



QQI

Quality and Qualifications Ireland
Dearbhú Cáilíochta agus Cáilíochtaí Éireann

Independent Evaluation Report on an Application for Validation of a Programme of Education and Training v1 2020

Part 1. Provider details

Provider name	SQT Training Ltd
Date of site visit	24 th March 2021
Date of report	19 th April 2021

Section A. Overall recommendations

Principal programme	Title	Certificate in Lean Six Sigma, Yellow Belt
	Award	Special Purpose Award
	Credit	10 FETS
	Recommendation <i>Satisfactory OR Satisfactory subject to proposed conditions OR Not Satisfactory</i>	Satisfactory subject to conditions proposed.

Section B. Expert Panel

Name	Programme review function	Affiliation
Naomi Jackson	Chairperson	Dean of Academic Affairs – CCT College
Dr Olivia McDermott - Hayes	Lecturer / Subject Matter Expert	Lean Six Sigma and Quality Lecturer – NUI Galway
Mary Hickey	Industry Expert / Subject Matter Expert	Process Improvement Manager - Tallaght Hospital
Dr Bríán Ó Donnchadha	Expertise on short courses including blended and virtual delivery	CPD Development Officer – NUI Galway
Cathal Curry	Learner representative	NSTEP trained learner representative (recent graduate from DCU)

Louise Fitzpatrick	Independent QA Expert (for validation of new proposed programme, Non-Cas Award Certificate in Lean Six Sigma – Yellow Belt, Level 6, 10 FET Credits.)	QA Officer, City of Dublin ETB
Mary Jennings	Report Writer	Independent Consultant

Section C. Certificate in Lean Six Sigma Yellow Belt

Names of centre(s) where the programme(s) is to be provided	Maximum number of learners (per centre)	Minimum number of learners
Public Programmes: These are delivered at central locations, typically hotel venues across Ireland.	16	4
In-house Programmes: Such programmes are usually delivered at the company's own facilities		

Proposed Enrolment	
Date of first intake	September 2021
Maximum number of annual intakes	4
Maximum total number of learners per intake	16
Intake Schedule (e.g. September, January)	Rolling intake
Programme duration (months from start to completion)	11.5 weeks in total
Panel Commentary on proposed enrolment:	

Target learner groups	
Target learners are adults, with the majority in full-time employment. This course is intended for learners who find themselves in one or more of these categories:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Learners who are new to process improvement. - Learners who improve processes in an informal and ah-hoc way, but want a structured way to conduct process improvement projects (e.g. by learning about & using DMAIC). - Learners who deploy process improvements as an integral part of their role and want to formalise their knowledge of process improvement. - Learners who have identified that current process(es) issues that need to be addressed and want support in delivering a sustainable process performance improvement. - Learners who want to be able to work with colleagues to deliver small, targeted process improvements that positively impact their roles and / or team's processes. - Learners that will be contributing to a larger Green Belt projects as a team member. - Learners working with colleagues who use LSS methodology and tools and they want to understand how to use the tools and techniques correctly. - Learners with good process improvement experience that want formal recognition of their knowledge of the DMAIC methodology and skills. - Learners within organisations that have an existing Operational Excellence or Business Process Improvement Programme and they may want to progress their careers and add to their credentials by undertaking Yellow Belt training. 	
Approved countries for provision	Ireland
Delivery mode: Full-time/Part-time	Part-time

The teaching and learning modalities	
Face-to-face; classroom (blended learning as emergency provision, subject to further development and accreditation by QQI).	
Brief synopsis of the programme (e.g., who it is for, what is it for, what is involved for learners, what it leads to.)	
<p>This programme is primarily aimed at those within an organisation who wish to develop a foundation in the principles of Lean Six Sigma and the Define Measure Analyse Improve Control (DMAIC) problem-solving approach. It is aimed at those who are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • new to Six Sigma across all areas and levels within an organisation or • have none or some process improvement experience and want to formalise their knowledge • seeking formal recognition of process improvement skills • In addition, and importantly, the programme seeks to prepare learners for progression to SQT's suite of Lean Six Sigma Level 6 or Level 7 HET Green Belt programmes. 	
Summary of specifications for teaching staff	WTE
Tutor / Mentor	<p>SQT have set the following minimum pre-requisite requirements for all newly appointed Tutors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Hold a third level degree (at a minimum) in a relevant discipline. Where an accreditation / professional body sets additional specific academic or professional qualifications, these must also be adhered to. ▪ A pedagogical qualification is required. In the case of experienced Tutors, who do not possess a formal pedagogical qualification, this should be completed within one year of Tutor approval. SQT's minimum requirement is the QQI accredited <i>Training Delivery and Evaluation</i> minor award (6N3326). ▪ 10 years' relevant industry experience. ▪ Practical training / teaching and assessment experience is highly advantageous.
Programme Director	Same as Tutor
0.2	

Learning Activities	Ratio of learners to teaching staff.
Workshops	1:16
Creative learning	1:16
Case studies	1:16
Group work	1:16

Problem based learning	emphasis, regardless of setting, is on problem-based learning. Online materials will be used to support learning.	1:16
Presentations		1:6
Mentoring		1:5 (depending on team size)

Panel Commentary on programme outline and staffing:

Section D. Other noteworthy features of the application

SQT has been successfully delivering the Lean Six Sigma Yellow Belt Programme for some years prior to seeking accreditation as a Level 6 Special Purpose Award.

Part 2. Evaluation against the validation criteria

Criterion 1. The provider is eligible to apply for validation of the programme

a)	The provider meets the prerequisites (section 44(7) of the 2012 Act) to apply for validation of the programme.	
b)	The application for validation is signed by the provider's chief executive (or equivalent) who confirms that the information provided is truthful and that all the applicable criteria have been addressed.	
c)	The provider has declared that their programme complies with applicable statutory, regulatory and professional body requirements. ¹	
	Satisfactory? (yes, no, partially)	Comment
Certificate in Lean Six Sigma, Yellow Belt	Yes	

As an established provider of programmes SQT has met the prerequisites (section 44(7) of the 2012 Act) to apply for validation of this programme. It was noted that SQT has in place procedures for access, transfer and progression as set out in the Programme Document.

SQT provided a copy of the letter to be submitted to QQI with the application for the validation of the programme. The letter contained the signature and declaration required under sub-criteria 1b) and 1c)

¹This criterion is to ensure the programme can actually be provided and will not be halted on account of breach of the law. The declaration is sought to ensure this is not overlooked but QQI is not responsible for verifying this declaration of enforcing such requirements.

Criterion 2. The programme objectives and outcomes are clear and consistent with the QQI awards sought

- a) The programme aims and objectives are expressed plainly.
- b) A QQI award is specified for those who complete the programme.
 - (i) Where applicable, a QQI award is specified for each embedded programme.
- c) There is a satisfactory rationale for the choice of QQI award(s).
- d) The award title(s) is consistent with unit 3.1 of QQI's *Policy and Criteria for Making Awards*.
- e) The award title(s) is otherwise legitimate for example it must comply with applicable statutory, regulatory and professional body requirements.
- f) The programme title and any embedded programme titles are
 - (i) Consistent with the title of the QQI award sought.
 - (ii) Clear, accurate, succinct and fit for the purpose of informing prospective learners and other stakeholders.
- g) For each programme and embedded programme
 - (i) The **minimum intended programme learning outcomes** and any other educational or training objectives of the programme are explicitly specified.²
 - (ii) The minimum intended programme learning outcomes to qualify for the QQI award sought are **consistent with** the relevant QQI awards standards.
- h) Where applicable, the **minimum intended module learning outcomes** are explicitly specified for each of the programme's modules.
- i) Any QQI minor awards sought for those who complete the modules are specified, where applicable.

For each minor award specified, the minimum intended module learning outcomes to qualify for the award are consistent with relevant QQI minor awards standards.³

	Satisfactory? (yes, no, partially)	Comment
Certificate in Lean Six Sigma, Yellow Belt	Yes	

The panel found that the aims, objectives and rationale for the programme were expressed clearly, as set out in Section 2.1 of the Programme Document.

It was concluded that the programme and module learning outcomes have been clearly outlined and were appropriate to the level of the award. The title of the programme was deemed to be appropriate and in line with the QQI standard for the award type on the NFQ.

In discussion with the panel at the review meeting, SQT stated the learning outcomes are broad so that they can accommodate the varying needs of different industry sectors, and at the same time, ensure that learners acquire appropriate, transferable skills. It was stated that a key aim is for learners to demonstrate, through successful completion of a narrowly scoped process improvement project, that she or he understands the discipline of the DMAIC (Lean Six Sigma) approach and can assist in the delivery of targeted process improvements for the benefit of the sponsoring employer.

² Other programme objectives, for example, may be to meet the educational or training requirements of a statutory, regulatory or professional body.

³ Not all modules will warrant minor awards. Minor awards feature strongly in the QQI common awards system however further education and training awards may be made outside this system.

The panel is satisfied that the minimum intended programme learning outcomes for the programme were informed by the QQI Generic Awards Standards and have been mapped against these standards.

Criterion 3. The programme concept, implementation strategy, and its interpretation of QQI awards standards are well informed and soundly based (considering social, cultural, educational, professional and employment objectives)

- a) The development of the programme and the intended programme learning outcomes has sought out and taken into account the views of stakeholders such as learners, graduates, teachers, lecturers, education and training institutions, employers, statutory bodies, regulatory bodies, the international scientific and academic communities, professional bodies and equivalent associations, trades unions, and social and community representatives.⁴
- b) The interpretation of awards standards has been adequately informed and researched; considering the programme aims and objectives and minimum intended programme (and, where applicable, modular) learning outcomes.
 - (i) There is a satisfactory rationale for providing the programme.
 - (ii) The proposed programme compares favourably with existing related (comparable) programmes in Ireland and beyond. Comparators should be as close as it is possible to find.
 - (iii) There is support for the introduction of the programme (such as from employers, or professional, regulatory or statutory bodies).
 - (iv) There is evidence⁵ of learner demand for the programme.
 - (v) There is evidence of employment opportunities for graduates where relevant⁶.
 - (vi) The programme meets genuine education and training needs.⁷
- c) There are mechanisms to keep the programme updated in consultation with internal and external stakeholders.
- d) Employers and practitioners in the cases of vocational and professional awards have been systematically involved in the programme design where the programme is vocationally or professionally oriented.
- e) The programme satisfies any validation-related criteria attaching to the applicable awards standards and QQI awards specifications.

	Satisfactory? (yes, no, partially)	Comment
Certificate in Lean Six Sigma, Yellow Belt	Partially	

While the programme is now mapped against QQI award criteria, it was stated that the original programme was influenced by the US professional body concerned with quality in industry, American Quality Society (AQS) which has a pragmatic, generally project-based approach to solving issues relating to continuous improvement and quality across a broad range of industries. The need for such programmes has been stated in government industrial and employment policies for many years, including the Springboard Programme, for people who are unemployed, SQT told the panel.

⁴ Awards standards however detailed rely on various communities for their interpretation. This consultation is necessary if the programme is to enable learners to achieve the standard in its fullest sense.

⁵ This might be predictive or indirect.

⁶ It is essential to involve employers in the programme development and review process when the programme is vocationally or professionally oriented.

⁷ There is clear evidence that the programme meets the **target learners'** education and training needs and that there is a clear demand for the programme.

In addition, in its consultation with industry representatives through the Lean Six Sigma Network and the Skillnets programmes, SQT were made aware of the need for cohesive teams working in particular operational functions – for example the maintenance function in a manufacturing plant. The Yellow Belt Lean Six Sigma programme provides a solid introduction to the key principles in effective problem solving in teams, the panel was informed. Learners do not have to have any formal entry requirements to participate and generally are selected for participation by their employer.

In meeting with industry and learner representatives at the virtual site visit, it was clear that, in their opinion, the proposed programme, its overall approach and level of engagement with learners by SQT, would facilitate organisations to make significant change and, at the same time, would provide learners with opportunities for personal and professional development.

It is clear that SQT engage with industry and learner stakeholders on an on-going basis through a variety of methods, including interviews, surveys and informal conversations with a view to ensuring that all of their programmes, including this one, meets different training needs and address emerging areas of concern such as action on climate change, sustainability of businesses and change management. As an entry level programme, the panel was of the view that the certificate programme would enable many more people to make a contribution to tackling some of these issues within their organisations.

The panel also found that there was insufficient comparison with other providers that might have highlighted the rationale for SQT's approach more clearly and transparently, particularly in relation to such areas as entry requirements, delivery models, curriculum content and assessment strategies. It is a condition that SQT provide this further documentation in the programme descriptor as outlined below. See also Criteria 5, 9,10 for further comment on this point.

Condition

It is a condition that SQT review and revise the programme descriptor to more fully reflect the information provided to the panel as part of the virtual visit. Specifically, this must include evidence of a more encompassing and transparent comparison with programmes of other providers in Ireland and beyond, identifying the similarities and differences with SQT's programme and providing the rationale for SQT's approach. Ideally, such a comparison should include detail of entry requirements, programme delivery model, credits, duration, curriculum content and assessment strategies.

Commendation

The 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.

Criterion 4. The programme's access, transfer and progression arrangements are satisfactory

- a) The information about the programme as well as its procedures for access, transfer and progression are consistent with the procedures described in QQI's policy and criteria for access, transfer and progression in relation to learners for providers of further and higher education and training. Each of its programme-specific criteria is individually and explicitly satisfied⁸.
- b) Programme information for learners is provided in plain language. This details what the programme expects of learners and what learners can expect of the programme and that there are procedures to ensure its availability in a range of accessible formats.
- c) If the programme leads to a higher education and training award and its duration is designed for native English speakers, then the level of proficiency in English language must be greater or equal to B2+ in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)⁹ in order to enable learners to reach the required standard for the QQI award.
- d) The programme specifies the learning (knowledge, skill and competence) that **target learners** are expected to have achieved before they are enrolled in the programme and any other assumptions about enrolled learners (programme participants).
- e) The programme includes suitable procedures and criteria for the **recognition of prior learning** for the purposes of access and, where appropriate, for advanced entry to the programme and for exemptions.
- f) The programme title (the title used to refer to the programme):-
 - (i) Reflects the core *intended programme learning outcomes*, and is consistent with the standards and purposes of the QQI awards to which it leads, the award title(s) and their class(es).
 - (ii) Is learner focused and meaningful to the learners;
 - (iii) Has long-lasting significance.
- g) The programme title is otherwise legitimate; for example, it must comply with applicable statutory, regulatory and professional body requirements.

	Satisfactory? (yes, no, partially)	Comment
Certificate in Lean Six Sigma, Yellow Belt	Partially	

The panel noted that there are no minimum academic entry requirements for participation on the programme or no special APEL was required. As noted in Criterion 3, the learners are nominated by their employer as part of a team operating in a particular functional area.

The programme is an academic as well as a practical, applied programme and the panel concluded that greater clarity was needed on the minimum attributes required for successful learning and it is a condition that this clarity be provided in the programme documentation.

⁸ Each of the detailed criteria set out in the Policy and criteria for access, transfer and progression in relation to learners for providers of further and higher education and training must be addressed in the provider's evaluation report. The detailed criteria are (QQI, restated 2015) arranged under the headings

- Progression and transfer routes
- Entry arrangements
- Information provision

⁹ http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Source/Framework_EN.pdf (accessed 26/09/2015)

The panel noted that the minimum language proficiency requirements for entrants whose first language is not English may self-assess their English language competency using the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) at a level that is greater than or equal to B2+ on the framework. The panel is not satisfied that the self-assessment route is sufficient evidence of competency and verifiable evidence would be a requirement.

The panel was informed that learners who are awarded the Yellow Belt Lean Six Sigma Award may progress to Green Belt Lean Six Sigma programmes.

Condition

It is a condition that SQT revise the documented programme entry requirements to include the following:

- Confirmation of the minimum attributes for general learning, noting that these should normally be evidenced to a Level 5 standard.
- The English language assessments that are accepted as verifiable evidence of English language competence be clearly stated.

Criterion 5. The programme's written curriculum is well structured and fit-for-purpose

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) The programme is suitably structured and coherently oriented towards the achievement by learners of its intended programme learning outcomes. The programme (including any stages and modules) is integrated in all its dimensions. b) In so far as it is feasible the programme provides choice to enrolled learners so that they may align their learning opportunities towards their individual educational and training needs. c) Each module and stage is suitably structured and coherently oriented towards the achievement by learners of the intended <i>programme</i> learning outcomes. d) The objectives and purposes of each of the programme's elements are clear to learners and to the provider's staff. e) The programme is structured and scheduled realistically based on sound educational and training principles¹⁰. f) The curriculum is comprehensively and systematically documented. g) The credit allocated to the programme is consistent with the difference between the entry standard and minimum intended programme learning outcomes. h) The credit allocated to each module is consistent with the difference between the module entry standard and minimum intended module learning outcomes. i) Elements such as practice placement and work-based phases are provided with the same rigour and attentiveness as other elements. j) The programme duration (expressed in terms of time from initial enrolment to completion) and its fulltime equivalent contact time (expressed in hours) are consistent with the difference between the minimum entry standard and award standard and with the credit allocation.¹¹ 		
	Satisfactory? (yes, no, partially)	Comment
Principal Programme	Yes	

In general, the panel is satisfied that the curriculum is well structured and fit for purpose.

The panel was informed that the structure of the curriculum is based on enabling learners to develop the capacity to work on aspects of a process-improvement project that has been chosen by their sponsoring employers. The integrative module provides a foundation in the principles of Lean Six Sigma and the DMAIC problem-solving approach.

The project is a group project and 80% of the marks goes to the group effort, with 20% allocated to individual learners. See Criterion 10 below for further comment on this.

¹⁰ This applies recursively to each and every element of the programme from enrolment through to completion.

In the case of a modular programme, the pool of modules and learning pathway constraints (such as any prerequisite and co-requisite modules) is explicit and appropriate to the intended programme learning outcomes.

¹¹ If the duration is variable, for example, when advanced entry is available, this should be explained and justified

Criterion 6. There are sufficient qualified and capable programme staff available to implement the programme as planned

- a) The specification of the programme's staffing requirements (staff required as part of the programme and intrinsic to it) is precise, and rigorous and consistent with the programme and its defined purpose. The specifications include professional and educational qualifications, licences-to practise where applicable, experience and the staff/learner ratio requirements. See also criterion 12 c).
- b) The programme has an identified complement of staff¹² (or potential staff) who are available, qualified and capable to provide the specified programme in the context of their existing commitments.
- c) The programme's complement of staff (or potential staff) (those who support learning including any employer-based personnel) are demonstrated to be competent to enable learners to achieve the intended programme learning outcomes and to assess learners' achievements as required.
- d) There are arrangements for the performance of the programme's staff to be managed to ensure continuing capability to fulfil their roles and there are staff development¹³ opportunities¹⁴.
- e) There are arrangements for programme staff performance to be reviewed and there are mechanisms for encouraging development and for addressing underperformance.
- f) Where the programme is to be provided by staff not already in post there are arrangements to ensure that the programme will not enrol learners unless a complement of staff meeting the specifications is in post.

	Satisfactory? (yes, no, partially)	Comment
Certificate in Lean Six Sigma, Yellow Belt	Yes	

The panel was advised that there are sufficient suitably qualified tutors to deliver the programme. All are trained in the Lean Six Sigma methodology, and have many years' experience of working in various sectors. The emphasis in the programme is on completion of a group project, with mentoring of each learner during the process, as appropriate. It was evident in the discussion the panel had with learners and graduates of other SQT accredited programme that tutors were readily available and that this was a particular feature of the SQT programme which has small numbers of learners in each cohort and that this approach would continue with the proposed programme.

SQT stated that current staff had participated in initial training workshops to facilitate the pivot to emergency remote learning during the pandemic.

¹² Staff here means natural persons required as part of the programme and accountable (directly or indirectly) to the programme's provider, it may for example, include contracted trainers and workplace supervisors.

¹³ Development here is for the purpose of ensuring staff remain up-to-date on the discipline itself, on teaching methods or on other relevant skills or knowledge, to the extent that this is necessary to ensure an adequate standard of teaching.

¹⁴ Professional or vocational education and training requires that teaching staff's professional/vocation knowledge is up to date. Being qualified in a discipline does not necessarily mean that a person is currently competent in that discipline. Therefore, performance management and development of professional and vocational staff needs to focus on professional/vocational competence as well as pedagogical competence. Professional development may include placement in industry, for example. In regulated professions it would be expected that there are a suitable number of registered practitioners involved.

The strategic intention of SQT is to deliver its programmes on a blended or virtual basis in the future and staff will be upskilled as the need arises. As stated, SQT will be seeking accreditation from QQI for these modes of delivery in due course and the panel indicated that staff re-training or upskills should form part of this process.

Criterion 7. There are sufficient physical resources to implement the programme as planned

- a) The specification of the programme's physical resource requirements (physical resources required as part of the programme and intrinsic to it) is precise, and rigorous and consistent with the programme, its defined purpose and its resource/learner-ratio requirements. See also criterion 12 d).
- b) The programme has an identified complement of supported physical resources (or potential supported physical resources) that are available in the context of existing commitments on these e.g. availability of:
 - (i) suitable premises and accommodation for the learning and human needs (comfort, safety, health, wellbeing) of learners (this applies to all of the programme's learning environments including the workplace learning environment)
 - (ii) suitable information technology and resources (including educational technology and any virtual learning environments provided)
 - (iii) printed and electronic material (including software) for teaching, learning and assessment
 - (iv) suitable specialist equipment (e.g. kitchen, laboratory, workshop, studio) – if applicable
 - (v) technical support
 - (vi) administrative support
 - (vii) company placements/internships – if applicable
- c) If versions of the programme are provided in parallel at more than one location each independently meets the location-sensitive validation criteria for each location (for example staffing, resources and the learning environment).
- d) There is a five-year plan for the programme. It should address
 - (i) Planned intake (first five years) and
 - (ii) The total costs and income over the five years based on the planned intake.
- e) The programme includes controls to ensure entitlement to use the property (including intellectual property, premises, materials and equipment) required.

	Satisfactory? (yes, no, partially)	Comment
Certificate in Lean Six Sigma, Yellow Belt	Yes	

The panel noted that SQT has never been a 'bricks and mortar' campus as the mode of delivery is either in-house in client companies or in hotels or conference centres for public programmes. It was stated that SQT put considerable resources into its IT function, providing access to programme materials on Moodle for instance and ensuring that there are sufficient administrative resources to provide support for queries by email, message board or phone calls to learners and client companies.

It was evident to the panel that SQT had made considerable efforts to successfully transition to provide its programmes remotely, while ensuring that there had been no compromise on maintaining standards and commitment to learners. The panel commends SQT for its efforts in this regard. The panel notes the intention for SQT to deliver programmes through blended learning on an ongoing basis. Acknowledging how this differs from emergency remote learning, the panel encourages SQT to consider further enhancements in the use of TEL to promote pedagogic approaches reflecting good practice in online and blended learning delivery.

Commendation

The panel commends SQT's successful transition to emergency remote learning arising from the COVID-19 pandemic and commends SQT on the stepped, cautionary approach that they employed to ensure maintenance of standards and fulfilment of commitments to learners.

Criterion 8. The learning environment is consistent with the needs of the programme's learners

a) The programme's physical, social, cultural and intellectual environment (recognising that the environment may, for example, be partly virtual or involve the workplace) including resources and support systems are consistent with the intended programme learning outcomes.
b) Learners can interact with, and are supported by, others in the programme's learning environments including peer learners, teachers, and where applicable supervisors, practitioners and mentors.
c) The programme includes arrangements to ensure that the parts of the programme that occur in the workplace are subject to the same rigours as any other part of the programme while having regard to the different nature of the workplace.

	Satisfactory? (yes, no, partially)	Comment
Certificate in Lean Six Sigma, Yellow Belt	Yes	

The panel was informed that there are mechanisms in place for the proposed programme to ensure that learners have the appropriate level of learner supports in the current environment. It was noted that SQT has quickly adapted to an online remote learning environment, offering key elements of many of its programmes on a range of platforms to suit different organisations and learner cohorts. These include Zoom, Webex and Microsoft Teams among others. While the SQT team acknowledged some of the difficulties they encountered in making the transition, including working with a range of platforms to deliver content and sometimes poor internet connectivity in some areas, the panel was informed that they made every effort to ensure that learners become familiar with using the technology effectively. SQT introduced the idea of 'tech checks' at the beginning of sessions to support learners and used their own IT personnel to support learners, for instance on their other programmes. The panel is satisfied that this level of support is in place for the proposed programme for the proposed September intake.

In discussions with the panel, learners and graduates commented on the positive learning environment provided by SQT and indicated that it was one of the main reasons for enrolling in their programmes. Tutors were readily available to provide support as needed on projects or assignments. The panel is satisfied that this approach is in place for the proposed programme.

Commendation

The panel wishes to commend 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.

Criterion 9. There are sound teaching and learning strategies

<ul style="list-style-type: none">a) The teaching strategies support achievement of the intended programme/module learning outcomes.b) The programme provides authentic learning opportunities to enable learners to achieve the intended programme learning outcomes.c) The programme enables enrolled learners to attain (if reasonably diligent) the minimum intended programme learning outcomes reliably and efficiently (in terms of overall learner effort and a reasonably balanced workload).d) Learning is monitored/supervised.e) Individualised guidance, support¹⁵ and timely formative feedback is regularly provided to enrolled learners as they progress within the programme.		
	Satisfactory? (yes, no, partially)	Comment
Certificate in Lean Six Sigma, Yellow Belt	Yes	

In general, the panel is satisfied that there are sound teaching and learning strategies in place. It was evident from discussions with learners and graduates during the virtual visit that the approach taken to teaching and learning was valued by them and working in practice. The panel is satisfied that this approach applies to the proposed programme.

It was clear from the information supplied by SQT at the virtual visit that the teaching and learning strategies are tailored to each group as well as each individual to ensure that their needs are met.

It was stated that SQT made every effort to involve the sponsor so that the learner was supported to attain all the learning outcomes of the programme.

¹⁵ Support and feedback concerns anything material to learning in the context of the programme. For the avoidance of doubt it includes among other things any course-related language, literacy and numeracy support.

Criterion 10. There are sound assessment strategies

- a) All assessment is undertaken consistently with *Assessment Guidelines, Conventions and Protocols for Programmes Leading to QQI Awards*¹⁶
- b) The programme's assessment procedures interface effectively with the provider's QQI approved quality assurance procedures.
- c) The programme includes specific procedures that are fair and consistent for the assessment of enrolled learners to ensure the minimum intended programme/module learning outcomes are acquired by all who successfully complete the programme.¹⁷
- d) The programme includes formative assessment to support learning.
- e) There is a satisfactory written **programme assessment strategy** for the programme as a whole and there are satisfactory module assessment strategies for any of its constituent modules.¹⁸
- f) Sample assessment instruments, tasks, marking schemes and related evidence have been provided for each award-stage assessment and indicate that the assessment is likely to be valid and reliable.
- g) There are sound procedures for the moderation of summative assessment results.
- h) The provider only puts forward an enrolled learner for certification for a particular award for which a programme has been validated if they have been specifically assessed against the standard for that award.¹⁹

	Satisfactory? (yes, no, partially)	Comment
Certificate in Lean Six Sigma, Yellow Belt	Partially	

SQT informed the panel that the main assessment tool is the assessment of the group project, with 80% of marks assigned to this element and 20% of marks assigned to individual learners who demonstrate attainment of the desired learning outcomes. To demonstrate this attainment, each learner is required to submit their own learning summary of the project; to demonstrate their contribution through evidence provided in the group activity log maintained by the group leader as well as evidence of attendance at class and mentoring sessions.

SQT stated that the learner who takes on the group leader role is automatically assigned 2% of the marks from the 20% assigned to individual effort in recognition of the additional effort required by this role.

The panel is not satisfied that there is sufficient clarity regarding how each learner is awarded an individual mark that is reflective of their individual attainment of the learning outcomes and it is a condition that this be fully documented in the programme descriptor.

¹⁶ See the section on transitional arrangements.

¹⁷ This assumes the minimum intended programme/module learning outcomes are consistent with the applicable awards standards.

¹⁸ The programme assessment strategy is addressed in the Assessment Guidelines, Conventions and Protocols for Programmes Leading to QQI Awards. See the section on transitional arrangements.

¹⁹ If the award is a QQI CAS compound award it is not necessarily sufficient that the learner has achieved all the components specified in the certification requirements unless at least one of those components is a capstone component (i.e. designed to test the compound learning outcomes).

Condition

It is a condition that SQT review and revise the assessment strategy to provide clarity regarding how each learner within a group is awarded an individual mark, reflective of their individual attainment of the learning outcomes, and that all learners have full access to 100% of the marks available.

Criterion 11. Learners enrolled on the programme are well informed, guided and cared for

- a) There are arrangements to ensure that each enrolled learner is fully informed in a timely manner about the programme including the schedule of activities and assessments.
- b) Information is provided about learner supports that are available to learners enrolled on the programme.
- c) Specific information is provided to learners enrolled on the programme about any programme-specific appeals and complaints procedures.
- d) If the programme is modular, it includes arrangements for the provision of effective guidance services for learners on the selection of appropriate learning pathways.
- e) The programme takes into account and accommodates to the differences between enrolled learners, for example, in terms of their prior learning, maturity, and capabilities.
- f) There are arrangements to ensure that learners enrolled on the programme are supervised and individualised support and due care is targeted at those who need it.
- g) The programme provides supports for enrolled learners who have special education and training needs.
- h) The programme makes reasonable accommodations for learners with disabilities²⁰.
- i) If the programme aims to enrol international students it complies with the *Code of Practice for Provision of Programmes to International Students*²¹ and there are appropriate in-service supports in areas such as English language, learning skills, information technology skills and such like, to address the particular needs of international learners and enable such learners to successfully participate in the programme.
- j) The programme's learners will be well cared for and safe while participating in the programme, (e.g. while at the provider's premises or those of any collaborators involved in provision, the programme's locations of provision including any workplace locations or practice-placement locations).

	Satisfactory? (yes, no, partially)	Comment
Certificate in Lean Six Sigma, Yellow Belt	Yes	

The panel is satisfied that there are procedures and practices in place to ensure that learners enrolling on the programme are well informed, guided and cared for as the evidence cited throughout this report demonstrates.

Students Handbooks are provided to all learners with information on areas such as how to make a complaint or lodge an appeal.

Prior to enrolment, SQT informed the panel that extensive discussions are held with potential learners and their sponsoring companies about the amount of time and work involved so that expectations are clear from the start.

²⁰ For more information on making reasonable accommodations see www.AHEAD.ie and QQI's Policies, Actions and Procedures for Access, Transfer and Progression for Learners (QQI, restated 2015).

²¹ See *Code of Practice for Provision of Programmes to International Students* (QQI, 2015)

It was evident that SQT provides on-going guidance to learners along the way, with, where possible, face to face mentoring or, because of COVID-19, online, through phone calls, emails or other platforms.

The panel is satisfied that learners enrolled on the programme are well informed, guided and cared for as the evidence cited throughout this report demonstrates.

Students Handbooks are provided to all learners with information on areas such as how to make a complaint or lodge an appeal. The panel was informed that no formal complaints have been received, due in part to the small number in each cohort where any issues arising can be dealt with. The panel questioned whether this may also be a result of the awards being unclassified, or the nature of the policies deterring engagement.

Prior to enrolment, SQT informed the panel that extensive discussions are held with potential learners and their sponsoring companies about the amount of time and work involved so that expectations are clear from the start.

Criterion 12. The programme is well managed

- a) The programme includes intrinsic governance, quality assurance, learner assessment, and access, transfer and progression procedures that functionally interface with the provider's general or institutional procedures.
- b) The programme interfaces effectively with the provider's QQI approved quality assurance procedures. Any proposed incremental changes to the provider's QA procedures required by the programme or programme-specific QA procedures have been developed having regard to QQI's statutory QA guidelines. If the QA procedures allow the provider to approve the centres within the provider that may provide the programme, the procedures and criteria for this should be fit-for-the-purpose of identifying which centres are suited to provide the programme and which are not.
- c) There are explicit and suitable programme-specific criteria for selecting persons who meet the programme's staffing requirements and can be added to the programme's complement of staff.
- d) There are explicit and suitable programme-specific criteria for selecting physical resources that meet the programme's physical resource requirements, and can be added to the programme's complement of supported physical resources.
- e) Quality assurance²² is intrinsic to the programme's maintenance arrangements and addresses all aspects highlighted by the validation criteria.
- f) The programme-specific quality assurance arrangements are consistent with QQI's statutory QA guidelines and use continually monitored completion rates and other sources of information that may provide insight into the quality and standards achieved.
- g) The programme operation and management arrangements are coherently documented and suitable.
- h) There are sound procedures for interface with QQI certification.

	Satisfactory? (yes, no, partially)	Comment
Certificate in Lean Six Sigma, Yellow Belt	Yes	

The panel is satisfied that the programme is well managed. It was noted that the QA policies and systems in place are adequate for the in-person mode of delivery and additional QA policies and procedures will be needed for accreditation for blended or virtual learning.

²² See also QQI's Policy on Monitoring (QQI, 2014)

Part 3. Overall recommendation to QQI

3.1 Principal programme:

Select one	
	Satisfactory (meaning that it recommends that QQI can be satisfied in the context of unit 2.3) of Core policies and criteria for the validation by QQI of programmes of education and training;
Satisfactory	Satisfactory subject to proposed special conditions (specified with timescale for compliance for each condition; these may include proposed pre-validation conditions i.e. proposed (minor) things to be done to a programme that almost fully meets the validation criteria before QQI makes a determination);
	Not satisfactory.

Reasons for the overall recommendation

1. The programme meets the criteria subject to conditions proposed.

Recommendations

1. The 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.
2. The panel commends SQT's successful transition to emergency remote learning arising from the COVID-19 pandemic and commends SQT on the stepped, cautionary approach that they employed to ensure maintenance of standards and fulfilment of commitments to learners.
3. The panel wishes to commend 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.

Special Conditions of Validation (directive and with timescale for compliance)

1. It is a condition that SQT review and revise the programme descriptor to more fully reflect the information provided to the panel as part of the virtual visit. Specifically, this must include Evidence of a more encompassing and transparent comparison with programmes of other providers in Ireland and beyond, identifying the similarities and differences with SQT's programme and providing the rationale for SQT's approach. Ideally, such a comparison should include detail of entry requirements, programme delivery model, credits, duration, curriculum content and assessment strategies.
2. It is a condition that SQT revise the documented programme entry requirements to include the following:
 - a. Confirmation of the minimum attributes for general learning, noting that these should normally be evidenced to a Level 5 standard.
 - b. The English language assessments that are accepted as verifiable evidence of English language competence be clearly stated.

3. It is a condition that SQT review and revise the assessment strategy to provide clarity regarding how each learner within a group is awarded an individual mark, reflective of their individual attainment of the learning outcomes, and that all learners have full access to 100% of the marks available.

Declarations of Evaluators' Interests

It was noted that the Chair of the Panel, Naomi Jackson, Dean of Academic Affairs, CCT College, Dublin, is one of two named CCT representatives on the HECA Board, upon which SQT is also represented. It was also noted that Dr Brían Ó Donnchadha, Subject Expert on the panel, had a professional connection with a SQT Training tutor on a limited basis a number of years ago and is no longer in this position.

This report has been agreed by the evaluation panel and is signed on their behalf by the chairperson.

Panel chairperson: Date:

Signed:

3.2 Disclaimer

The Report of the External Review Panel contains no assurances, warranties or representations express or implied, regarding the aforesaid issues, or any other issues outside the Terms of Reference.

While QQI has endeavoured to ensure that the information contained in the Report is correct, complete and up-to-date, any reliance placed on such information is strictly at the reader's own risk, and in no event will QQI be liable for any loss or damage (including without limitation, indirect or consequential loss or damage) arising from, or in connection with, the use of the information contained in the Report of the External Evaluation Panel.

Part 4. Proposed programme schedules

#	Stage	Description	Month
1	Pre-Course	Teams are confirmed in advance of course commencement. They are supplied with a brief outlining the requirements for the draft Pre-Course Charter. This project charter is submitted to the Tutor for review and feedback.	Pre-Course
2	Directed Training & Mentoring	Lean Six Sigma Introduction, Define and Measure Phases. Feedback is given during training on the development of the Charter and the use of the tools during the training session.	1
3	Project Work	Each team will have an action plan to characterise and investigate the process opportunity, using the tools and techniques covered above.	
4	Directed Training & Mentoring	Analyse, Improve and Control Phases. Feedback is given during training on the progress of the project and the use of the tools during the training session, as well as any drafted project documentation.	2
5	Project Work	Each team will work to develop and implement an appropriate solution and verify its resultant impact on the process.	
6	Mentoring Meetings	Review the Project Team deliverables on an individual team basis, mentor and advise the Teams. Teams are expected to illustrate and ultimately deliver on the Projects' objectives in conjunction with the Company Programme Manager or Representative. Feedback is given on the progress of the project and the use of the tools during the training session as well as any drafted project documentation.	3
7	Submission of Assessment	Team submits the team Project Report assessment & the individual learning summary assessment via Moodle.	