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Policy Area	Area 10: Other Parties involved in Education and Training
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Applies to	☐ All ☒ Specific
	☒ Staff only ☐ Learners only ☐ Staff and Learners

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

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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)
	- Roles, Responsibilities and Code of Conduct for Reviewers and Evaluators and other QQI policies and standards (2014), Quality and Qualifications Ireland

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1. PURPOSE

SQT is committed to engaging with reputable external bodies for any aspect of programme delivery or external peer review. Engagement with third parties is subject to appropriate internal and external quality assurance procedures.

2. SCOPE/APPLICATION

This policy applies to all relationships established by SQT that aid in the development of our knowledge and contribute to the range and quality of programmes delivered to our learners.

3. RESPONSIBILITY

The Academic Council is responsible for ensuring that SQT complies with its QA standards when establishing relationships with external parties.

4. POLICY

SQT is committed to establishing and maintaining close links with reputable national and international awarding bodies and other educational institutes in delivering its programmes. In addition to delivering QQI accredited programmes, SQT also offers programmes which have been validated through our Training Partners, these are set out in Table 1 below. Comprehensive details concerning all programmes are published on the SQT website www.sqt-training.com.

Awarding Body / Institute	Approved Training Partner
CQI | IRCA (Chartered Quality Institute | International Register of Certificated Auditors).	Antaris
Institute of Environmental Management & Assessment (IEMA)	Antaris
CompEx	Antaris
Association of Energy Engineers (AEE)	Target Energy
International Food Protection Training Institute (IFPTI)	IMS

Table 1: SQT's relationship with other Awarding Bodies

It is a strategic imperative that SQT maintains formal links with key industry stakeholders and engages with the broader education and training community, such links are set out in Section 5 below. In the context of Expert Panellists and Examiners, SQT are hugely committed to applying due diligence when proposing and selecting independent expertise such as panellists for Peer Review or External Examination. Core principles and the process adopted is set out in Sections 5: Peer and External Stakeholder Relationships and Section 6: Expert Panellists, Examiners and Authenticators respectively.

5. PEER AND EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDER RELATIONSHIPS

SQT maintains formal links with key industry stakeholders and engages with the broader education and training community through attendance at conferences and membership of peer groups. The key stakeholder links and relationships, are as follows:

- **HECA:** SQT is a member of HECA (Higher Education Colleges Association) since 2014. HECA is the recognised voice of independent higher-level education in Ireland. HECA's main focus is on representing the independent third level sector by ensuring the highest standards of quality amongst its members.

- **Lean Six Sigma Network:** SQT initiated the formation of the Lean Six Sigma Network in 2004. This network was founded as a means of engaging a wide range of organisations that were on a Lean Six Sigma journey. The network provides a forum for Tutors and practitioners to share information, discuss technical problems and engage in continuous learning about the latest Lean Six Sigma tools and techniques. This network benefits both the members and SQT, as it works as a two-way process in sharing and learning.

- **Skillnets:** SQT delivers programmes to a range of Skillnets. These are government funded groups, tasked with identifying training programmes of direct relevance to the needs of their member organisations. These groups are categorised into a wide range of industry types such as the food & drink industry, the pharmaceutical industry and hospitality sector etc.

6. EXPERT PANELLISTS, EXAMINERS AND AUTHENTICATORS

SQT engages external, independent, national, and international experts from time to time. These include but are not limited to an External Subject Matter Expert Report for new programme development, Expert Panels, Programme Review with Awarding Bodies and External Examiners.

6.1. Core Principles

In line with QQI guidelines (QQI's Roles, Responsibilities and Code of Conduct for Reviewers and Evaluators and other QQI policies and standards) The key considerations when selecting and proposing external experts are independence and appropriate competence and experience.

- **Independence** ensures that panel members act with strict impartiality and objectivity, free from conflicts of interest that could compromise the integrity of the evaluation process. To uphold this principle, panel members must declare any interests that could be perceived as conflicting with the interests of the process. Even the appearance of a conflict of interest can undermine the credibility of the review, hence SQT's firm stance on avoiding such conflicts to maintain public and stakeholder trust. All independent panellists appointed by SQT are required to sign a Declaration of No Conflict of Interest.

- **Competence** is demonstrated through a variety of indicators including current occupation, professional history, and a track record of relevant experience. Competence encompasses a range of core skills such as effective communication, interpersonal skills, teamwork, and professionalism. Reviewers are also expected to be technically current and possess specific expertise in areas pertinent to the review, such as leadership in education, programme development, and quality assurance.

6.2. Procedure for Selection of External Panel Members (QQI)

The selection and appointment of external panel members is managed by the Director of Quality and Academic Affairs, in accordance with the core principles set out above and the following procedure:

1. Nominations for suitable Expert Panel members are sought from relevant personnel within or external to SQT.
2. Nominees are discussed with the Chair of the Academic Council, where they are evaluated based on the core principles set out above.
3. The Director of Quality and Academic Affairs proposes the nominee(s) to QQI.
4. If approved by QQI, the Director of Quality and Academic Affairs makes formal contact with the proposed member. Should they agree to undertake the role, SQT provides him/her with appropriate information which makes clear their roles and responsibilities within the panel.
5. If QQI do not agree with the proposed nominee, alternative nominees are agreed by the Academic Council and the above process is repeated.
6. The following documentation is sought from the Expert Panel member and provided to QQI, if requested:
   - Curriculum Vitae
   - Signed Declaration of No Conflict of Interest

The names and affiliations of expert panellists, examiners and authenticators are maintained by the Director of Quality and Academic Affairs.

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.

8. DOCUMENT CONTROL

Version No	Approval Date	Description of Revision	Originator	Approved By
1.0	14/12/18	New Document	Senior Management Team	Academic Council
2.0	25/11/22	Update of policy to reflect updated QQI document - Roles, Responsibilities and Code of Conduct for Reviewers and Evaluators Update to Awarding Bodies (Removal of CIEH)	Senior Management Team	Academic Council
3.0	14/6/24	Removal of NEBOSH as an Awarding Body and update of IRCA to include CQI	Senior Management Team	Academic Council
4.0	15/11/24	Updates to Section 6.2: Procedure for Selection of External Panel Members (QQI)	Senior Management Team	Academic Council