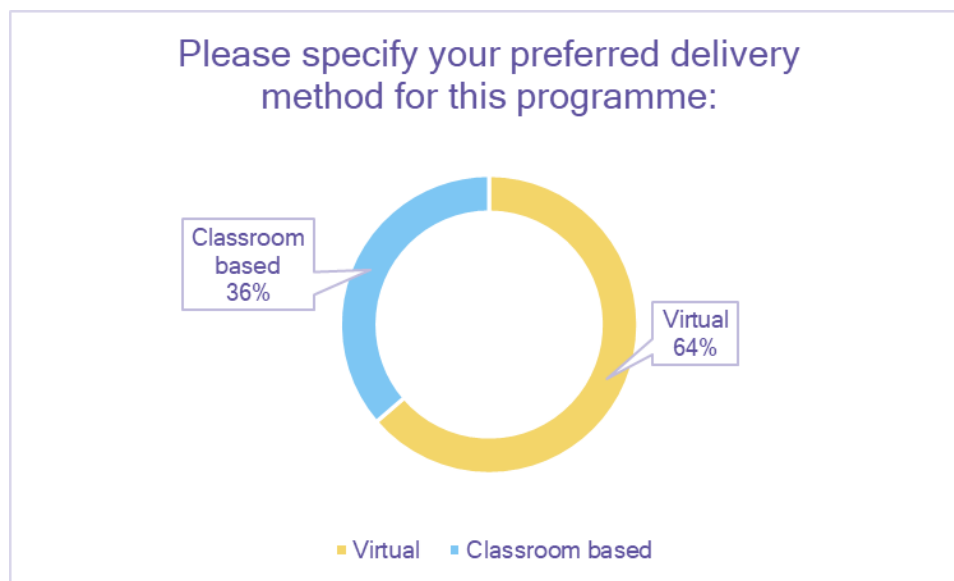

Figure 7: Preferred Delivery Method

Preferred Delivery Mode by Course Category
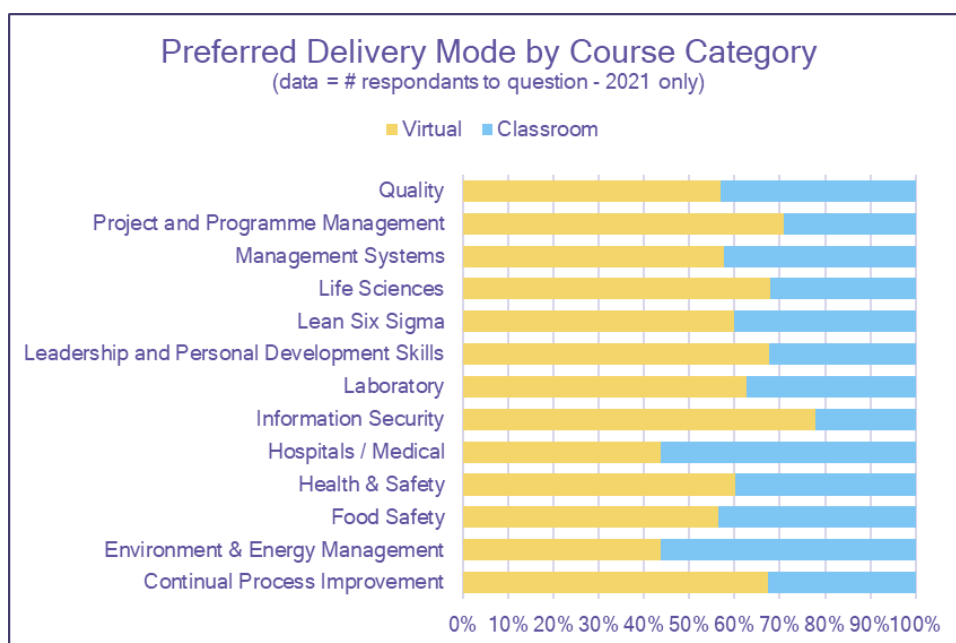(data = # respondants to question - 2021 only)

Figure 8: Preferred Delivery Method by Course Category

Given the successful development of the virtual delivery model, it is now operationally possible to extend SQT's learner reach to a much wider target population and begin to deliver on its strategic goal of becoming a trusted education partner nationally and internationally. SQT's customer base is predominantly multinational organisations seeking global training partners to ensure consistency of training and skills development across all sites. Based on the acceleration of the deployment of virtual technology, clients and learners are now demanding virtual programmes that facilitate global multisite integration. Specifically, SQT witnessed a two-fold growth in learners outside of Ireland on non-accredited programmes in 2021 and a five-fold growth when compared to pre-pandemic numbers.

Finally, an important strategic focus in the medium to long term is for SQT to offer its entire suite of programmes to all learners irrespective of their location subject to QQI approval. This has been documented within SQT's updated Teaching and Learning Strategy (2022-2025), which has been developed to reflect the significant enhancements and modifications, which have resulted from the Covid-19 pandemic. This strategy sets out SQT's priorities in relation to teaching, learning and assessment and seeks to provide a framework and focus for T&L and virtual learning related activities within SQT. It incorporates relevant overlapping T&L objectives which are set out in its overarching organisational Strategic Plan 2022-2025. Consequently, the extension of scope of provision for blended and online synchronous delivery on a permanent basis is consistent with SQT's revised business model and addresses the transformative needs of its diverse cohort of learners and their organisations.

Appendix 1: Programmatic Review Panel Response to Review of Virtual Delivery (2021)

The panel made the following recommendations which are presented in bold text, SQT's response in addressing these recommendations is also presented.

a. <u>A more detailed costing model, evidencing additional costs associated with blended / virtual delivery.</u>

SQT evaluated the financial implications of each of the key operational decisions of transitioning from classroom to virtual delivery. This resulted in it making significant investment across all areas of the organisation in 2020 to ensure the effective roll out of full online delivery in response to the Covid pandemic. Significant investment was made in the following areas:
- roll-out of a range of TEL applications including various video conferencing products.
- the completion of its fully customized MIS rollout (cloud based SAAS (Software As A Service) platform)
- upgrade of its digital learner support network
- application and pedagogical training for staff
- Upgrade of IT architecture and infrastructure
    o Enable remote access for all employees
    o Installed new Server to improve performance and robustness of systems
    o All on-site systems are backed up to cloud storage to allow quick restoration in the event of system going down
    o Enhanced security with active firewall and endpoint monitoring
    o Installation of new VIOP phone system for all remote access and out of hours support if required

SQT's Board of Directors incorporate into the annual budget process:
- Ongoing investment in IT infrastructure and the human resources needed to provide a blended and virtual learning model of delivery to a high standard to include the use of external specialists
- CDP to develop the capacity of tutors and staff in relation to blended and online learning pedagogies and learning design frameworks, and learner support.
- Development of new content to support blended learning such as video content and materials to support blended learning

b. <u>Information pertaining to the specialist staff (in post or proposed) supporting SQT's blended learning strategy e.g., platform management and administration, technical support, expertise on online pedagogy, educational technology and instructional design, as applicable.</u>

SQT currently has a range of experienced staff in these areas allied to specialist external contractors. It will actively monitor its needs in the area and act when necessary. <u>SQT's Blended Learning Strategy</u> will document the support staff in place for its platform management and administration, technical support, expertise on online pedagogy, educational technology and instructional design, as applicable.

c. **Documented teaching and learning strategies that are informed by best practice in blended and online provision with educational research informing the pedagogic approach and instructional design.**

SQT's Teaching and Learning Policy (QAP5:1) will include updated teaching and learning strategies. These strategies will complement the T&L approach presented in the Programme Descriptor and will be informed by best practice in blended and online provision as well as the experience of SQT's staff in successfully pivoting to virtual delivery in response to the covid pandemic. It will be informed by the work of the T&L committee and the workings of the Tutor Community of Practice Forum recently formed.

The indicative timetable for blended learning delivery is presented in Appendix 1 of the Programme Descriptor. Updated programme schedules will be provided as part of the application for extended scope of provision as agreed by QQI.

d. **Specific minimum requirements of teaching staff in respect of expertise in blended / virtual delivery.**
e. **Arrangements for the induction and CPD of staff involved in the development of online resources and in the practice of online teaching.**

SQT recognises that both technical and pedagogical expertise is required by staff who teach on blended learning programmes and is committed to supporting staff in this environment. It will ensure that all staff are appropriately qualified (new staff) and/or are supported to achieve the required level of digital competencies (existing staff) and that all staff have opportunities for Professional Development specific to their roles.

The related documentation which will be provided to support the extended QA application in this area includes:
- SQT's Blended Learning Strategy
- SQT's Blended Learning Policy
- *QAP4-1 Recruitment and Induction of Teaching Staff*
- *QAP4-2 Peer Review of Teaching Staff*
- *QAP4-3 Monitoring the Effectiveness of Teaching Staff*
- *QAP4-4 Professional Development of Teaching Staff*

f. **Mechanisms for ensuring data privacy in the blended / virtual learning context.**

SQT has implemented best practice guidelines to ensure data privacy in the blended and virtual context and will continue to do so. For example, Zoom meetings and activity are subject to the following measures:
- SQT are using Zoom V5.0 which includes the latest security enhancements
- SQT does not share web links through Zoom during the session
- SQT is working with small groups and only those registered will be provided with a unique link to join
- Sessions are only routed through US & European Data centres
- Join before host option is disabled
- A random meeting ID is associated with the meeting rather than a personal meeting ID
- Waiting room functionality has been enabled on all meetings.

The related documentation which will be provided to support the extended QA application in this area include:
- SQT's Blended Learning Strategy
- SQT's Blended Learning Policy
- *QAP8-1 Information Management Policy*

- *QAP8-2 Data Protection Policy*

g. <u>Information to potential learners (including admissions requirements) includes detail of hardware and software requirements, required bandwidth, specific devices, the nature of the blend, the expected workload, specific engagement requirements including live online and face-to-face attendance.</u>

SQT currently has a range of policies setting out its information and data management processes. These are shown in Section 8 of the QA Framework. SQT is committed to ensuring the ongoing availability of appropriate information that adequately explains the online sections of the programme and assesses the suitability of a programme. This will be made available to learners in advance of programme commencement.

Programme documentation has been updated to reflect this requirement and a dedicated SQT webpage is available to provide further information pertaining to required bandwidth, software requirements. SQT will continue to review and update this information as required.

h. <u>Learner supports (academic, technical and pastoral) and the hours they are available.</u>
i. <u>Specific arrangements for developing learner competence as online learners and ongoing supports available.</u>

SQT currently has a range of policies clearly documenting its support for learners, these are shown in Section 7 of its QA Framework. SQT is committed to ensuring that appropriate learner supports are available for the provision of all programmes regardless of the mode of delivery. In general, supports which would take place in a face-to-face setting in a traditional classroom course can successfully be delivered remotely as has been demonstrated since March 2020 and corroborated by very successful learner and employer feedback.

In addition to the comprehensive programme specific supports provided. The following additional supports are also in place:

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

This information is made available to all learners on a dedicated web-page and is also reiterated on course commencement.

The SQT student body are mature, professional learners and familiar with the various platforms and applications. Learner competence and successful engagement has not been an issue to date. Nonetheless, SQT will provide ongoing supports to learners, as required.

j. <u>Specific arrangements to reflect the legal and regulatory obligations in respect of transnational provision and the implementation of processes and procedures fit for purpose for learners outside of Ireland, as may be applicable.</u>

Given the successful development of the virtual delivery model for all the LSS programmes, it is now operationally possible to extend SQT's learner reach to a much wider target population and begin to deliver on its strategic goal of becoming a trusted education partner nationally and internationally. SQT's customer base is predominantly multinational organisations seeking global training partners to ensure consistency of training and skills development across all sites. Given the acceleration of the deployment of virtual technology, customers are now demanding virtual programmes that facilitate multisite integration. This will greatly enrich the overall learner experience and add further value to its key stakeholder needs. It would give due recognition to the creativity and professionalism of its staff in successfully completing such a transformative project, in the face of the Covid 19 pandemic. SQT is committed to liaising with QQI and seeking their guidance in respect of transnational provision and the implementation of processes and procedures fit for purpose in the context of SQT's programme and profile for learners outside of Ireland.