



Reengagement Panel Report

Assessment of QA Procedures for Blended Learning

Part 1 Details of provider

1.1 Applicant Provider

Registered Business/Trading Name:	International Centre for Security Excellence
Address:	140 Phibsborough Rd, Phibsborough, Dublin, D07 F8NE
Date of Application:	19 th March 2021
Date of resubmission of application:	
Date of evaluation:	12 th April, 2021
Date of virtual site visit:	12 th April, 2021
Date of recommendation to the Programmes and Awards Executive Committee:	24 th June 2021

1.2 Profile of provider

Established in 2006, the International Centre for Security Excellence (ICSE) is a training and development provider based out of Galway, with other training centres in operation in Dublin and Cork. ICSE has had a longstanding relationship with QQI (and formerly FETAC) since 2007.

ICSE offers QQI-accredited programmes across a number of different learning domains, primarily security and hospitality, and ranging between NFQ Level 4 and Level 6. ICSE also offers some non-QQI programmes, specifically *Conflict Management* and *Opera Property Management System*.

ICSE's learner profile is comprised of those from both the public and private sector, the vast majority of whom seek to complete the security-related training programmes to become eligible to apply for a licence with the Private Security Authority (PSA). The company's motto is "We Change Lives", which reflects its stated goal to make an impact on all learners who train with it.

ICSE is seeking an expansion of its scope of provision to include blended modes of learning.



Part 2 Panel Membership

Name	Role of panel member	Organisation
David Treacy	Chair	Former Education Officer, City of Dublin ETB
Naomi Pasley	Panel Member	Lecturer in Nursing, Hibernia College
Matthew Hurley	Report Writer	QA Officer, Bridge Mills Galway Language Centre

Part 3 Findings of the Panel

3.1 Summary Findings

The panel would like to express its gratitude to the representatives from ICSE who participated in the virtual site visit and contributed to the open, honest and constructive dialogue on the day. The panel conducted a comprehensive review of the submitted documentation and spoke at length with ICSE representatives on the various components which make up the blended learning experience.

The panel explored the transition from traditional classroom delivery to an online delivery framework in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the extent to which ICSE has had to change or adapt its processes — in particular, those originally written for the physical classroom — to fit a blended or online environment. The implementation of the Arlo training management system, programme development and assessment, and the provision of learner supports were all discussed in great detail during the site visit. The panel also had the opportunity to speak with tutors about their experiences with adapting to the transition.

At the conclusion of the virtual site visit, the panel was of the view that the significant investment in infrastructure, staff development and programme materials helped put ICSE in a healthy position for the provision of blended learning. The panel is pleased to recommend to QQI *Approval of ICSE's QA Procedures*. It has identified some *Conditions of Approval*, as well as some items of *Specific Advice* to ensure optimal operation of ICSE's approach to blended learning. These are set out in Section 5 of this report.



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

	Tick <u>one</u> as appropriate
Approve ICSE's draft QA procedures for Blended Learning	✓
Refuse approval of ICSE's draft QA procedures for blended learning pending mandatory changes set out in Section 6.1 (If this recommendation is accepted by QQI, the provider may make a revised application within six months of the decision)	
Refuse to approve ICSE's draft QA procedures for blended learning	



Part 4 Evaluation of draft QA Procedures for Blended Learning submitted by ICSE

The following is the panel's findings following evaluation of ICSE's quality assurance procedures for blended learning against QQI's Topic Specific QA Guidelines - Blended Learning.

Panel Findings:

At the outset of this report, the panel would like to recognise and commend the significant work undertaken by ICSE in its move from the physical classroom environment to an online delivery framework in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In evaluating ICSE's quality assurance and enhancement procedures relative to the provision of blended learning programmes, the panel is guided by QQI's *Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Blended Learning Programmes* (2018). These guidelines are comprised of three primary sections — *Organisational Context*, *Programme Context*, and *Learner Experience Context* — which will form the general structure of this report.

Organisational Context

Strategic Plan

QQI's aforementioned blended learning guidelines (2018) require providers to have procedures in place ensuring that "a strategic approach to the use of blended learning is explicit and is shared with staff, learners and other stakeholders." Additionally, "a strategic plan for online learning should be clearly linked (or incorporated into) the institution's overall education/teaching and learning strategy..." (3.1.1, p.8).

While the Blended Learning Policy submitted by ICSE did generally outline the strategic context and rationale for the organisation's investment in blended learning, the panel was of the view that the document did not adequately detail the envisioned relationship between the face-to-face and blended elements of programme delivery. This was discussed with ICSE representatives during the virtual site visit, who noted that the level of face-to-face and blended elements will vary between programmes, playing a more central role on some, and more of a support role on others.

The panel emphasised the importance of documenting this relationship more explicitly as part of the organisation's strategic plan, considering the implications it can have on infrastructure and resources. A *Condition of Approval* was identified in respect of this, which is detailed in Section 5.2 of this report. (5.2.1)

Infrastructure

ICSE's documentation outlined significant investment in hardware and software, in particular the installation of the training management system *Arlo*, which is used, among other things, for learner registration, scheduling of programmes, attendance, and tutor communication with learners. ICSE's



utilisation of the learning management system *Co-assemble* is also being developed with the aim of enhancing e-learning resources and interactivity. *Zoom* is used as the primary method of online programme delivery, while a range of other platforms including *Kahoot* and *Padlet* are used as delivery aids and for gamification.

ICSE's documentation outlines a clear procurement process and notes the contingency measures in place in the event of hardware/software failure. Contingencies include provision of technical support, replacement equipment and standby tutors.

The panel commends ICSE's ongoing investment in a robust, fit-for-purpose infrastructure.

Staff Training and Development

The panel would like to offer a commendation to ICSE on its clear commitment to the provision of professional development and upskilling opportunities for staff.

Within one year of employment, all tutors are required to enrol on a company-funded degree programme in Training and Education, which has recently been expanded to make available a digital learning and technology-enhanced learning module. Additionally, ICSE has established a tutor development programme which includes three hours of upskilling per week using a mix of in-house expertise, as well as sessions delivered by external subject-matter experts.

During the virtual site visit, the panel had the opportunity to speak with tutors about the transitional process from classroom delivery to online delivery. While noting some initial challenges, tutors spoke very positively about the transition, with the increased capabilities and opportunities in relation to lesson delivery, as well as positive learner interaction and feedback, being singled out as particular highlights.

Documentation

Every provider's quality assurance system must be fully documented, ensuring that there are "robust, documented policies and associated procedures for the assurance of quality and standards of provision (QQI Core Statutory QA Guidelines, Section 2.1, p.9).

In reviewing ICSE's documentation, the panel observed some gaps in the policies and procedures presented. For example, the chapter on Blended Learning Supports and Resources outlines the range of supports available but in a predominantly descriptive manner, rather than offering learners a step-by-step guide and detailed information in a more procedural manner. This was also the case for other sections such as admission to blended learning programmes, and programme material development, approval and review.

The panel was of the view that ICSE would benefit from a review of its policies and procedures to ensure that all processes are adequately documented across the QA Manual and Learner Handbook, as appropriate. A *Condition of Approval* was identified in respect of this, which is detailed in Section 5.2 of this report (5.2.2).

**Programme Context (including development and assessment)***Programme Delivery*

The panel explored the way programmes are delivered in ICSE’s online environment and queried if anything had changed since the transition. Representatives noted that the learning outcomes have, for the most part, remained the same, but that the manner in which the content is delivered — in chunks, rather than long, full days — has been necessary adapted to be more suitable to online delivery. Tutors are keenly aware of the potential that exists for online fatigue, and employ a variety of different delivery aids and techniques in order to avoid this.

Staff meetings are conducted each week as a means of feedback to assess what is working and what is not working.

Programme Material Development and Approval

In its initial review of ICSE’s documentation and materials, the panel noted that many of the learner resources were quite text-heavy, with little imagery and a lack of interactive elements. However, following a request for additional information and clarifications, the panel was given access to ICSE’s learner portal, which included materials that had clearly been developed much more recently.

During the virtual site visit, the panel queried the extent to which materials were being developed by ICSE specifically for the online environment, as opposed to legacy materials being carried over from the traditional live classroom. ICSE representatives explained that as contact hours are reduced, more effort and time is being put into professional video production and resource development. The panel sees this as an important and valuable step for ICSE, and encourages ongoing development in this area.

However, as previously outlined under *Organisational Context* above, the panel was of the view that ICSE’s documentation would benefit from further review to ensure that all policies and procedures pertaining to programme material development, approval and review for the blended environment are adequately documented across the QA Manual and Learner Handbook, as appropriate.

Assessment and Academic Integrity

During the site visit, the panel discussed the differences between ICSE’s assessment processes in the live classroom and the online classroom. Tutors stepped the panel through a sample assessment, as well as the security measures in place to protect the integrity of the assessment and to minimise the chances of plagiarism.

Learner Experience Context

The panel would like to commend ICSE on its clear commitment to the learner experience from point of entry throughout their programme.

Information provision

QQI’s blended learning guidelines (2018) require providers to have procedures in place to ensure “the availability of appropriate information” (p.20) for both prospective and enrolled learners.



The documentation submitted by ICSE comprehensively details the admissions process, along with the information received by learners at different stages of registration and enrolment. Information such as the programme award level, mode of delivery, duration, entry criteria, and assessment methods are all made available to learners in advance, followed by more programme-specific documentation following registration.

However, as QQI's guidelines also require providers to ensure learners receive "a clear explanation on the blend of learning they will receive," (p.20) the panel is of the view that this can be more satisfactorily addressed once ICSE has defined and documented the proposed relationship between the face-to-face and blended elements of programme delivery, as previously mentioned under *Organisational Context*.

Furthermore, in reviewing ICSE's documentation, the panel observed a lack of blended learning-specific information in the Learner Charter, noting that it appears not to have been updated since the move to online delivery. A *Condition of Approval* has been identified in respect of this, whereby ICSE must further develop its Learner Charter to incorporate all aspects of the blended learning experience (5.2.3).

Similarly, ICSE's netiquette policy was seen by the panel as somewhat bloated with superfluous information, and encourages ICSE to streamline this document with the aim to ensure all information is relevant to acceptable standards of learner behaviour and etiquette in an online environment.

Learner Supports

ICSE has a comprehensive range of learner supports at its disposal, including technology supports, study skills supports, curriculum supports, assessment supports and wellbeing supports. All supports are reviewed by the tutor groups and trialled before being widely implemented. These supports are detailed in the Learner Handbook, which is sent automatically to learners by the *Arlo* system once they book a place on a programme.

However, the panel was of the view that the existing procedure for requesting Reasonable Accommodation and/or Additional Support, which is available in the Learner Handbook, is incomplete, and written in a descriptive manner which does not afford learners a practicable step-by-step guide. Considering the importance of such a procedure, which can remove significant disadvantages for learners, the panel has identified a *Condition of Approval* in respect of this concern. This is detailed in Section 5.2 of this report (5.2.4).



Part 5 Mandatory Changes to QA Procedures for Blended Learning and Specific Advice

5.1 Commendations

- 5.1.1** The panel commends the significant work undertaken by ICSE in moving from a classroom environment to an online delivery framework in the context of the current global pandemic.
- 5.1.2** The panel recognises and commends the investment in infrastructure, staff development and programme materials.
- 5.1.3** The panel commends ICSE's commitment to the learner experience at every level.

5.2 Conditions of Approval

- 5.2.1** ICSE must define and document the (proposed) relationship between the face-to-face and blended elements of programme delivery. (Please refer to QQI Guidelines – Section 2, p.6)
- 5.2.2** ICSE must ensure that all policies and procedures pertaining to the delivery of programmes in a blended environment are adequately documented across the QA Manual and Learner Handbook, as appropriate. This includes: admission to blended learning programmes, programme material development, approval and review, and access to learner supports. (Please refer to QQI Guidelines – Section 3.1.2)
- 5.2.3** ICSE must further develop its Learner Charter to incorporate all aspects of the blended learning experience.
- 5.2.4** ICSE must document its procedures in relation to learner requests for reasonable accommodation or additional support.

5.3 Specific Advice

- 5.3.1** The panel encourages ICSE's ongoing development of its Learning Management System and wider Virtual Learning Environment.
- 5.3.2** The panel encourages ICSE's continued development of interactive elements into the online elements of its programmes.
- 5.3.3** The panel encourages ICSE to streamline its netiquette policy with the aim to ensure all information is relevant to learner behaviour and etiquette in an online environment.



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Part 6 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 draft Quality Assurance Procedures or Blended Learning of ICSE.

Name: David Treacy

Date: 17th May 2021



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

Document	Related to
Blended Learning Policy	Organisational Context
Copyright and Intellectual Property	Organisational Context
Governance of Blended Learning	Organisational Context
Implementing Contingency Arrangements	Organisational Context
Infrastructure and Procurement Process	Organisational Context
Supports for Staff	Organisational Context
Learner Admission to Blended Learning Programmes	Organisational Context / Programme Context
Programme and Curriculum Design	Programme Context
Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy	Programme Context
Assessment of Blended Learning Programmes	Programme Context
Blended Learning Supports for Learners	Learner Experience Context
Additional Clarifications and Information	Various Sections
Learner Resources	Various Sections

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

Name	Role/Position
Mark Toner	Head of Centre
Tony O'Brien	Quality Assurance and Programme Development
Martha Qualter	Business and Finance Administrator
Paul Grealish	Tutor
Tony McCann	Tutor

Appendix: Provider response to the Blended Learning QA Approval Panel
Report



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28.05.21

ICSE Reengagement Panel Report

Assessment of QA Procedures for Blended Learning.

ICSE would like to express its gratitude to the panel (Mr. David Treacy, Ms. Naomi Pasley and Mr. Matthew Hurley) for conducting the virtual site visit. The made the process engaging and rewarding for the team and we are grateful for their professionalism and their attention to detail.

We have no hesitation in taking on board and implementing the aspects detailed in both their Conditions of Approval and Specific Advice and we accept the findings of the panel.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mark Toner', is written over a horizontal line.

Mark Toner
MD ICSE