

Independent Evaluation Report on a Provider's Quality Assurance Procedures and Capacity for Fully Online Learning

Part 1 Details of provider

1.1 Applicant Provider

Provider Name:	SQT Training Ltd
Date of Application:	15 November 2024
Date of resubmission of application:	N/A
Date of [virtual] site visit (if applicable):	24 January 2025
Date of panel reconvene meeting (if applicable)	N/A
Date of recommendation to the Programmes and Awards Executive Committee:	10 April 2025

1.2 Profile of provider

SQT Training Ltd. is located within the National Technology Park in Limerick and the administration / management functions are located on site.

All programmes are offered off-site or in a synchronous virtual format. Prior to transitioning to emergency remote provision in March 2020, all SQT programmes were delivered through traditional classroom methods only (face-to-face). SQT offers two types 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. All public programmes are currently offered on a fully online or blended format only.
- In-house Programmes: These programmes are both standard and tailored for a particular organisation and generally cater for four to twelve learners. Prior to March 2020, such programmes were delivered at the company's own training facilities. Currently they are offered in classroom, fully online or blended formats (where appropriate).

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

SQT Training Ltd presently has 32 approved Tutors, with 11 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 the following twelve broad subject areas:

1. Lean Six Sigma
2. Continual Process Improvement
3. Project & Programme Management
4. Quality
5. Environment & Energy Management
6. Health & Safety
7. Food Safety
8. Life Sciences
9. Laboratory
10. Hospitals / Medical
11. Train the Trainer
12. Leadership & Personal Development

In the context of QQI Provision, SQT initially secured QA approval from FETAC in 2007, followed by HETAC in 2008, and successfully completed its reengagement process with QQI in 2019. SQT currently provides programmes leading to QQI awards in the following 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 1 Special Purpose Award)
- Life Sciences (1 HET Special Purpose Award)

Part 2 Provider's Scope of Provision

2.1 Currently Approved Scope¹

(based on QA Approval against QQI Core and Topic QA Guidelines through Initial Access, Reengagement and any subsequent approved extensions of scope²)

Sector (FET, HET, Both)	NFQ Level(s)		Award Class(es)	Programme Discipline Area(s)	Mode(s) of Delivery and Assessment ³	Approval Date ⁴
	Low	From				
Both	5	8	SPA, Minor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engineering, manufacturing and construction Services Business, administration and law Education 	Face-to-face only	SQT Training Ltd gained QA approval from FETAC in 2007, and HETAC in 2008. It completed its Reengagement (Assessment of capacity and approval of QA Procedures) with QQI in September 2019.

2.2 Proposed Extension of Scope for a new Mode of Delivery and Assessment

(with reference to [QQI QA Guidelines for Blended and Fully Online Learning](#))

Proposed extension of approved scope of provision to include:	(Tick <u>one</u> as appropriate)
Blended – Onsite + Synchronous Only	
Blended – Onsite + Synchronous and Asynchronous	✓
Fully Online – Synchronous Only, National	
Fully Online – Synchronous + Asynchronous, National	
Fully Online – Synchronous + Asynchronous, National + Transnational	✓

¹ See Statement of Approved Scope of Provision provided by QQI

² e.g. Approval for collaborative provision, apprenticeships, postgrad programmes etc

³ Add as appropriate from this list: Onsite, Apprenticeship, Blended, Collaborative, Transnational

⁴ Add date at which approval was confirmed by relevant QQI governance committee i.e. PAEC or ARC

Part 3 Evaluation Panel

3.1 Panel Membership

Name	Role of panel member	Organisation
Dr Michael Hall	Chair	Munster Technological University (MTU)
Mary Doyle	Report Writer / Quality Expert	Griffith College
Dr Sarah O'Toole	Subject Matter Expert / Quality Expert	Technological University of the Shannon (TUS)
Jonathan Flynn	Subject Matter Expert	Irish College of Humanities & Applied Sciences (ICHAS)
Ciara Maguire	Industry / Learner Representative	Abbott Nutrition

3.2 Summary Findings

Commendation(s)

Having examined SQT Training Ltd.'s QA Manual and appropriate governance processes and procedures, in relation to the case for extending SQT's Approved Scope of Provision to enable provision, the Panel recorded the following commendations:

- The documentation provided to the panel was excellent and the implementation plan and enhancements to quality assurance (QA) were very clear.
- The commitment to Universal Design for Learning (UDL) shown across the organisation was remarkable.
- There is an obvious community of practice within the SQT team, as evidenced particularly by the joint presentation during the site visit.
- The level of staff engagement with the event was very positive.

Having examined SQT's QA Manual and appropriate governance processes and procedures, in relation to the case for extending SQT's Approved Scope of Provision to enable provision, the Panel recommends approval of Extension of Scope to Fully Online – Synchronous + Asynchronous, National + Transnational provision [to include Blended – Onsite + Synchronous and Asynchronous provision]. The panel also proposes a number of specific advices, which are set out directly below.

Specific Advices

1. The Panel identifies as a specific advice that the statement that "EL requirements are satisfied" is clarified in the QA Manual (section 6.1) as requiring adherence to validated programme requirements.
2. The Panel identifies as a specific advice that the opportunities for submission of assessment artefacts in different formats are explored and facilitated to recognise the diversity of learners under Universal Design for Learning (UDL).

3. The Panel identifies as a specific advice that SQT's procedures for academic misconduct (and in particular in relation to AI) provide further guidelines for tutors in relation to detection of unauthorised content generation using AI.
4. The Panel identifies as a specific advice that, in relation to Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), SQT seeks case studies or scenarios in order to understand best practice (in light of the expanding global market). Furthermore, SQT could identify one or more members of staff to champion this activity.
5. The Panel identifies as a specific advice that the development and provision of a learning resource page on Moodle (or elsewhere) which is generally available for the purpose of supporting all learners (and particularly those with additional needs). This resource should identify specific IT tools that may be useful to learners (and their use).

3.3 Recommendation of the panel to Programmes and Awards Executive Committee of QQI

The panel recommends that QQI	Tick <u>one</u> as appropriate
Approve	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Approve with Conditions ⁵ set out in Section 5.1	
Refuse approval pending mandatory changes set out in Section 6.1	
Refuse to Approve	
the provider's application to extend its Approved Scope of Provision to include programmes delivered and assessed via the following mode: Fully Online – Synchronous + Asynchronous, National + Transnational	

The findings underpinning this recommendation are set out in Part 4 below.

⁵ The panel may propose conditions of QA approval (these are things that must be done in order to maintain approval, unlike mandatory changes which are things that must be done to achieve approval in the first place)

Part 4 Evaluation of draft QA Procedures submitted by SQT Training Ltd.

The following is the panel's findings following evaluation of SQT Training Ltd.'s application to extend its approved scope of provision to include the following mode: Fully Online – Synchronous + Asynchronous, National + Transnational.

4.1 Organisational Context

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

Strategy Management and Implementation Plans	Staff Training, Professional Development and Institutional Support
Policies, Regulations and Administrative Processes	Strategic Collaborations and Partnerships
Finances, Infrastructure and Resources	Learners Outside of Ireland

Findings

Strategy Management and Implementation Plans

In their opening presentation SQT identified how the organisation demonstrated agility and responsiveness to the Covid crisis, with QQI-approved contingency provision (i.e. online delivery) in a measured way (for example, some programmes took 18 months to redesign). The panel heard how this development, and the subsequent transition back to classroom, reset how the organisation operated.

SQT's motivation for seeking extension of its approved scope provision to include online learning was identified as including programme profile; learner feedback; industry (multinational company) demand; the potential of global markets supporting growth; potential international competition from other providers; programme continuity/flexibility for delivery when contingency factors are required, such as when employees relocate or travel with work; and support for environmental goals by reducing travel/material use, etc. SQT has moved from a short-term to a long-term plan and has developed a 5-year strategic plan for the period 2024 to 2029 – the 6 key pillars identify areas for growth including programmes, markets and recognition. Three key staff completed the 'Go Global for Growth' programme, in DCU, supported by Enterprise Ireland.

The tutors met by the panel are (senior) industry experts, delivering practical, tailored, programmes to work-based learners (supported by the learners' employers). An internal decision was taken to reduce cohort size for online classes (generally 10-15). SQT registers over 7,000 learners annually (approx. 12% of whom are enrolled on QQI programmes). In the five-year period, 2020-2024, over 19,000 learners have attended online programmes (over 2,400), with a further over 2,000 classroom-based programmes supporting over 12,000 learners. The panel notes that all programmes receive positive feedback through SQT surveys, with 97% of learners awarding their programmes 4-5 (out of 5) stars.

Policies, Regulations and Administrative Processes

Following a Gap Analysis of current processes against QQI's Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Blended and Fully Online Programmes, SQT developed and implemented an Action Plan. Updates made were based on learning following current Covid-contingency online provision. These changes to governance and QA processes are outlined in SQT's Transition to Virtual Learning: QA, Outcomes and Future Directions report (provided to the panel), in the presentation on the day, and in the policies provided for consideration by the panel. In addition, SQT reviewed and updated its processes for supporting online learning including how companies and individual learners book programme offerings, materials, tracking attendance, gathering feedback, etc. The panel considered the documentation provided to be excellent and the implementation plan and enhancements to quality assurance (QA) and relevant teaching and learning were very clear. **[Commendation 1]**

Finances, Infrastructure and Resources

The panel noted that the transition to online learning has been and continues to be supported at all levels within SQT, with evident buy-in, resourcing and support provided across the organisation.

SQT has considered various risks to the maintenance of standards of delivery, including not investing in information technology, not identifying appropriate technical requirement specifications for learners, or not investing in tutor upskilling and established a framework to mitigate such risks

SQT has enhanced its learner resources through the development of a Learner Support Hub and other updates. The learning resource page on Moodle (or elsewhere) should identify specific IT tools (and their use) to support all learners (and particularly those with additional needs). This information should be generally available for all learners. **[Specific Advice 5]**

Staff Training, Professional Development and Institutional Support

SQT has invested significantly in supporting tutor development. Tutor upskilling commenced in March 2020, with the provision of bespoke training for SQT tutors by Flexlabs (now Digital Learning Institute). This allowed the organisation to build comfort and trust in adjustments it made to existing practice. The training has helped tutors to develop their confidence and proficiency in programme redesign, instructional design, interactive content, and engagement tools. SQT has embraced a process of measured and incremental implementation (to support capacity building).

Staff undertook lots of practice and peer review sessions internally and with family. Additionally, for internal peer-support, tutors have established and actively participate in a community of practice to enhance their practices. **[Commendation 3]**

The focus on programme design has been supported through the engagement of staff in the AHEAD/UCD Universal Design of Learning (UDL) programme. Currently, seven members of staff have completed this programme, with three doing the 'facilitator' add-on programme. SQT envisages that all staff will have completed the UDL programme by the end of this year. **[Commendation 2]**

Tutor Approval/Induction: Training qualifications are required by tutors, and all tutors must obtain the required training qualification before receiving tutor approval. SQT has established an interim mentoring process for new trainers, supported by the existing tutor team. As some SQT programmes are lengthy, this shadowing process can take considerable time to complete to become familiar with the full programme's requirements/practice. This tutor support is a recorded process, with peer reviews

undertaken and a teacher observation record completed for submission to and review by the Director of Quality and Academic Affairs.

Strategic Collaborations and Partnerships

SQT has established a Tri-Partite Partnership Model to include its engagement with its companies and learners. SQT has arrangements with 260+ employers, and learner attendance on programmes is supported by 14 Skillnet organisations.

Learners Outside of Ireland

Organically from 2020/2022, and in a more targeted way in recent years, SQT has experienced a growth of learner numbers, with demand from Irish clients (international pharmaceutical and MedTech companies) particularly evident. The panel heard that these companies are seeking a common approach to delivery of their training programmes to be rolled out globally (particularly to EU and US bases). SQT intends scheduling delivery of programmes so that all enrolled learners are at the same time-zone, where possible, and learner supports provided accordingly.

Multi-cultural and inter-cultural awareness within the programme team has been developed through the tutor community of practice (as all tutors are experienced industry trainers) and there is further training planned within SQT. Examples of identified current supporting practice include use of subtitles [and close captions] on training sessions and materials; encouragement of learner use of translation software on their devices; encouragement of and engagement with questions to provide context and connection in a real-life way with content; and use of coaching sessions to embed learning.

For accredited programmes, the panel identifies as a specific advice that the statement that learner English language requirements are satisfied be clarified in the QA Manual (section 6.1) as requiring adherence to validated programme requirements. **[Specific Advice 1]**

Commendations

The panel recorded the following commendations in relation to SQT:

1. The documentation provided to the panel was excellent and the implementation plan and enhancements to quality assurance (QA) were very clear.
2. The commitment to Universal Design for Learning (UDL) shown across the organisation was remarkable.
3. There is an obvious community of practice within the SQT team, as evidenced particularly by the joint presentation during the site visit.

Specific Advices

1. The Panel identifies as a specific advice that the statement that “EL requirements are satisfied” is clarified in the QA Manual (section 6.1) as requiring adherence to validated programme requirements.
5. The Panel identifies as a specific advice that the development and provision of a learning resource page on Moodle (or elsewhere) which is generally available for the purpose of

supporting all learners (and particularly those with additional needs). This resource should identify specific IT tools that may be useful to learners (and their use).

4.2 Programmes Context

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

Programme Outcomes

Approval and Validation Processes

Learning and Curriculum Design

Learning Materials and Resources

Assessment and Feedback Practices

Evaluation and Continuous Improvement

Findings

The SQT programme tutors demonstrated great collegiality, and provided an effective and positive presentation **[Recommendations 1-4]**, covering:

- Programme portfolio – how these are structured to allow for delivery.
- Pre-course (online) – what are the company/organisation needs/outcomes for the programme.
- Pre-reading –what type of materials are provided.
- Pre-course Orientation – Activities in advance of Day 1, the pre-material provided.
- Project Charter – explanation of what it is, and the type of feedback provided to learners in advance of training commencing.
- In-class experience - how is this maintained, the interaction between tutors and learners.
- Attendance requirements - For short programmes, full attendance requirement.
- Tools Used – these are trialled and used, if found helpful.
- Culture and tone – the importance of a positive environment, using humour and levity but staying with the message.

Programme Outcomes

During delivery, the tutor ensures that the programme meets the requirements of the company and the learner, with content and examples reflecting their own business and product categories (through peer interactions). SQT noted that learners may be more willing to engage in the wider class sessions when the content is relevant. The tutors use lesson plans to keep them/the programme on track. These support the assessment and review of the programme content after its delivery.

Approval and Validation Processes

SQT indicated that it has developed guidelines as to what content is better suited to online learning to inform its decisions of when it's appropriate to make the programme fully online versus using a blended learning (BL) approach. This process has developed out of the original work undertaken with FlexLabs

which implemented a BL approach first, maintaining the classroom experience (before introducing a fully online methodology), as some activities worked better in person (e.g. gamification.)

The current QA practice documentation is informed by SQT's prior practice. The panel observed that all tutors are familiar with delivery of their own programmes, which SQT noted is informed by experiential practice (what worked well) and QQI guidelines. SQT further noted that GAP analysis was used to provide feedback for enhancement of individual programmes, via the team meetings and the tutors' community of practice. The Programme Board looks at usual practice for individual programmes and ensures that the QA policies and practices are reflective of this and up to date.

Learning and Curriculum Design

SQT noted that Universal Design for Learning (UDL) has become the foundation stone of its programme delivery (some SQT tutors reported that, before formal training, they had used this model without realising that is what it was). The CAST UDL Framework, which is employed by SQT tutors in delivering their programmes, is engaged to utilise real-life scenarios relevant to the workplace with the intention of facilitating learners to put their learning into practice immediately on completion of their programme.

Programmes are delivered using the '*reach everyone, teach everyone*' philosophy (of Prof Tom Tobin).

Learning Materials and Resources

The presentation provided by the tutor team (as requested by the panel in advance of the meeting) allowed the panel to experience the 'SQT Look and Feel' of presentations. The presentation reflected a professional and competent team, operating in a collegiate manner, supported by a strong community of practice.

SQT noted that its practice in terms of student engagement and management of groups (the use of breakout rooms, quizzes, etc.) was developed through Covid-contingency delivery. Learner engagement is supported in several ways, including through one-to-one mentoring and coaching – this is implemented face to face, online or through Moodle. The announcement section is used to broadcast, the private message section for direct content, and use of the forum can be immediate and flexible.

SQT's use of Moodle provides an opportunity for neurodiverse students to access material and communication, and course material is accessible for all (building on the principles of UDL).

Learners who do not have English as their first language must meet the programme entry requirements and language requirements (and are usually supported for entry by their employers). Additionally, SQT uses video and audio content, recorded sessions, and closed caption and translation software to support learners whose first language is not English. **[Specific Advice 1]** SQT noted that the programme team ensures the pre-material provided is appropriate to support programme workload (required content vs reference material and long-term useful resources).

According to the documentation, the SQT learners' support webpage was to launch in December 2024. Owing to some technical issues at the time, the webpage launched in January 2025. **[Specific Advice 5]**

Induction and orientation are supported through Moodle – both through engagement by learners with the platform, and through opportunities for learners to practice accessing and uploading assessments. The Course Manager is the learner's point of contact as tech support for Moodle.

Assessment and Feedback Practices

SQT ensures that learners understand the categorisation and prioritisation of course material priorities to manage the asynchronous workload. Formative assessment is built into the programme to encourage learners' reading of required resources.

Most assessments are projects or assignments, and proctoring is therefore not required. The tutors indicated through the use of these assessment tools that they would generally be able to detect artificial intelligence (AI) use in the assignments, particularly for company-based assessments. MCQs, if used, are online with feedback provided to the learners in real-time. Learners are provided with the opportunity to record their assessments, and video/online presentations are also permitted. The panel identified as a specific advice the exploration and facilitation of opportunities for submission of assessment in different formats to recognise the diversity of learners, under Universal Design for Learning (UDL). **[Specific Advice 2]**

A Project Charter, developed by the learner, is linked to the project for the Lean Six Sigma Green Belt programme. Learners draft the charter at the time of their enrolment, indicating what they wish to do (and what they need to do outside the programme to complete their project). This is further supported by an assessment brief (provided on Moodle) and one-to-one meetings with the learners. The Charter supports the learner in completing the assessment successfully and promotes active and applied learning in the programme concerned.

New technologies (including AI resources) are evaluated by SQT's Managing Director and the Teaching & Learning (T&L) Committee before they may be recommended for use for the delivery of SQT's programmes. A current list of approved resources, and their uses, is available. The tutors indicated that they would generally be able to detect artificial intelligence (AI) use in assignments, particularly for company-based assessments. The panel identified a specific advice that, as AI becomes more sophisticated and pervasive, SQT's procedures for academic misconduct (and in particular in relation to AI) would provide further guidelines in relation to the detection of unauthorised content generation using AI. **[Specific Advice 3]**

Evaluation and Continuous Improvement

Post-course review, the tutor records all feedback and considers the programme in detail. SQT noted that use of the Coursecheck System (since 2022) provides SQT with real-time and transparent feedback to support learning, validate delivery and to make follow-up more responsive. It also observed that monitoring feedback and trends allows SQT's team to be responsive to learner and company needs.

Evaluation and monitoring within SQT are supported by the T&L Committee (meeting twice per year) and the Community of Practice (meets every 6-8 weeks). These online fora have allowed tutors to come together to keep up to date in their own subject area, as well as support their peers' pedagogical development. Tutors engage with conferences and webinars, as well as their own pedagogical development in areas such as instructional design; Universal Design for Learning (UDL); teaching and learning; AI tools (as lead/experts in relation to specific tools); etc.

Commendations

The panel recorded the following commendations:

1. The documentation provided to the panel was excellent and the implementation plan and enhancements to quality assurance (QA) were very clear.
2. The commitment to Universal Design for Learning (UDL) shown across the organisation was remarkable.
3. There is an obvious community of practice within the SQT team, as evidenced particularly by the joint presentation during the site visit.
4. The level of staff engagement throughout the site visit was very positive.

Specific Advices

1. The Panel identifies as a specific advice that the statement that “EL requirements are satisfied” is clarified in the QA Manual (section 6.1) as requiring adherence to validated programme requirements.
2. The Panel identifies as a specific advice that the opportunities for submission of assessment artefacts in different formats are explored and facilitated to recognise the diversity of learners under Universal Design for Learning (UDL).
3. The Panel identifies as a specific advice that SQT’s procedures for academic misconduct (and in particular in relation to AI) provide further guidelines for tutors in relation to detection of unauthorised content generation using AI.
4. The Panel identifies as a specific advice that the development and provision of a learning resource page on Moodle (or elsewhere) which is generally available for the purpose of supporting all learners (and particularly those with additional needs). This resource should identify specific IT tools that may be useful to learners (and their use).

4.3 Learner Experience Context

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

Thinking About Study

Learning Support and Development

Equality of Opportunity

Learner Experience and Outcomes

Findings

SQT administration and learner support staff made a short presentation outlining the learner journey, plus a scenario talk through of an in-house programme. **[Commendations 1-4]**

The panel explored the technical supports which are available to the learners. The course manager provides the primary support (for Zoom log-in, Moodle uploads, etc.), and liaises directly with any learners experiencing a technical issue.

Thinking About Study

Owing to the nature of many of the programmes provided by SQT, Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is not applicable. SQT has an RPL framework available to support the application process, where relevant, and uses specific criteria for access (entry only) to each programme. The panel identifies as a specific advice that SQT seeks case studies or scenarios in order to understand RPL best practice (in light of the expanding global market). SQT could identify one or more members of staff to champion this activity. **[Specific Advice 4]**

Learning Support and Development

Asynchronous material is provided in advance of the programme's commencement. Much of this is considered supplementary by SQT (required content vs reference material and long-term useful resources).

Equality of Opportunity

SQT indicated that every learner undertaking a programme longer than 2 days is provided with pre-orientation. Learners with additional support requirements are requested to flag this on their application form. SQT arranges a follow-up call to check what supports are needed/can reasonably be provided (e.g. contrast ratio, text size, backgrounds, etc.).

Alternative assessment mechanisms are being considered for future use (on the basis of staff having completed the UDL badge, referenced above) and SQT's intention is to facilitate multiple means of assessment presentation. **[Specific Advice 2]** The SQT team believes that this development should also help to discourage academic misconduct.

Learner Experience and Outcomes

All feedback is gathered through Coursecheck in the office at end of every day. This is followed up and addressed in a programme management meeting. SQT (either the Director of Quality and Academic Affairs

or the Course Manager) deals with any rating below 4 out of 5 within 24 hours of when it is submitted (after a class). If the feedback relates specifically to course content, the Tutor is also involved in addressing the feedback. The process for dealing with dissatisfied learners was discussed. SQT makes a distinction between Negative Feedback and a Complaint – a complaint procedure is outlined in the QA Manual. SQT noted that negative learner feedback is relatively rare. However, when it does arise, it is often linked to a mismatch between the learner's experience level and the course content.

SQT uses analytics (for example in Moodle or other platforms) to check if a learner is remaining engaged – this may be accessed and monitored by tutors if they are concerned about an individual's engagement with the course. This is outlined to learners at their commencement of the programme when they are briefed on the programme's attendance requirements.

The mechanisms for how support is delivered for a non-national vs an Irish-based online learner were discussed. The SQT team indicated that, based on feedback received from existing learners and graduates, there appears to be no difference in the learner experience (and there is no fee differential).

SQT indicated that academic integrity guidelines to support both tutors and learners have been developed and published (QAP6-2). The Swiss-cheese model is currently being used. The guidelines include procedures on learners' use of AI – authorised vs not permissible – and the tutor advises learners at the outset where AI may and may not be used. The panel identified as a specific advice that, as AI becomes more sophisticated and pervasive, SQT's procedures for academic misconduct (and in particular in relation to AI) could provide further guidelines in relation to detection. **[Specific Advice 3]**

SQT considers the design of assessment important to maintaining its integrity. Assessment strategies employed include project-based assessments, oral assessment, video presentations, etc. SQT maintains a central database for recording Academic Integrity incidents. Gathered (personal) evidence is destroyed once the Academic Council makes a determination about an academic integrity case, and the appeals timeframe expires.

The SQT learners' support webpage was to launch in December 2024. Owing to some technical issues at the time, the webpage launched in January 2025. **[Specific Advice 5]**

Recommendations

The panel recorded the following commendations:

1. The documentation provided to the panel was excellent and the implementation plan and enhancements to quality assurance (QA) were very clear.
2. The commitment to Universal Design for Learning (UDL) shown across the organisation was remarkable.
3. There is an obvious community of practice within the SQT team, as evidenced particularly by the joint presentation during the site visit.
4. The level of staff engagement with the event was very positive.

Specific Advices

1. The Panel identifies as a specific advice that the statement that “EL requirements are satisfied” is clarified in the QA Manual (section 6.1) as requiring adherence to validated programme requirements.
2. The Panel identifies as a specific advice that the opportunities for submission of assessment artefacts in different formats are explored and facilitated to recognise the diversity of learners under Universal Design for Learning (UDL).
3. The Panel identifies as a specific advice that SQT’s procedures for academic misconduct (and in particular in relation to AI) provide further guidelines for tutors in relation to detection of unauthorised content generation using AI.
4. The Panel identifies as a specific advice that, in relation to Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), SQT seeks case studies or scenarios in order to understand best practice (in light of the expanding global market). Furthermore, SQT could identify one or more members of staff to champion this activity.
5. The Panel identifies as a specific advice that the development and provision of a learning resource page on Moodle (or elsewhere) which is generally available for the purpose of supporting all learners (and particularly those with additional needs). This resource should identify specific IT tools that may be useful to learners (and their use).

Part 5 Conditions of QA Approval

5.1 Conditions of QA Approval

There were no conditions of QA approval identified by the panel.

Part 6 Mandatory Changes to QA Procedures and / or Specific Advice

6.1 Mandatory Changes

There were no mandatory changes identified by the panel.

6.2 Specific Advice

1. The Panel identifies as a specific advice that the statement that “EL requirements are satisfied” is clarified in the QA Manual (section 6.1) as requiring adherence to validated programme requirements.
2. The Panel identifies as a specific advice that the opportunities for submission of assessment artefacts in different formats are explored and facilitated to recognise the diversity of learners under Universal Design for Learning (UDL).
3. The Panel identifies as a specific advice that SQT’s procedures for academic misconduct (and in particular in relation to AI) provide further guidelines for tutors in relation to detection of unauthorised content generation using AI.
4. The Panel identifies as a specific advice that, in relation to Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), SQT seeks case studies or scenarios in order to understand best practice (in light of the expanding global market). Furthermore, SQT could identify one or more members of staff to champion this activity.
5. The Panel identifies as a specific advice that the development and provision of a learning resource page on Moodle (or elsewhere) which is generally available for the purpose of supporting all learners (and particularly those with additional needs). This resource should identify specific IT tools that may be useful to learners (and their use).

Part 7 Recommended Amendment to Approved Scope of Provision following this evaluation

Sector (FET, HET, Both)	NFQ Level(s)		Award Class(es)	Programme Discipline Area(s)	Mode(s) of Delivery and Assessment
	From	To			
Both	5	8	SPA, Minor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engineering, manufacturing and construction services Business, administration and law Education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Blended - Synchronous and Asynchronous Fully Online – National and Transnational

Part 8 Approval by Chair of the Panel

This report of the panel is approved and submitted to QQI for its decision on the approval of the SQT Training Ltd. application for extension of scope to include programmes delivered and assessed via the following mode: Fully Online – Synchronous + Asynchronous, National + Transnational.



Name: _____

Dr Michael Hall

Date: 19 February 2025

Annexe 1: Documentation provided to the Panel in the course of the Evaluation

Document	Related to
Application Form SQT Extension of Scope - TOR Draft 3 Final SQT Programmes - List Fully Online	Organisational Context Programmes Context
Guidelines and other documents	Organisational Context Programmes Context Learner Experience Context
Contingency Policies - Contingency Protocol for Office Staff - Contingency Protocol for Tutors	Organisational Context Programmes Context Learner Experience Context
Guidelines - Academic Integrity Guidelines for Learners - Academic Integrity Guidelines for Tutors - Guidelines for Developing Learning Resources V1.0 - Guidelines for the Development and Delivery of Blended and Fully Online Learning Programmes V1.0	Organisational Context Programmes Context Learner Experience Context
Handbooks - Moodle Student Reference Guide - Moodle Tutor Reference Guide - Zoom – Tutor Handbook - Zoom – Learner Handbook	Organisational Context Programmes Context Learner Experience Context
SQT's Transition to Virtual Learning - Quality Measures, Outcomes and Future Directions	Organisational Context Programmes Context Learner Experience Context
SQT Training Ltd QA Policies and Procedures	Organisational Context Programmes Context Learner Experience Context

Annexe 2: Provider staff met in the course of the Evaluation

Name	Role/Position
SESSION 1 / DOMAIN 1: ORGANISATIONAL CONTEXT	
Meeting with Management	
David Williams	Managing Director
Lorraine Halpin	Director of Quality and Academic Affairs
Aishling Madigan	Operations Project Manager
SESSION 2 / DOMAIN 2: PROGRAMME CONTEXT	
Meeting with Tutors & Programme Developers	
Dave Williams	Managing Director
Lorraine Halpin	Director of Quality and Academic Affairs
Denis Kiely	Programme Director, Food Safety programmes
Brian Robinson	Tutor, Food Safety programmes
Joan Brien	Tutor, Food Safety programmes
Tom Keane	Tutor, Food Safety programmes
John Ryan	Programme Director, Lean Six Sigma programme
Éamon Ó Béarra	Programme Director, Lean Six Sigma programme
Ashling Keogh	Programme Director, Lean Six Sigma programme
Noel McCann	Tutor, Lean Six Sigma programmes
Gina Ryan	Programme Director, Leadership and Professional Development programmes
Emer Doyle	Tutor, Leadership and Professional Development, programmes
SESSION 3 / DOMAIN 3: LEARNER EXPERIENCE CONTEXT	
Meeting with Staff Responsible for Supporting Learners & IT Infrastructure	
David Williams	Managing Director
Lorraine Halpin	Director of Quality and Academic Affairs
Aishling Madigan	Operations Project Manager
Annette Cahill	Accreditation Manager
Jean Hastings	Course Manager, In-house programmes
Bernie Madigan	Course Manager, Public programmes
Anthony McCormick	Course Manager, Lean Six Sigma programmes
Lisa Neville	Course Manager, In-house programmes

Appendix
Provider Response to Blended and Online Learning Panel Report

Response to Panel Report: Extension of Scope of Provision for Blended and Online Learning

SQT Training, 12th March 2025

Following receipt of the Panel Report, SQT would like to extend our sincere appreciation to all Panel members for the time and effort dedicated to reviewing the materials provided in advance of the virtual site visit. We also greatly appreciate the supportive engagement throughout the day and the expertise and insight shared which will further strengthen our approach to blended and online learning. SQT appreciates the constructive feedback provided by the Panel and the valuable recommendations that will help further strengthen our blended and online learning provision.

Commendations

1. The documentation provided to the panel was excellent, and the implementation plan and enhancements to quality assurance (QA) were very clear.

SQT Response: SQT is pleased that the Panel considered the documentation and implementation plan to be of a high standard. A robust and transparent QA process has been central to our approach, ensuring that our blended and online provision aligns with best practices in learner experience, assessment integrity and programme delivery. We remain committed to continuously refining and enhancing these processes based on stakeholder feedback and industry developments.

2. The commitment to Universal Design for Learning (UDL) shown across the organisation was remarkable.

SQT Response: We greatly appreciate this recognition of our commitment to UDL. UDL is a core pillar of our Teaching and Learning Strategy and SQT continues to embed UDL principles across programme design, delivery, and assessment, ensuring inclusivity and accessibility for all learners. Ongoing professional development and supports for staff and tutors remains a key priority to further strengthen our implementation of UDL.

3. There is an obvious community of practice within the SQT team, as evidenced particularly by the joint presentation during the site visit.

SQT Response: The strong sense of collaboration within SQT is a cornerstone of our success in delivering quality training. The joint presentation of Tutoring staff showcased our shared commitment to programme design, delivery, innovation and learner engagement. We will continue to foster this community of practice to enhance our learning environment and encourage peer-to-peer knowledge sharing.

4. The level of staff engagement with the event was very positive.

SQT Response: We are delighted that the Panel has recognised the engagement and enthusiasm of our entire team. We are fortunate to have such a professional and knowledgeable team whose contributions have been invaluable in maintaining our high standards. We place great value on staff engagement and participation in QA processes and programme enhancement activities and will continue to do so.

Specific Advice

1. Clarification of “EL requirements are satisfied” in QA Manual (Section 6.1) to ensure adherence to validated programme requirements.

SQT Response: SQT acknowledges the importance of clarity in all QA documentation. We will review Section 6.1 of the QA Manual and ensure that it explicitly states that EL (English Language) requirements must align with validated programme requirements.

2. Exploration of opportunities for submission of assessment artefacts in different formats to support diverse learners under UDL.

SQT Response: SQT fully supports the principle of providing learners with multiple means of demonstrating their knowledge and skills. This is a specific action within the UDL pillar of our Teaching and Learning Strategy. Programme teams will conduct a comprehensive review of assessment design and submission options to identify opportunities for increased flexibility, ensuring that assessments remain academically rigorous while accommodating diverse learning needs and preferences.

3. Further development of academic misconduct procedures, particularly in relation to AI, and guidance for tutors on detecting unauthorised content generation.

SQT Response: SQT acknowledges the evolving challenges presented by AI-generated content in academic integrity. We will continue to review and update our academic misconduct procedures and guidelines for Tutors with regards detecting and addressing unauthorised AI-generated submissions. Additionally, we will provide necessary upskilling and resources to support Tutors in applying these guidelines effectively.

4. Consideration of case studies and staff champions for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) to align with best practice in the expanding global market.

SQT Response: SQT will develop relevant case studies to enhance our RPL approach and ensure alignment with best practices. These case studies will serve as practical examples to support learners and staff in effectively applying RPL principles.

5. Development of a general learning resource page on Moodle (or an alternative platform) to support all learners, particularly those with additional needs.

SQT Response: SQT is committed to continuously enhancing the learner support page. As a specific action we will develop relevant resources which will include guidance on IT tools and accessibility features beneficial to learners.

We look forward to implementing these enhancements and continuing our commitment to high-quality, learner-centred training.

Best regards,

dorraine Holpin.

Director of Quality and Academic Affairs
SQT Training