



## Quality Assurance Handbook PART A1

### **POLICY No.14: Virtual Classroom Policy**

#### 14. Purpose of Policy

Policy No.14 outlines FIT’s minimum expectations for tutors and delivering partners while utilising virtual classrooms to provide synchronous off-the-job training to enrolled Tech Apprentices.

##### 14.1 Policy Scope

Tutors should access this policy along with Apprentices, FIT staff, Approved Delivery Partners<sup>1</sup>, and broader regulatory and accreditor stakeholders where appropriate. This policy relies on proven strategies that promote engagement in programme materials in instances where Tech Apprenticeships off-the-job modules are delivered using synchronous formats, approaches, and technology.

##### 14.2 Overarching Considerations

This policy aims to ensure the consistency/equivalence of experience in the Tech Apprenticeship programmes for enrolled Apprentices who may undertake their study in a physical training environment and those who may participate using synchronous arrangements. This policy focuses on sound principles that ensure consideration of module design, delivery, and support activities, including broad quality assurance arrangements for delivering learning modules that form constituent elements of Tech Apprenticeships.

Importantly, virtual classrooms allow for a significant level of flexibility for regional employers to onboard Apprentices from a multitude of geographic locations. This technology is a cornerstone of the evolving strategic approach to ensure Tech Apprenticeships are accessible and remain accessible in developing solutions that genuinely make provision for programmes with a national reach. Although FIT notes a variety of positive uses that provide a rationale for adopting synchronous formats, FIT also

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<sup>1</sup> Typically an Education and Training Board.

appreciates the acute and possible negative impacts should technology not be employed/utilised in FIT's intended fashion or instances where FIT does not sanction the platform in use. Consequently, FIT anticipates a regimen of ongoing and rigorous monitoring. Before the outset of training, all candidates will be informed of any intended use of virtual classrooms in their specific programme intake, ensuring ample time for Apprentices to make appropriate preparations.

### 14.3 Policy Statement

In consideration of virtual classrooms, tutors will ensure the posting of a concise daily/weekly schedule to the Apprentices. The schedule will provide a view of the variety of intended live sessions, including the start and expected finish times, while also making provision for the allocation of one-to-one or online group activities for the duration of the entire training day. In addition, tutors will crucially ensure they establish a **proactive presence** in the online environment.

The technology employed will facilitate a mechanism for private conversation between the tutor and an Apprentice as appropriate to facilitate the private dissemination of formative and summative feedback while also making provision for discussion on personal mitigating circumstances as they arise. In addition, the tutor will ensure that Apprentices are aware of response times where it relate to written email requests. Whereas this policy details minimum expectations, there is a good deal of overlap between this policy and the overarching *FIT Teaching, Learning, and Assessment Strategy*. Specifically, the strategy acknowledges the variety of means by which Apprentices learn. This consideration culminates in FIT's expectation of a varied and dynamic delivery approach that will enable Apprentices, where possible, to engage in different types/formats for learning. This consideration is critical as it provides an expectation and delivery environment facilitating engagement and positive apprentice progression.

#### 14.3.1 Single Use of Virtual Classroom Vendor

Where possible, each delivery partner and tutor will ensure that Apprentices are not requested to log into more than one webinar/virtual classroom platform provided by distinct providers. Tutors must ensure that Apprentices have been provided with an interactive overview of the functionality and use of the virtual classroom<sup>2</sup>. It is unacceptable to take for granted that an Apprentice may understand how to navigate such platforms appropriately.

#### 14.3.2 Planning a Virtual Class Session

Tutors should plan for a series of relatively short delivery sessions throughout the specified training day hours, making adequate provisions for group discussions/debate and a location for appropriate questions and answers that can be shared among the intake cohort. Apprentices should be

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<sup>2</sup> FIT's Big Blue Button: FIT's Virtual Classroom Vendor (new intakes post 2025).

encouraged to summarise key concepts, points, or theories. The format should provide formative assessment to include individual and group feedback.

#### 14.3.3 Tutor/Apprentice Communications

Timely tutor feedback is essential for online learners to manage their learning experience. However, Apprentices must understand reasonable timescales to expect a response, which may inform their learning. Tutors should post regular updates and announcements to update Apprentices on available resources, events, or upcoming activities while making adequate provisions on the training day for providing individual and group formative and summative module feedback.

#### 14.3.4 Establish Patterns for Module Delivery via Virtual Classroom

In tandem with the development of the delivery schedule, tutors must ensure a regular series of diverse activities direct the delivery over time. The tutor should ensure that the schedule provided to Apprentices should be somewhat anticipated in terms of planned activities, allowing the Apprentice to plan and manage their assigned training time adequately.

#### 14.3.5 Maintaining Positive Apprentice Progress

Tutors should form a plan regarding communications relating to Apprentice progression through various modules. The goal should ensure timely discussion with the Apprentice, considering virtual classroom formats don't, in the main, provide for as many casual interactions<sup>3</sup> between the Apprentice and a Tutor, which can assist with an Apprentices' understanding of their progression.

#### 14.3.6 Safe and Secure Online Interactions

Providing a safe online environment is paramount in ensuring a positive learning environment. Tutors must only utilise virtual classroom platforms sanctioned for use by FIT. Tutors should only use their confirmed and approved institutional email addresses when compiling weekly monitoring reporting for FIT.

#### 14.3.7 Apprentice Supports for the Virtual Classroom

FIT is conscious that Apprentices, in some cases, can feel somewhat isolated from their intake cohort when studying from home or in their employer's business location. FIT ensures the availability of a People, Analytics and Wellbeing Officer to support all Apprentices, particularly those in training and accessing the off-the-job delivery using virtual classrooms.

### 14.4 Apprentice Use of Webcams in the Virtual Classroom Setting

A thoughtful and equitable approach to webcam use allows Apprentices and Tutors alike to benefit from the sense of presence that webcams can provide during remote instruction while preserving Apprentice privacy. To date, the experience of virtual classroom activity has yielded insight into the

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<sup>3</sup> As distinct from inperson/face-to-face delivery formats.

limitations of the Apprentice's capacity to engage in learning when webcams are not used regularly and consistently. With the active use of webcams comes the ability to see one another, to interact, to speak and work together, and to read facial expressions and gestures—behaviours that play a significant role in the process of learning. Unless sanctioned individually, all Apprentices must ensure their desktop/laptop camera is on and functioning when engaged in virtual classroom activities. The primary reason to remain visible in live remote learning and teaching, when possible, is that much of our communication is accomplished through visual means, such as gestures and facial expressions. In instances where an Apprentice notifies an issue that precludes a camera on approach before a virtual class session, the tutor will note the matter. In the cases where regular patterns emerge of webcams not being actively and regularly used, the tutor will notify FIT's People, Analytics and Wellbeing Officer of the matter, as this scenario can sometimes be an early indicator of Apprentice disengagement from learning. Candidates who accept the apprentice placement offer and who commence off-the-job training via synchronous delivery are advised that before the commencement of training, they will be required by FIT to agree to use their cameras as part of virtual class interactions. This stipulation does not, however, preclude an individual apprentice from noting issues with camera use, which may be related to broader matters of additional needs.

#### 14.5 Apprentice Use of Webcam Backgrounds

Stark or bright backgrounds can distract others active in a given virtual classroom setting. FIT advises Apprentices only to utilise webcam backgrounds of a neutral pallet when active in the virtual classroom setting.

<b>Document History</b>	
<b>Document Name</b>	<b>Virtual Classroom Policy</b>
<b>Policy Document Number</b>	<b>FIT-POL-014</b>
<b>Version Reference</b>	<b>V2.0</b>
<b>Document Owner</b>	<b>FIT Registrar</b>
<b>Roles with Aligned Responsibility</b>	<b>Registrar and Director of Academic Affairs</b>
<b>Approved by</b>	<b>Academic Council</b> <b>20/09/2022 (active)</b>
<b>Revision Cycle x5 Year</b>	V1.0 document created 05/2022
	V2.0 updated logo, change of policy title, Sec 14.2, and 14.3.1 update, Sec 14.4 and 14.5 addition (04/24)