



## Quality Assurance Handbook PART B

# **Teaching, Learning & Assessment Strategy 2022-2025**

Produced by the FIT Registry Team

## 1. Introduction

This Strategy aims to provide a visible and relevant framework for developing teaching, learning, and assessment practice for all Tech Apprenticeship programmes where FIT is the approved National Coordinating Provider. Doing so will provide direction for all key stakeholders, particularly staff and apprentices, in delivering and engaging with an effective teaching and learning experience that supports wider quality assurance goals where necessary.

## 2. Strategy Aims

FIT promotes industry input into apprenticeship development and review processes, ensuring and leading where possible to dynamic programmes that ensure the fair and consistent assessment of apprentices while active and enrolled in programmes. The strategy aims to outline various indicators consistent with enabling effective teaching, learning and assessment practice that culminates in the certification of apprentices who are informed, skilled, and competent in their occupation at an intermediate level, placed and identifiable for all on the National Framework at NFQ Level 6.

## 3. Context & Consultation Process

FIT develops Tech Apprenticeships with solid apprentice retention rates in mind, aiming for high levels of satisfaction with ongoing programme operation by both apprentices and employers. Central to achieving this continuing goal is ensuring a continued currency of programme content while providing the adoption of new and emerging teaching technologies.

In March of 2020, FIT, in response to the global Coronavirus pandemic, switched from a traditional off-the-job in-person delivery classroom to a format largely utilising synchronous webinar delivery approaches. This change in delivery mode was sudden, with many operational and institutional lessons learned. However, the pandemic provided an opportunity to leverage technology and delivery approaches not previously tested or fully considered. Teaching aids and solutions adopted through the pandemic have, in many cases, been proven to increase engagement, supported by new full-time Tech Apprenticeship resourced roles that monitor engagement and general well-being.

Utilising new technologies and associated teaching learning and assessment practices provides an opportunity for a truly national programme positively impacting the potential locations of off-the-job delivery and some flexibility with the location of the place of employment.

FIT recommends stakeholders disseminate this strategy with reference to wider aligned quality assurance policies, procedures, and the various Terms of Reference governing the remit of individual roles and that of wide Boards and Committees. This strategy does not aim to restate matters of policy already outlined in tech apprenticeship quality assurance documentation. In compiling this

strategy, FIT collaborated with several select tech apprenticeship employers with reference to all applicable QQI statutory guidelines.

## 4. Definitions

This strategy is informed by FIT’s approach to understanding the nature of teaching, learning, and assessment relating to tech apprenticeship provision, programmes encompassing significant work-based learning components.

### 4.1.0 Teaching

To teach is to engage apprentices in learning, enabling understanding of knowledge. Consequently, this consists of getting apprentices involved in actively constructing knowledge. Tech Apprenticeship tutors are not only subject matter experts but are understanding of how individuals learn, tasked with the mission to transform onboarded candidates into active Tech apprentices. *“Teaching is fundamentally about creating the pedagogical, social, and ethical conditions under which students agree to take charge of their own learning, individually and collectively<sup>1</sup>.”*

### 4.1.1 Learning

Learning can be defined as the *“activity or process of gaining knowledge or skill by studying, practicing, being taught,”* or experiencing something. Learning is about what apprentices do; not what tutors do in discharging their roles.

### 4.1.2 Assessment

Assessment can be defined as the act of judging the amount of learning that took place as a result of learning and teaching. Regarding the provision of tech apprenticeship, assessment assesses the understanding of module learning outcomes informed by programme learning outcomes, aligned occupational profiles, and mapping to QQI Award Standards.

## 5. General Philosophy

FIT’s apprenticeship teaching learning and assessment philosophy is driven by apprentice-centred, reflective approaches that promote apprentices bedding into their workplace, enabling them to contribute to their teams' work practically and productively. FIT recognises the employer-led nature of tech apprenticeships targeted towards meeting skills deficits in disciplines from the broad ICT sectors. Hence apprentices, FIT, tutors, and employers are the principal stakeholders who mould the learning process. Tech apprentices are encouraged to be aware of their continuing lifelong learning, work environment, and the broader context in contributing to the economy and life in Ireland.

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<sup>1</sup> Education for judgment: The artistry of discussion leadership. Edited by C. Roland Christensen, David A. Garvin, and Ann Sweet. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Business School, 1991.

## 6. Key Strategy Principles

FIT identifies four distinct areas that make up the cornerstones of the FIT Teaching, Learning, and Assessment Strategy. These include:

1. Developing digitally competent and well-rounded Tech apprentice graduates,
2. Accommodating diversity in all forms,
3. Utilising technology to enhance teaching, learning, and assessment,
4. Pedagogical Innovation—setting standards by adopting a defined framework for programme delivery.

### 6.1 Developing Well Rounded Tech Apprentice Graduates

Through structured curriculum and close ties with employers, a vital cornerstone of the FIT strategy is providing programmes that enable skills acquisition opportunities relevant to contemporary work environments, collaborating with state stakeholders from the Further Education and Training Sector. Where necessary, focusing on getting the *basics* right through work-based learning provides real-world, authentic experiences demonstrating the rationale for conducting operational processes while at work for participant apprentices. Tech Apprenticeship aims to upskill apprentices from a base of no formal prior knowledge to a point when a graduate apprentice can contribute in a vibrant way to the work of their teams.

#### 6.1.1 Actions

Activity Area & Actions 2022-2025	
1.	Continue to build employer consortium
2.	Significantly increase the volume of motivated candidates applying for Tech Apprenticeships
3.	Provide an increasing opportunity for the identification of new tutors and their development
4.	Increase formal training for Workplace Mentors on the Mentor/Mentee relationship
5.	Broaden the opportunity for stakeholder feedback
6.	Continue further to integrate alignment with workplace assessment tasks with off-the-job delivery
7.	Instigate and communicate a series of new industry-led and academic progression destinations
8.	Strengthen processes that support apprentice workplace induction

### 6.2 Accommodating Diversity

During the lifetime of the Tech Apprenticeship programmes, FIT has prioritised the development of processes and procedures that assist candidates who have additional needs to navigate the candidate recruitment process but who also actively engage in learning once they have been onboarded to a Tech Apprenticeship programme.

FIT is committed to ensuring, where possible, a process to support diversity in all forms and, where appropriate, providing support to enable participation. Several aligned FIT policies outline the various supports available to apprentices and the means to access them.

During the pandemic, switching to synchronous webinars resulted in a small proportion of the apprentice population having difficulties managing the provision. While it was achievable to come to practical technology-enhanced solutions in mitigating most issues, FIT also identified the need to appoint full-time resources to roles that support workplace learning and, more generally, well-being. Accordingly, FIT appointed a Workplace Learning Officer in 2021 and an Onboarding and Well-being Officer in early 2022. These roles now seek to support Tech Apprentices in any form of vulnerable circumstances.

Through a process of trying to understand the most pressing issues facing the apprentice population, FIT conducted a significant piece of research in 2020 and 2021, the primary data source being outcomes of one-to-one interactions with apprentices during the onset of the pandemic and through the period of adjustment during late 2020 and 2021. One of the leading outcomes of this research details that those with a presenting physical or hidden disability are among the most likely to encounter an issue trying to navigate their way through a Tech Apprenticeship programme, particularly in an instance where FIT utilises synchronous webinar formats.

In tandem with staff onboarding, FIT has worked on an ongoing and innovative collaborative project with the AHEAD organisation to establish critical processes that enable access, inclusion, and promote diversity in all forms in Tech Apprenticeships. AHEAD are a well-known and highly regarded not-for-profit tasked with fostering inclusive environments in education and employment. Apprenticeships generally have a complex series of stakeholder relationships. FIT aims to be at the forefront of initiatives promoting diversity in the context of a national backdrop where not enough research has been conducted to inform sustained apprenticeship growth cognisant of enrolment with diverse apprentice support needs for both on and off-the-job delivery.

#### *6.2.1 Actions*

Activity Area & Actions 2022-2025	
1.	Continue to engage with AHEAD and other national and international DIA stakeholders
2.	Broaden the codification of practices that promote access to varied supports
3.	Actively promote the apprenticeship proposition as a viable route for those with disabilities
4.	Review staff resources regarding the potential impact positively those with disabilities

### 6.3 Enhancement of Teaching, Learning, and Assessment

The primary functions of a Tech Apprenticeship tutor are to encourage, reinforce, access, engage and facilitate learning. These requirements have not changed over time. However, as technology, connectivity, and access to relevant online tools improve, it has led to a sea change in the methods used to deliver education and training programmes.

Regarding the potential to enhance candidates' access to Tech Apprenticeship programmes on a national basis and following a positive implementation of related technology through the pandemic, it is now a key strategic aim for FIT to continue to implement a proportion of Tech Apprenticeship intake cohorts utilising a synchronous delivery format for off-the-job programme elements. In addition, FIT is cognisant of the requirement over time to continue to finesse procedures informed by the overarching quality assurance policies that ensure a continuous improvement approach.

#### 6.3.1 Actions

Activity Area & Actions 2022-2025	
1.	Support tutors to engage in accessing excellent programme resources in a digital format
2.	Continue to develop innovative, dynamic digital learning resources
3.	Institutionalise structures and procedures that ensure rigorous monitoring of materials
4.	Provide engaging continuous professional development opportunities for tutors
5.	Strengthen apprentice feedback opportunities relating to the quality of electronic resources
6.	Strengthen apprentice feedback opportunities relating to Virtual Learning Environments

### 6.4 Pedagogical Innovation

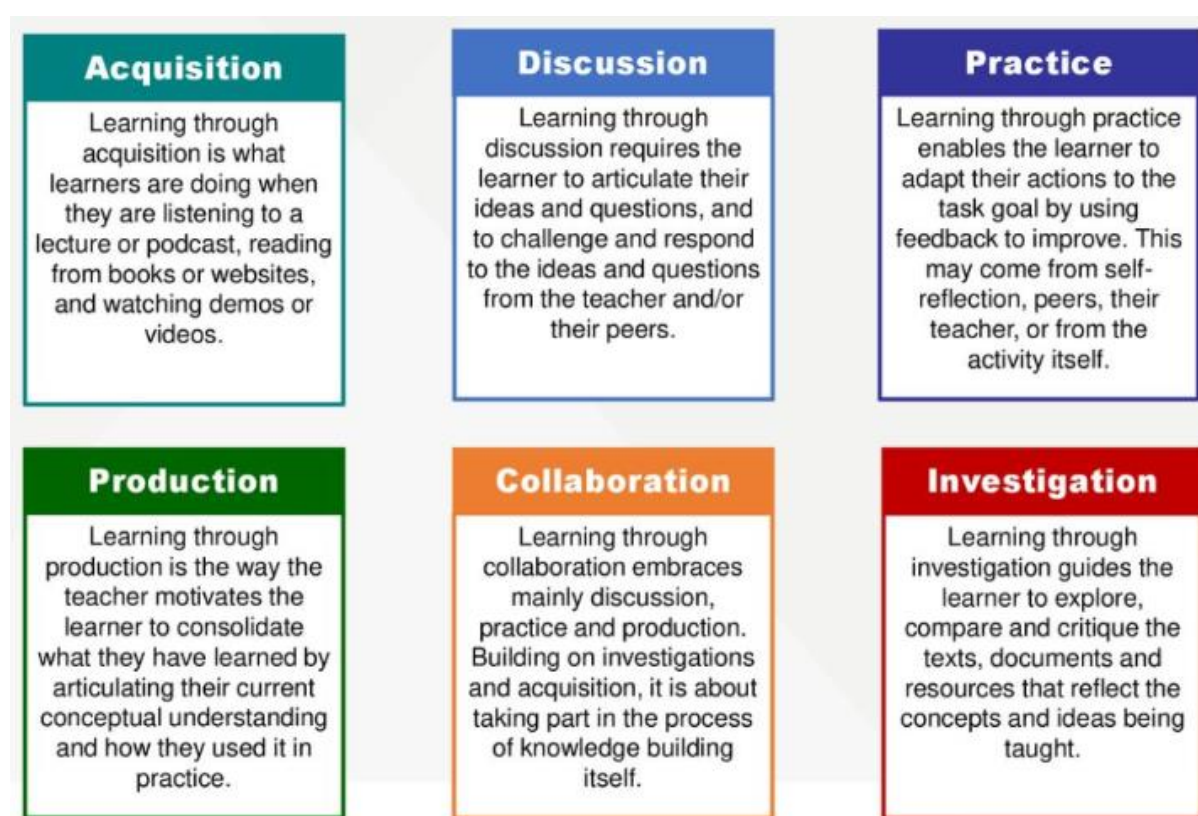
During the onset of the pandemic, the rapid switch to using synchronous webinar formats for delivery led to an awareness of the possible need to further support activities that enable stakeholder confidence in assuring consistency in the changing Tech Apprenticeship delivery approach across multiple delivering partners. In this regard and in early 2020, the focus was on the suitability of existing Tech Apprenticeship resources to meet the requirements for use in synchronous webinar formats. However, as time has gone by, a more pressing need has emerged to provide a framework that is easy to identify and sets out a series of expectations that FIT require tutors to focus on in the pursuit of creating well-rounded and capable apprentices.

Looking into several theoretical frameworks and considering the basic need to ensure tutors utilise diverse learning strategies to retain and build engagement among diverse cohorts of Tech Apprenticeship learners, FIT began to explore different types of learning. With this in mind, FIT supports the approaches noted in Dr. Diana Laurillard's *Conversational Framework*. Specifically, the

framework is useful both as a theoretical learning framework and a practical framework for designing educational environments. As its name suggests, the framework focuses on a bi-directional dialogue between teacher/tutor and apprentice/learner. In this way, it is closely aligned with other learning theories such as constructionism and social constructivism.

The Conversational Framework focuses on the apprentice and not just what the teacher/tutor is aiming to say or teach, but importantly what the apprentice/learner is doing to understand a topic or concept while being supported to engage in the process of autonomous research and discovery.

Figure 1. Types of Learning



Working back from differing types of learning, FIT aims to ensure the inclusion of activities that directly lead to a vibrant teaching practice making adequate provision for the six types of learning noted above.

#### 6.4.1 Actions

Activity Area & Actions 2022-2025	
1.	Adopt a series of measurable outcomes that ensure apprentices avail of the six types of learning
2.	Develop a Tech Apprenticeship tutor training programme for new tutors
3.	Compile a plan to disseminate FIT expectations on the content of delivery sessions

## 7.0 Operation and Communication of this Strategy

The registrar and Director of Academic Affairs and Programme Development will have a leading responsibility to communicate and to begin to act on this Strategy in ongoing consultation with the FIT employer consortium and stakeholder base.