

<b>Document Title</b>	Quality Assurance Policy
<b>Policy Area</b>	Area 1: Governance and Management of Quality
<b>Document Code (version #)</b>	QAP1-1 (V3.0)
<b>Policy applies to</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> All <input type="checkbox"/> Specific ( <i>outline organisational unit, etc.</i> )
	<input type="checkbox"/> Staff only <input type="checkbox"/> Learners only <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Staff and Learners

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<b>Related legislation, policies, procedures, guidelines and local protocols</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines (2016), QQI</li> <li>- Sector Specific Independent/Private Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines (2016), QQI</li> <li>- Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012</li> <li>- 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)</li> </ul>
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## 1. BACKGROUND

Quality assurance is embedded in all aspects of the organisation and therefore spans both corporate (governance, data protection, human resources, finance, health and safety etc.) and academic domains (teaching, assessment, curriculum, learning environment, learner support services etc.). SQT has developed its policies and procedures to meet the requirements of statutory legislation including the following:

- Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012
- Employment Equality Acts 1998 - 2015
- Disability Act 2005
- Data Protection Act 2018

The 2018 revision of SQT's Quality Assurance Framework brings it in line with QQI's Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines. These guidelines specify equivalent policies and procedures for FET (Further Education and Training) and HET (Higher Education and Training) provision, notwithstanding notable differences in areas such as assessment and programme development. The fundamental overarching QQI QA documents utilised for developing the framework are as follows:

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

This revised framework has been informed by the following:

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

## 2. PURPOSE

This QA policy describes SQT's approach to the management of its quality assurance framework. The framework comprises five key areas:

1. **Quality Strategy and Planning** which is directly aligned to SQT's Organisational Strategy.
2. **Implementation** of quality assurance through documented quality assurance policies, procedures and work instructions.
3. **Ongoing Monitoring and Self-Evaluation** through a wide variety of relevant methods which encapsulate feedback from all relevant stakeholders.
4. **Continuous Improvement** through systematic methods such as PIN's (potential for improvement notices), programme improvement plans and quality improvement plans.
5. **Publication of Outcomes / Findings** via SQT's website and other relevant channels.

This quality framework is fit for purpose and enables SQT to deliver its education and training programmes to the highest standard, whilst conforming to national and international best practice guidelines, policies and procedures and legal and statutory regulations.

### 3. SCOPE/APPLICATION

This policy supports the development of a quality culture in which all staff assume responsibility for quality which is specific to their role.

### 4. DEFINITIONS

SQT have adapted the following definitions:

- **Policy:** A policy is a clearly articulated, intended course of action or principle. Policies guide decision making.
- **Procedure:** A procedure clearly describes the specific actions undertaken to implement a policy. It is the 'how to', whereas the policy is the 'what to'.
- **Guideline:** Guidelines provide advice or guidance to individuals implementing the policies or procedures.
- **Work Instruction:** A work instruction is an internal document, which provides detailed step by step instructions on how to perform a task within a process.

### 5. RESPONSIBILITY

The specific responsibilities with respect to quality assurance are documented in QAP1-2: SQT Governance. A summary of responsibilities, is as follows:

- All staff undertake relevant roles and responsibilities with respect to the implementation of quality assurance procedures and a number of committees and boards ensure accountability.
- The Director of Quality and Academic Affairs is responsible for ensuring that the *Quality Management Policy* is communicated, understood and implemented for their respective areas.
- The documented quality framework is managed by the Director of Quality and Academic Affairs with support from the Accreditation and Systems Manager.
- The Academic Council has ultimate responsibility for approval of all academic quality assurance policies and procedures, whilst the Board of Directors approves corporate policies and procedures. It should be noted that general updates to quality assurance documentation such as formatting, name changes etc. which do not impact the implementation of the policy or procedure are implemented by the Director of Quality and Academic Affairs as appropriate, without approval of Academic Council. In such instances a point version history is noted, for example Version 2.1.1.

- The Quality Committee is tasked to review the output of internal quality audits, as well as keeping under review all aspects of the quality assurance system through the implementation of the Quality Improvement Plan (QIP).

## 6. QUALITY ASSURANCE FRAMEWORK

SQT's Quality Assurance Framework (presented in Figure 2 – next page) is founded on the Plan-Implement-Review-Improve (PIRI) cycle (presented in Figure 1 below) and further strengthens SQT's focus of embedding a culture of quality and commitment to continuous improvement and innovation. The framework is essentially a cyclical system for ongoing review and improvement that is essential to achieving quality and sustained success.

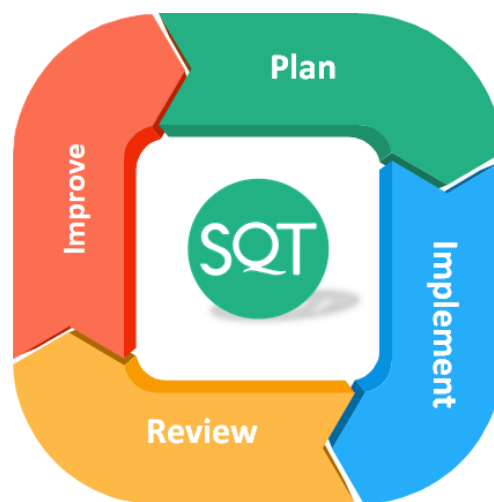


Figure 1: PIRI Cycle

### 6.1 Core Principles

There are two core principles underpinning the framework, which are:

- I. The framework must ensure that the learner interest is being served – the learner is always at the core.
- II. Quality assurance and quality enhancement are therefore inter-related. This can support the development of a quality culture that is embraced by all, from the learners and teaching staff, to the organisational leadership and operational management.

All activities that take place within the QA framework are fit for purpose, relevant to the scale and context of the organisation and based on relevant engagement and dialogue between appropriate stakeholders.

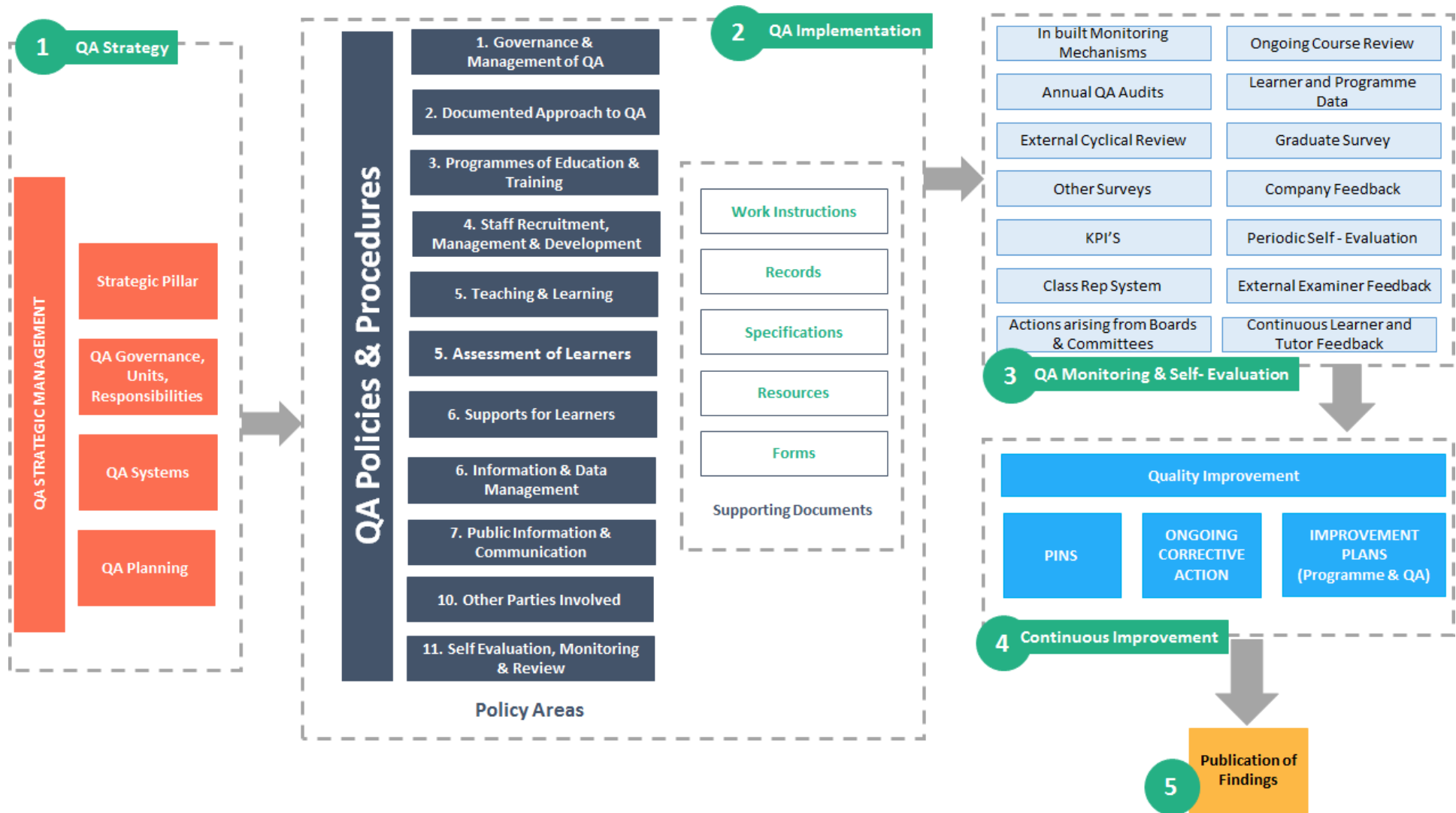


Figure 2: SQT Quality Assurance Framework

## 6.2 Five Stages of the QA Framework

Below is an outline of each of the five stages as presented in Figure 2 above:

1. QA Strategy / Plan
2. QA Implementation
3. QA Monitoring & Self-Evaluation
4. Continuous Improvement
5. Publication of Findings / Outcomes

### 6.2.1 STAGE 1: QA Strategy / Plan

‘Quality Assurance and Enhancement’ is a key pillar in SQT’s Strategic Plan. Goals and targets associated with this pillar have been clearly aligned with SQT’s mission and vision. Considerations for the ongoing review of the goals and targets which may change the scope of SQT’s current QA framework include for example, the development of blended learning or eLearning courses which would broaden the scope of SQT’s provision. Such development would require a re-scope and amendment to relevant QA policies and procedures. SQT’s policy for strategic planning is detailed in QAP1-4: Strategic Planning.

### 6.2.2 STAGE 2: QA Implementation

The QA process involves the development, approval and implementation of policies, procedures, guidelines and associated internal work instructions specific to key QA areas.

The policies and procedures have been organised within eleven key areas, which have been informed by and aligned to QQI’s Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines. Table 1 presents the link between SQT’s policies and procedures and the respective areas of the European Standards and Guidelines (2015).

#### Protocols for Documenting Policies and Procedures

The following protocols are observed when documenting policies and procedures.

- Each of the eleven policy areas include **documented policies, procedures, resources and internal work instructions** relevant to that area.
- SQT has developed a structure and template for presenting policies and procedures. This approach seeks to promote **consistency across the format of all documentation** and ensures that important information such as purpose, scope, responsibility, monitoring mechanisms and revision history etc. are captured and transparent to relevant stakeholders.
- The structure clearly shows the **person, board or committee that is responsible** for each procedure / activity.
- **Monitoring mechanisms** which are built into each procedure clearly identifies the frequency and person responsible for monitoring the effectiveness of the policy / procedure. This ensures that policies and procedures remain effective and fit for purpose.

- **Supporting documents** published by QQI and other relevant organisations and bodies have been utilised to ensure necessary compliance across the entire QA Framework. Such documents are referenced within each QA document, as relevant.
- **Supporting resources** such as guidelines, handbooks (Tutor, Learner, Moodle etc.), forms etc. have been developed to operationalise and support the QA Framework.
- **Internal work instructions** are internal documents and referenced in the cover page of appropriate documents. These detailed step-by-step instructions safeguard the implementation of all policies and procedures.



SQT and QQI Core (Statutory) Quality Assurance Guidelines, 2016	Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), 2015
QUALITY ASSURANCE AREAS	QUALITY ASSURANCE AREAS
1. Governance and Management of Quality	1. Policy for Quality Assurance
2. Documented approach to Quality Assurance	1. Policy for quality assurance 10. Cyclical external quality assurance
3. Programmes of Education and Training	2. Design and approval of programmes 4. Student admission, progression, recognition and Certification
4. Staff Recruitment, Management and Development	5. Teaching staff
5. Teaching and Learning	3. Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment
6. Assessment of Learner Achievement – General Guidelines	3. Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment
7. Supports for Learners	6. Learning resources and student support
8. Information and Data Management	7. Information management
9. Public Information and Communication	8. Public information
10. Other parties involved in Education and Training	
11. Self-Evaluation, Monitoring and Review	9. On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes

*Table 1: Linkages between SQT Quality Areas, QQI Core Guidelines and ESG*

QA Area	Code	Document Title	Approving Unit AC = Academic Council BOD = Board of Directors
1. Governance and Management of Quality	QAP1-1	Quality Assurance Policy	AC
	QAP1-2	SQT Governance	BOD
	QAP1-3	Risk Management	BOD
	QAP1-4	Strategic Planning	BOD
2. Documented approach to Quality Assurance	QAP2-1	Ongoing Review and Update of QA Documents	AC
3. Programmes of Education and Training	QAP3-1	Development and Validation of Programmes	AC
	QAP3-2	Updating Programmes and Course Material	AC
	QAP3-3	Access, Transfer and Progression	AC
	QAP3-4	Recognition of Prior Learning	AC
4. Staff Recruitment, Management and Development	QAP4-1	Recruitment and Induction of Teaching Staff	AC
	QAP4-2	Peer Review of Teaching Staff	AC
	QAP4-3	Monitoring the Effectiveness of Teaching Staff	AC
	QAP4-4	Professional Development of Teaching Staff	AC
5. Teaching and Learning	QAP5-1	Teaching and Learning Policy	AC
6. Assessment of Learners	QAP6-1	Assessment of Learners (QQI Programmes)	AC
7. Support for Learners	QAP7-1	Approval and Management of Venues	AC
	QAP7-2	Supports for Reasonable Accommodation	AC
	QAP7-3	Personal Mitigating Circumstances	AC
	QAP7-4	Protection of Enrolled Learners	BOD
	QAP7-5	Learner Complaints	AC
	QAP7-6	Academic Appeals	AC
	QAP7-7	Non-Standard Course Completion (QQ Programmes)	AC
8. Information and Data Management	QAP8-1	Information Management Policy	BOD
	QAP8-2	Data Protection Policy	BOD
	QAP8-3	Management of Data Breaches	BOD
	QAP8-4	Subject Access Requests	BOD
9. Public Information and Communication	QAP9-1	Public Information and Communication	AC
10. Other parties involved in Education and Training	QAP10-1	Other parties involved in Education and Training	AC
11. Self-Evaluation, Monitoring and Review	QAP11-1	Ongoing Monitoring of Programmes and QA Framework	AC
	QAP11-2	Periodic Programme Review and Revalidation of Programmes (QQI Programmes)	AC
	QAP11-3	External Cyclical Review (QQI Institutional Review)	AC

Table 2: Index of Policy and Procedure Documents

### **6.2.3 STAGE 3: QA Monitoring and Self-Evaluation**

SQT is committed to ongoing monitoring and periodic evaluation across all of its activities. This is achieved through active engagement with key stakeholders and staff across a variety of mechanisms such as the following:

- **Programme specific monitoring and review mechanisms**
  - Continuous Learner and Tutor feedback
  - Learner and programme data
  - Ongoing course review (to ensure the currency of the learning outcomes and content)
  - Graduate survey
  - Company feedback
  - Periodic self-evaluation
  - External Examiner feedback
  - Actions arising from Boards and Committees
  - Class rep system
  - Review of relevant KPI's
- **Other QA monitoring mechanisms**
  - In-built monitoring mechanisms within policies and procedures
  - Annual QA audits
  - External cyclical and desk based reviews
  - Other surveys

The QA Monitoring and Self-Evaluation process is dealt with comprehensively in Section 11: Self-Evaluation, Monitoring and Review within the following policies and procedures:

- QAP11-1: Ongoing Monitoring of Programmes and QA Framework
- QAP11-2: Periodic Programme Review and Revalidation of Programmes
- QAP11-3: External Cyclical Review (Institutional Review)

### **6.2.4 STAGE 4: Continuous Improvement**

SQT believes that a quality culture is achieved through a 'live' QA framework as well as the commitment of all staff, learners, and governance bodies, to continuous improvement. Continuous improvement is the output of the QA monitoring and self-evaluation stage and is achieved through the effective implementation of mechanisms such as Quality and Programme Improvement Plans, ongoing corrective action, PINs etc.

### **6.2.5 STAGE 5: Publication of Findings / Outcomes**

Approved QA policies, procedures, guidelines and regulations are publicly available on the SQT website in line with QAP9-1: Public Information and Communication.

In the case of QQI programmes, enhancements are documented in an Annual Programme Report which is circulated to the past years graduates and other relevant stakeholders who provided feedback as part of Stage 3: QA Monitoring. Relevant stakeholders are determined by the relevant Programme Board. This process effectively closes the feedback loop.

Furthermore, SQT is committed to publishing the outcomes of external review activities on the QA section of the website.

## 7. 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.
Director of Quality and Academic Affairs	Ongoing	- Review of output from governance unit meetings.

## 8. DOCUMENT CONTROL

Version No	Approval Date	Description of Revision	Originator	Approved By
2.0	14/12/18	Complete revision and new document format.	Director of Quality and Academic Affairs	Academic Council
3.0	7/6/19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Delegation of responsibilities clarified in Responsibilities section.</li> <li>- Inclusion of Annual Programme Reports for QQI programmes in Stage 5: Publication, to effectively close the feedback loop.</li> </ul>	Director of Quality and Academic Affairs	Academic Council