Document Title	Teaching and Learning Policy
Policy Area	Teaching and Learning
Document Code (version #)	QAP5-1 (V3.0)
Applies to	☒ All ☐ Specific ☐ Staff only ☐ Learners only ☒ Staff and Learners

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

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

Related legislation, policies, procedures, guidelines and local protocols	This policy has been designed with due regard to the following: - Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines (2016), Quality and Qualifications Ireland. - Sector Specific Independent/Private Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines (2016), Quality and Qualifications Ireland. - Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 - European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), et. al (2015), Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) - Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Blended and Fully Online Programmes (2023), Quality and Qualifications Ireland - SQT Teaching and Learning Strategy, incorporating Online Learning (2022 – 2026)

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1. PURPOSE

This policy outlines SQT's approach to and expectations for teaching and learning and the means by which it supports learners to "develop real capability".

2. SCOPE/APPLICATION

This policy applies to all programmes and all teaching staff.

3. RESPONSIBILITY

The following responsibilities apply with respect to the implementation of this policy:

- The Academic Council approves this policy.
- The Director of Quality and Academic Affairs is responsible for ensuring site wide compliance.
- All staff are responsible for ensuring compliance within their respective roles.

4. ORGANISATIONAL CONTEXT

In order to provide a context for SQT's Teaching and Learning policy, it is appropriate to provide an organisational context which considers the range of programmes offered and the distinctive profile of the learner cohort.

4.1. Programme Range

SQT presently offers approx. 110 programmes categorised into the following 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

SQT's programmes vary in duration from 0.5 to 20 teaching days and many programmes involve significant learner effort hours outside of face-to-face delivery.

As well as offering short non-validated programmes, SQT delivers a range of programmes which are validated by the following awarding bodies:

- QQI (Quality and Qualifications Ireland)
- CQI|IRCA (The International Register of Certificated Auditors)
- IEMA (The Institute of Environmental Management & Assessment)
- AEE (Association of Energy Engineers)

4.2. Learner Profile

A unique feature of SQT is its distinctive learner profile. All SQT learners are adult learners who have already embarked on their working careers and have gained valuable experience in their respective industries. The majority of learners are in full-time employment at the time they begin their chosen SQT programmes.

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

Unlike many other higher education providers, SQT does not provide centre-based delivery at its location in Limerick. It offers two types of delivery options, as follows:

- **Public Programmes** are delivered at central locations, typically hotel venues across Ireland.
- **In-house Programmes** are tailored for a particular organisation and generally cater for four to fifteen learners. Such programmes are usually delivered at the company's own training facilities.

4.3. Delivery Modes

SQT offers three delivery methods: On-site, blended and fully online. Section 7: The Learning Environment outlines the operational structure and approach for each modality.

5. POLICY

Through innovation, range of programmes, exceptional teaching and learning, and its long-established reputation, SQT supports each individual learner to "develop real capability". SQT is committed to providing a learner-centred approach to teaching and learning, which plays an important role in stimulating learners' motivation, self-reflection and engagement in the learning process.

SQT's policy with respect to Teaching and Learning is directly aligned to the organisations mission and vision, which are as follows:

Mission

At SQT, our mission is to deliver impactful training and continuous skill enhancement for professionals and organisations across evolving industries. Our focus is on providing "Skills for Today, Success for Tomorrow," ensuring that our learners leave with practical, applicable knowledge that drives immediate workplace success and long-term professional growth.

Vision

Through innovative learning approaches, we aim to "Innovate, Educate, Elevate." Our goal is to deliver transformative learning solutions that not only enhance career success but also set industry benchmarks, inspiring others to adopt higher standards in training delivery and educational outcomes.

SQT is committed to delivering learning experiences that:

- **Meet Industry Needs**: Courses are developed in consultation with industry experts to ensure relevance and alignment with current and future trends.

- **Encourage Continuous Learning**: Learners are empowered to pursue lifelong learning through continuous professional development opportunities.

- **Support Diverse Learners**: SQT aims to accommodate the varied needs of its learners, including those with disabilities, non-native English speakers, and professionals from diverse industry backgrounds.

- **Promote Practical Application**: Theoretical knowledge is complemented by practical examples, case studies, and real-world applications to ensure that learners can immediately apply what they have learned in their work environment.

- **Foster Innovation in Learning**: We explore and integrate new technologies and methodologies, blended learning, and innovative instructional design, to enhance the learning experience.

A formal **SQT Teaching and Learning Strategy (2022-2026)** is in place to build on its existing strengths, focusing on specific and measurable activities that enhance the learning experience and professional and personal development of teaching staff.

6. TEACHING AND LEARNING APPROACH

SQT is committed to the provision of a teaching and learning experience which is practical, learner oriented, well researched and industry informed. The organisations distinctive learner profile (experienced, working adult learners) is fundamental to the methods adopted in teaching and learning practices across all programmes.

SQT's Tutors support and foster the importance of delivering programmes through a combination of appropriate and fit-for-purpose teaching methods. The learning outcomes of all programmes are subsequently enhanced by exposing the learner to a variety of pedagogies. A variety of learning methods are utilised including workshops, creative learning, mentoring, case studies, group work, problem-based learning, reflective diaries, learning logs, action plans and presentations.

6.1. Underlying Principles

SQT recognises the importance of distinguishing the unique qualities of adult learners so as to effectively incorporate the principles of adult learning within all aspects of its programmes. Its

teaching and learning philosophy has, therefore, been underpinned in the well-grounded and acknowledged principles of adult learning (Andragogy) (Knowles, 1984)[1] as summarised in Figure 1 below. This Andragogy theory describes the specific methods which should be employed in the education of adults and their involvement in identifying their learning needs. It is consistent with the constructivist philosophy where learners are expected to reflect on their own experiences as part of an active, constructive process.
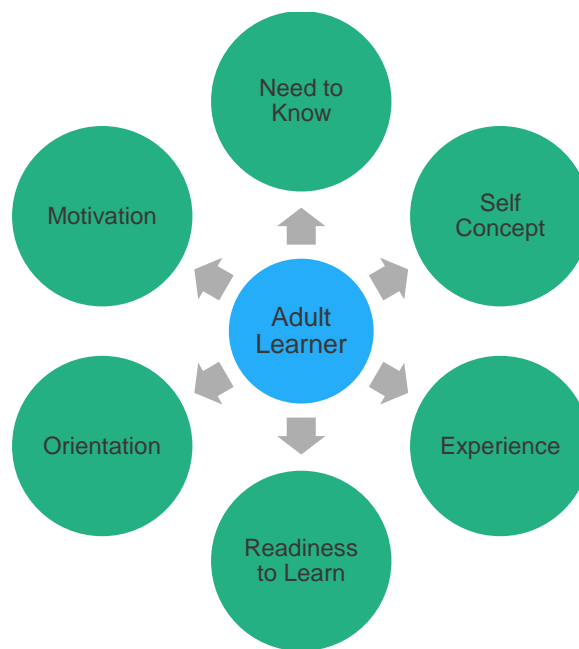
Figure 1: Principles of Adult Learners (Knowles, 1984)

1. **Need to know:** Adults need to know why they are learning a topic before learning commences.

2. **Self-concept:** Adults need to be responsible for their decisions on education and training.

3. **Role of learners' experiences:** Adults use experiences as the basis for learning activities.

4. **Readiness to learn:** Adults are more interested in learning if there is an immediate relevance to their work.

5. **Orientation to learning:** Adult learning is problem-centred rather than content orientated.

6. **Motivation to learn:** Adults' most potent motivators are intrinsic.

This learner centred approach teaches learners how to think, solve problems, evaluate evidence, analyse arguments and in some cases, generate hypothesis. The key characteristics of this approach is to fully engage learners in learning, undertake explicit skill instruction, reflect on what they are

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[1] Knowles, M. (1984). Andragogy in Action. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

learning and how to give them some control over the learning processes and encourage collaboration.

6.2. Constructive Alignment in Blended and Fully Online Programmes

With the introduction of blended and fully online learning programmes, SQT's teaching and learning philosophy continues to align with the principles of adult learning (Andragogy) as described by Knowles (1984). To ensure that these principles are effectively integrated into the design and delivery of its online programmes, SQT have adopted the Constructive Alignment learning model, which fits seamlessly with the principles of adult learning.

Constructive Alignment (Biggs, 1996) is a model of teaching and learning where learning outcomes, teaching activities and assessments are intentionally aligned to ensure that learners engage in meaningful learning experiences. This model is particularly effective in blended and online environments as it helps create a structured learning path, ensuring that learners remain focused and motivated. In SQT's blended and fully online programmes, constructive alignment ensures that learning is not only flexible and accessible but also engaging and outcome-driven. Learners are encouraged to actively participate, reflect on their experiences, and take control of their learning journey—just as they would in traditional on-site classroom settings. Assessments are designed to reflect real-world applications, fostering problem-solving and critical thinking skills.

HOW CONSTRUCTIVE ALIGNMENT FITS WITH THE PRINCIPLES OF ADULT LEARNING:

1. **Need to Know:** Constructive alignment ensures that learning outcomes are clearly communicated to learners from the outset, helping them understand the relevance of each topic. This resonates with the principle that adults need to know why they are learning something before they engage in the learning process.

2. **Self-Concept:** In a constructively aligned course, learners are given autonomy over their learning through self-directed activities. This supports the adult learner's need for responsibility and self-direction in their education.

3. **Role of Learners' Experiences:** Constructive alignment encourages learners to draw on their past experiences and apply them to learning activities and assessments making the learning process more relevant and reflective of real-world scenarios.

4. **Readiness to Learn:** By aligning teaching methods with immediate, work-related challenges, constructive alignment ensures that adults are ready to learn when the content is directly applicable to their current job or life situations. Learning tasks are designed to be immediately relevant and practical.

5. **Orientation to Learning:** The problem-centred nature of adult learning is supported through constructive alignment by designing assessments and learning tasks that focus on problem-solving and application, rather than just content memorisation. This ensures that learners can relate the material to real-world challenges.

6. **Motivation to Learn:** With the emphasis on creating intrinsic motivation, constructive alignment promotes deep learning by aligning tasks with learners' intrinsic goals and interests, making the process rewarding in itself.

Through constructive alignment, SQT remains committed to delivering high-quality, learner-centred programmes that are tailored to the needs of adult learners, whether they are delivered on-site, blended, or fully online.

6.3. SQT's Implementation of Core Teaching and Learning Principles

Table 1 below defines SQT's approach to teaching and learning based on the key principles of adult learning set out above.

Core principle	Principles Adopted at SQT
Need to know	**Pre-course engagement:** In the case of in-house courses, it is imperative to understand the learning context which would include, the context and circumstances around the business need driving the requirement for the programme. This ensures that the programme learning outcomes satisfy the desired business outcome. Time is set aside at the commencement of each programme to discuss and explore each learners particular learning needs and expectations. If necessary and in certain circumstances, learners are invited to engage with the Tutor directly in advance of the programme to discuss the learning outcomes and assessment requirements. This all provides for deeper understanding and reflection on the learners own motivation for attending and investing in the programme and consequently in their own development. **Programme Design (Customised Programmes):** SQT Tutor groups design and tailor customised programmes to meet an organisations requirement and consistently speak to and reinforce these requirements within the programme. This ensures that links are made and application of learning is clearly understood. In line with **Constructive Alignment**, the design ensures that learning outcomes, teaching methods, and assessments are aligned, enabling clear understanding and application of learning content.
Learners' self-concept	Tutors strive, where possible, to provide control and choice to learners by encouraging self-directed learning and provide support to individual learning styles. Tutors ensure the content and delivery of programmes is learner centred, offers different mediums of learning to appeal to different learning styles and encourages learners to ask for what they need to ensure the learning experience is meaningful and devoid of unnecessary complication. Small working groups within learning sessions are often chosen by the learners themselves and there is encouragement to share and add their own learning experience to these group activities. Tutors encourage self-directed learning, particularly in blended and online settings, where learners have more

	autonomy. In blended and online environments class sizes remain low allowing learners to contribute their own experiences. This promotes learner independence and active involvement, a key aspect of **Constructive Alignment**, where learners take responsibility for achieving the stated learning outcomes.
Role of learners' experiences	Tutors work to the principle that experience is the highest authority in any learning situation, to this end, they encourage the learner to draw parallels and similarities between their own experiences and what they are learning at any given time during the programme. This is achieved through regular interaction and in some programmes, through scheduled reflective practise. Learning content is also designed to allow for as much practical application of all theoretical concepts, to afford time to experience the learning in a meaningful realistic way and to allow the opportunity for feedback and reflection on the experience. This supports the building of skill and the validation of knowledge gained and applied. Tutors actively draw on learners' prior experiences, facilitating reflective practices both on-site and online. In blended and online courses, regular interactions through forums, breakout rooms, and reflective exercises allow learners to connect theory with practice. Practical application is a central focus, with learners given opportunities to test theories in real-world scenarios and receive feedback, in line with **Constructive Alignment**, which emphasises applying learning to achieve outcomes and develop skills.
Readiness to learn	Tutors embrace SQT's mission to ensure learners "develop real capability". Content is at all times developed to allow time for learners to consider the learning required to develop their skills and knowledge or solve the problem they may be experiencing in the workplace. Learners are encouraged to voice and share this in the larger group setting, with the aim of encouraging and inviting shared experiences from fellow learners and collaborative working towards meeting the individual learners learning need. Learner are invited to test their skills and knowledge through meaningful assessment and supportive feedback on what they see as working well and where there is a need or opportunity for further refinement or practice of knowledge. In blended and online programmes, Tutors ensure content is designed to allow learners to develop relevant skills and knowledge applicable to their workplace. Learners are encouraged to voice their learning needs in online discussion boards and synchronous sessions. Assessments in online formats are aligned with workplace applications, allowing learners to test their skills and receive feedback, reflecting the principles of **Constructive Alignment** by linking assessments to real-world problems and desired outcomes.
Orientation to learning	Tutors understand that for learners undertaking any programme, the learning outcomes are often for them to work through, find options to or to solve a problem within the workplace or in how they are approaching or conducting their work. The

	Learning approach is, therefore, designed to firstly understand what the problem is and from there allow time for the learner to explore this fully in the light of awareness individually and then with the help and support of the group. SQT Tutors work to the principle that problem solving happens more effectively where more inputs are shared and received and the learners are afforded time to check their understanding, approaches and methods with all others involved in the learning experience plus other stakeholders. This includes fellow learners, tutors, work-based sponsors and mentors. In both blended and online learning, Tutors adopt a problem-solving approach, facilitating opportunities for learners to explore real-life issues in both individual and group contexts. Breakout rooms and online forums provide spaces for collaborative problem-solving. The design ensures alignment between the problem-centred approach and programme outcomes, consistent with **Constructive Alignment**, where learning activities and assessments are designed to help learners address specific workplace challenges.
Motivation to learn	Tutors support the learning process which has its inception with the identified needs of the learner. They know that all learners come ready to learn and a key component in a successful learning experience is the space provided to encourage expression of that readiness. To this end, SQT Tutors meet the learners where they are, adopt a learner centred approach through exploring the learner context and encourage full understanding, validation and expression of the motivation factors behind the learning need. This is then referenced regularly throughout the learning intervention through reflective practice, group discussion work and plenary sessions. In blended and online programmes, Tutors regularly revisit learners' motivations, integrating reflective practices and group discussions to reinforce intrinsic motivations. Learners are encouraged to reflect on how their learning addresses their personal and professional goals, aligning with **Constructive Alignment**, which promotes learner engagement through meaningful, outcome-driven learning experiences.

6.4. Three-Way Partnership Model

Given the industry focus of SQT's programmes, it considers participation on programmes as a three-way partnership between the learner, employer and SQT. Figure 2 below provides an overview of this approach and summarises the responsibilities of each partner.
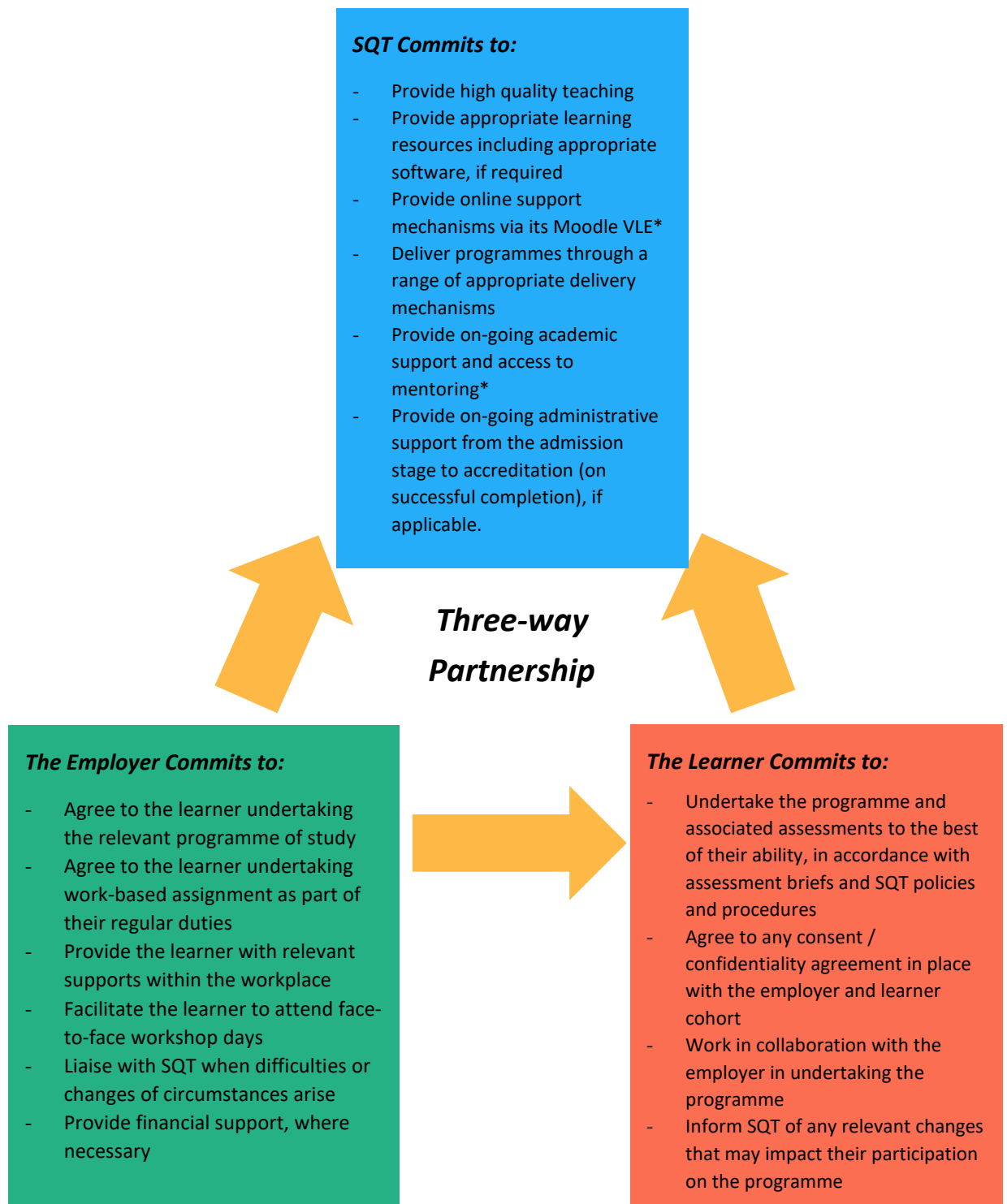
SQT Commits to:

- Provide high quality teaching
- Provide appropriate learning resources including appropriate software, if required
- Provide online support mechanisms via its Moodle VLE*
- Deliver programmes through a range of appropriate delivery mechanisms
- Provide on-going academic support and access to mentoring*
- Provide on-going administrative support from the admission stage to accreditation (on successful completion), if applicable.

Three-way Partnership

The Employer Commits to:

- Agree to the learner undertaking the relevant programme of study
- Agree to the learner undertaking work-based assignment as part of their regular duties
- Provide the learner with relevant supports within the workplace
- Facilitate the learner to attend face-to-face workshop days
- Liaise with SQT when difficulties or changes of circumstances arise
- Provide financial support, where necessary

The Learner Commits to:

- Undertake the programme and associated assessments to the best of their ability, in accordance with assessment briefs and SQT policies and procedures
- Agree to any consent / confidentiality agreement in place with the employer and learner cohort
- Work in collaboration with the employer in undertaking the programme
- Inform SQT of any relevant changes that may impact their participation on the programme

Figure 2: Three-Way Partnership

7. THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

SQT offers three delivery methods: on-site, blended learning, and fully online. This section outlines the operational structure and approach for each modality.

7.1. On-site (Face-to-Face Delivery)

Programmes are delivered at public locations (nationwide subject to demand) or at onsite training facilities in the case of in-house programmes. The objective is to provide a high-quality environment for learners and to avail of all the learning support tools relevant and available for specific programmes.

As regards public programme delivery, facilities include high specification conference rooms with state-of-the-art support technology including high speed Wi-Fi. A set of quality guidelines in the form of a training room specification applies to the physical learning environment for all programmes. This varies according to the requirements of the programme. Although this cannot always be fully adhered to at onsite training facilities, venue managers are nevertheless made aware of the requirements and informed of the importance of such. The training room specification includes items such as:

i.   Health & safety

ii.   Room layout and equipment

iii.   Learning environment considerations (air conditioning, water, light, access to fresh air, breakout space, access to work area etc)

iv.   Special requirements

v.   Security

vi.   Programme materials

vii.   Technology

viii.   Programme display

In addition, SQT utilises Moodle as its Virtual Learning Environment (VLE). This system is generally utilised for programmes with a duration of 3 days or longer. The platform provides a secure resource repository and allows for the upload of assignment submission and subsequent capture of Tutor feedback. The system is also used as a Tutor Portal which is accessible by all Tutors. This portal acts as a platform for sharing resources and experiences and is easily accessible by all Tutors. There is also the facility for learners to directly contact the Tutor, when necessary, via the portal.

7.2. Online Delivery

SQT's online programmes are delivered predominantly via Zoom, with MS Teams used for a small number of clients based on their preferences. These online classes aim to replicate the classroom environment as closely as possible, ensuring an interactive and engaging experience with small class sizes (maximum of 16 learners). Interaction is encouraged in accordance with SQT's Learner Interaction on Blended and Online Programmes policy, fostering an immersive learning environment.

Blended programmes combine both classroom-based and virtual learning elements. Classroom sessions are held in public venues across the country, subject to demand, or at on-site training facilities for in-house programmes. The goal is to create a high-quality learning experience, leveraging relevant support tools and ensuring the best possible learning conditions.

7.3. Blended Learning

Blended programmes combine both on-site and online learning elements. On-site sessions are held in public venues across the country, subject to demand, or at on-site training facilities for in-house programmes. The goal is to create a high-quality learning experience, leveraging relevant support tools and ensuring the best possible learning conditions.

8. ONGOING MONITORING AND SELF – EVALUATION OF PROGRAMMES

All monitoring and self-evaluation activity is expected to identify areas for improvement and innovation. Figure 3 presents SQT's methodology for ongoing monitoring and continuous improvement of all activities, including its programmes.

1. On-going monitoring draws on information from a variety of sources through appropriate monitoring mechanisms.
2. Feedback and information collected informs a review by the relevant operational or academic unit. For example, feedback relating to programme content may be reviewed by the programme delivery team in the first instance and then by the Programme Board. However, feedback pertaining to a venue may be reviewed by the Operations Management Team initially and subsequently noted at the Programme Board.
3. The relevant review unit determines the necessary action required (e.g. corrective action, QA update, programme update etc.).
4. Actions are collated by the Director of Quality and Academic Affairs and are included in SQT's quality improvement plan documents (spreadsheets are used to record actions and track/monitor their implementation). These are live documents which are continuously updated by the personnel responsible for implementing the required action. The Director of Quality and Academic Affairs is responsible for monitoring the implementation of the Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) with oversight from the Quality Committee and reports to the Academic Council. Relevant Programme Directors are responsible for monitoring the implementation of the Programme Improvement Plan (PIP) and reports this to the Programme Board and Academic Council where relevant.
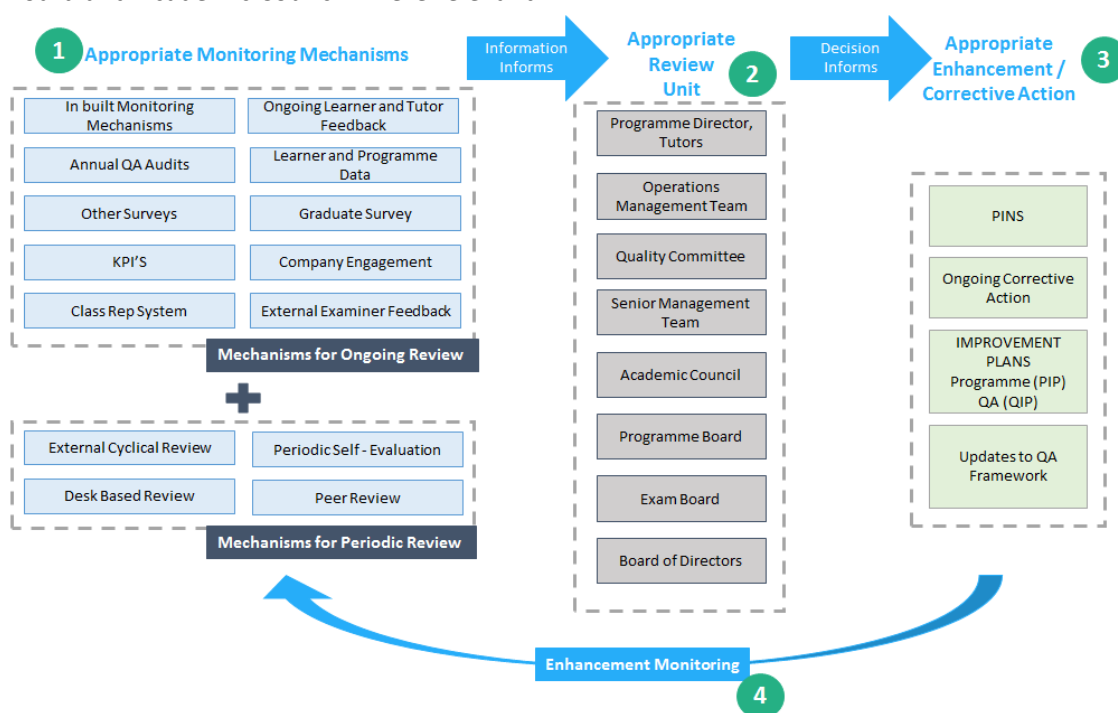

Figure 3: Ongoing Monitoring, Periodic Review and Continuous Improvement Cycle

9. TEACHING STAFF

Since its establishment in 1989, SQT has partnered with leading subject matter experts in specific fields to ensure exceptional expertise is available for the development, delivery, and support of its course offerings. This partnership approach, through collaboration with Training Partners, has successfully benefited learners for nearly 30 years. The policies and procedures governing the recruitment and monitoring of teaching staff are outlined in:

- **QAP4-1: Recruitment and Induction of Teaching Staff**
- **QAP4-3: Monitoring the Effectiveness of Teaching Staff**

All Tutors are industry experts with extensive professional experience. In addition to their subject matter expertise, Tutors engage annually in both pedagogical and technical development, as per **QAP4-4: Professional Development of Teaching Staff**. A critical element of this development includes upskilling in online teaching methodologies to adapt to the evolving educational landscape. Tutors participate in structured training sessions to enhance their proficiency in online delivery platforms such as Zoom and MS Teams, as well as strategies for creating engaging and interactive online learning environments.

Tutors also participate in peer support activities in line with **QAP4-2: Peer Review of Teaching Staff**. The Peer Review system is a supportive process designed to help Tutors explore different teaching approaches within their specific discipline, with the structured assistance of a trusted peer (observer). The overall goal is to enhance the learner experience through continuous improvement of teaching methods.

SQT encourages continuous learning through various formal and informal mechanisms. Tutors are exposed to new challenges daily, requiring ongoing research, investigation, and discussion, which lead to new insights and skill enhancement. These opportunities for upskilling, combined with peer support activities, ensure that Tutors stay current in both on-site and online learning environments, delivering high-quality education across all modalities. Below is a typology of professional development activities, including both non-accredited and accredited activities (NFETL, 2016), which further guide and support Tutor development.

Non-Accredited			Accredited
1. Collaborative (informal)	**2 Unstructured (non formal)**	**3 Structured (non formal)**	
Learning from these activities comes from their collaborative nature	These activities are independently led by the individual. Engagement is driven by the individual's needs/interests. Individuals source the materials themselves.	Organised activities (by an institution, network or disciplinary membership body). They are typically facilitated and have a membership body.	Accredited programmes of study (ECTS or similar)
Examples			
Conversations with colleagues, peer networking, peer observations, online blogs/discussion forums	Reading articles, following social media, self-study, watching video tutorials, keeping a reflective teaching journal/portfolio, preparing an article for portfolio	SQT annual tutor days, workshops, seminars, MOOCs, conferences, summer schools, structured collaborative projects	Professional Certificate, Graduate Diploma, Masters, PhD, EdD in: Teaching and Learning, eLearning, Leadership in Education, Education Policy

Table 1: Accredited Vs Non Accredited Learning (NFETL, 2016)

10. POLICY MONITORING

Responsibility	Frequency	Methods
Director of Quality and Academic Affairs – Document Update	Per QA audit schedule	- Review of documentation as set out in QAP2-1: Ongoing Review and Update of QA Documents.
Academic Council Teaching & Learning Working Group Director of Quality and Academic	Each meeting Ongoing	- Review of progress of Teaching and Learning Strategy

11. DOCUMENT CONTROL

Version No	Approval Date	Description of Revision	Originator	Approved By
1.0	14/12/18	New Document	Teaching and Learning Working Group	Academic Council
2.0	25/11/22	Incorporation of virtual and blended learning modes of delivery within Section 7: The Learning Environment	Teaching and Learning Committee	Academic Council

| 3.0 | Nov 24 | - Section 5: Policy updated in line with revised mission and vision.

- 6.2: Constructive Alignment in Blended and Fully Online Learning added and 6.3 updated to incorporate Constructive Alignment.

- Section 9: Teaching Staff updated | Teaching and Learning Committee | Academic Council |