

# Independent Panel Report on a Provider's Programme Review

<b>Provider</b>	<b>Fastrack into Information Technology (FIT)</b>
<b>Programme(s) Reviewed</b>	<b>Advanced Certificate in Computer Programming</b>

## Independent Panel Members

<b>Chair &amp; Subject Matter Expert</b>	Prof. Martin McKinney	Professor Emeritus of Computing, Ulster University
<b>Secretary</b>	Dr Catherine Peck	Independent Education Consultant
<b>Academic Subject Matter Expert</b>	Mark Deegan	TU Dublin
<b>Sector Employer Representative &amp; Subject Matter Expert</b>	Pat Mulhern	Industry Representative
<b>QA Expert &amp; ETB Representative</b>	Siobhan Magner	QA representative & ETB Rep

All members of the independent panel declared their independence of FIT and that they have no conflict of interest.

## Part 1. Introduction

This document presents the findings of the Independent Panel (hereafter, 'the panel') following a review and evaluation of the Programme Review Report provided by FIT.

It is closely guided by the terms of reference agreed by FIT with QQI for the programmatic review of the:

### **Advanced Certificate in Computer Programming.**

The terms of reference include agreement to give special consideration to the following:

- Workplace Mentorship Arrangements
- Blended Learning Approaches
- Adopting best practices from QQI publications

These special considerations are addressed as appropriate throughout the body of this report and the attached IER.

With particular regard to blended learning approaches, it is noted that the panel did not evaluate FIT's procedures for the purpose of extending the provider's scope of provision. The panel has offered feedback for formative purposes only.

It is noted that the programme was reviewed by the provider and by the panel with reference to QQI's Award Standards.

## Part 2. Evaluation Process

### 2.1 Documents Supplied to the Panel

Document Type	Document Name
Programme Review Report	Programme Review Report
Programme Descriptor Document	Revalidation Programme Document
Book of Modules	Module Documentation Revalidation
Terms of Reference	Terms of Reference for a Programme Review for the
Quality Assurance Documentation	Folders K - P
Stakeholder Guides	Folder F
MIPLO, MIMLO Mapping to Award Standards	Folder H
Ongoing Reporting	Folder Q
Original Programmes & Panel Reports	Folder R
Ongoing Consortium Review Activity	Folder G

### 2.2 Provider's Representatives Met

Person	Role/Job Title
Peter Davitt	FIT CEO
Andrew Finn	Director of Academic Affairs and Programme Development
Gemma Cassidy	Tech Apprenticeship Registrar
Clare Stewart	Philanthropy Manager (diversity, access & inclusion brief)
Michelle Cox	Tech Apprenticeship National Fulfilment Manager
Amy Phipps	Workplace Learning Officer
Clodagh Kearns	Onboarding and Wellbeing Officer
Michael Maycock	Software Development Tutor
Ken Jones	Network Engineer Tutor
Jamie Rickard	Employer representative (Deloitte)
Mark O'Toole	Employer representative (Telent)
Tracey Gallagher	Certification Officer
Paul King	Learner representative - Software Development (active apprentice)
Abigail Asabi	Learner representative - Network Engineering (active apprentice)

### 2.3 Description of evaluation process

The panel was engaged by FIT and approved by QQI in November 2022. The panel was comprised of a suitably qualified Chair/Subject Matter Expert, a Secretary, an Academic Subject Matter Expert, a Quality Assurance Expert and a Sector Employer Representative. The panel was tasked with three main undertakings related to the programmes, as follows:

1. To address the programme review report provided by FIT along with any associated discussions held during the site visit pertaining to the provider's programme review; to outline findings and recommendations with regard to this;
2. To evaluate the modified programmes (as documented) for revalidation against the QQI validation criteria and sub-criteria and outline any special conditions and recommendations with regard to these;
3. To take account of three special considerations as agreed within the terms of reference.

The panel was issued with a suite of programme review and revalidation documentation by FIT. This included module descriptors for the programme proposed revalidation (see Section 2.1). Members of the panel conducted a review of the documentation and met to discuss initial impressions and plan for a virtual site visit scheduled for December 01, 2022. The panel participated in a pre-meeting prior to the site visit. The site visit was facilitated virtually, using the MS Teams platform.

During the virtual site visit on December 01, 2022, the panel engaged with provider staff and stakeholders, including:

- FIT CEO and Senior Management
- FIT Apprenticeship Manager and Workplace Learning Officers
- FIT Tutors and Learner Representatives
- FIT Administrative and Learner Support/Wellbeing Staff

Following those meetings, the panel identified recommendations for FIT and delivered preliminary oral feedback to provider representatives.

The members of the panel subsequently contributed to the drafting and review of this report and associated Independent Evaluation Report (IER), which is specific to the programme proposed for revalidation. These reports summarise the findings and recommendations of the panel.

## Part 3. Panel Findings on Provider Programme Review Report

### Section A. Context and Terms of Reference for the Programme Review

#### **Commentary:**

The panel has reviewed the terms of reference agreed with QQI and other documentation that provides context for the programme review. The documentation is comprehensive and transparent, and the panel has no specific concerns in relation to this.

However, the panel notes that, following direction from QQI, the panel did not evaluate FIT's procedures for the purpose of extending the provider's scope of provision. In line with the special considerations within the terms of reference, the panel has offered feedback on FIT's blended learning approaches for formative purposes only.

#### **Recommendations:**

There are no specific recommendations in relation to this aspect of the programme review.

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### Section B. Provider Information and Programme Context

#### **Commentary:**

FIT's programme review documentation offers clear information about the provider and the programme context. Notably, FIT is a registered charity and not for profit entity.

- To date, the programme has been delivered via nine regional Education and Training Boards (ETBs). FIT anticipates expanding provision to offer the programme via all sixteen ETBs in the future.
- As an apprenticeship programme, the mode of delivery combines a significant proportion of on the job learning with off the job learning time.
- The programme has a duration of 24 months and a year-round rolling enrolment system.
- Target learners must be over the age of 18. Access requirements are outlined. Candidates must be willing to undertake aptitude testing, work with FIT staff to develop their CVs and participate in mock interview panels ahead of being placed on a selection panel for participating employers.

During the virtual site visit, FIT representatives provided a presentation that outlined the broader context of the provider's work in apprenticeships and within the greater digital skills ecosystem in Ireland, emphasizing FIT's focus on promoting diversity and inclusion.

#### **Recommendations:**

There are no specific recommendations in relation to this aspect of the programme review.

## Section C. Baseline qualitative and quantitative information

### Programme Data Overview

#### **Commentary:**

Programme enrolment data is presented by FIT, which reflects that 40% of apprentices access the programme via a Recognition of Prior Learning route. Further analysis of this data reveals that many of these apprentices hold qualifications at higher levels on the National Qualifications Framework, which in many cases are unrelated to an ICT discipline. This is noted to be contrary to initial expectations that learners would typically access the programme after completing post primary education. It is noted that equivalent to B2 level of English language proficiency on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) is required.

FIT has an inclusive approach to tracking gender participation in its programmes, quantifying male, female and gender non-binary apprentices. Provider initiatives to encourage female participation have resulted in females representing 36% of enrolments. Although this significantly exceeds national and EU averages for the sector, FIT note that it falls short of the 50:50 participation rate that is desired. The panel has offered commendations in relation to this.

Learner data is broken down by age, with the majority of participants falling within the 20 – 29 and 30 – 39-year-old age groups. This data reflects that to date, no learners under the age of 20 have enrolled on the programme. This data is further analysed in relation to the proportion of learners within each age group accessing the programme via a non-standard or RPL entry route. This is noted to be higher for the age brackets over 30.

This section of FIT's programme review report also outlines the process the provider has embarked upon in partnership with AHEAD to better facilitate applications from and participation in the programme by learners with disabilities. Specific enhancements to FIT processes are outlined. The panel has offered a commendation in relation to this.

Attrition and completion rates are provided for the programme, indicating an overall attrition rate of 15%. The causes of attrition are analysed in detail and the implications for the current and future programme discussed. The panel is satisfied that FIT is giving appropriate consideration to those factors which it is able to influence. Measures taken include the appointment of a workplace learning officer to more closely monitor apprentice learning in the workplace.

Grades and awards classification data are presented within the review report. Grades are noted to cluster at higher and lower levels, and this is attributed to the diverse profiles of participants to date. FIT notes difficulty in obtaining comparable data for benchmarking due to the lack of comparable apprenticeship programmes offered.

With regard to graduate destinations, it is noted that 75% of learners have progressed from the programme into full-time employment. Of these, 90% have been retained by their original employer. An analysis of the role types is provided. This is considered to be a positive reflection on the programme's outcomes in that it reflects an acceptance in industry that graduates of the programme are qualified to uptake intermediate level roles in industry.

#### **Recommendations:**

The panel notes that FIT may benefit from including applicants whose prior educational qualifications exceed entry requirements separately to other RPL applicants in future analysis.

The panel notes that FIT may benefit from inclusion of details of how a B2 English language proficiency level is evidenced in future programmatic review documentation.

There are no specific recommendations in relation to this aspect of the programme review.

## Programme Delivery and Teaching & Learning Strategies

### **Commentary:**

The programme review report provided by FIT notes that the provider has processes in place to ensure that all approved training partners have appropriate physical facilities to deliver programmes. Programme specific procedures are established to ensure that employers have the capacity to support the relevant array of workplace learning activities required. In addition, SOLAS Authorised Officers complete checks before registering employers.

It is noted that proposed changes to some of the modules will impact future timetabling of the programme, with some variation expected between block and day release from on-the-job elements of the apprenticeship. Feedback from learners has been considered in the revised programme proposed for validation, acknowledging workload pressures and clarifying annual leave arrangements.

FIT has not exceeded the 1:18 ratio for tutors to learners outlined in the initial validation of the programme, with the average ratio being 1:14. Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic FIT pivoted to facilitate synchronous webinars where face to face delivery was not possible. This experience has prompted the renewal of FIT's Teaching, Learning and Assessment strategy for the period 2022 – 2025. The strategy has been developed with the intention of aligning to QQI's current guidelines in relation to blended learning and is responsive to feedback from apprentices and tutors. The activity areas and actions within this are outlined in the documentation. These are comprehensive and future oriented, with an emphasis on continual enhancement. It is noted that an action included in this documentation is the development of a Tech Apprenticeship tutor training programme for new tutors.

During the virtual site visit, the panel sought to understand the extent to which the rebalancing of the curriculum proposed in the validation document would ensure apprentices were developing communication and soft skills. It was noted that this is emphasized in the first semester of the apprenticeship programme, including within a module focused on customer service.

### **Recommendations:**

There are no specific recommendations in relation to this aspect of the programme review.

## Section D. Evaluation of the programme by stakeholders

### Evaluation by current learners and graduates of the programme

#### **Commentary:**

Feedback from apprentices was collected via class representative focus groups and the use of surveys that included both quantitative and qualitative items. The panel notes that response rates to the surveys were healthy, with a decline noted from 2020 to 2022. A thematic analysis of what is working well, and recommended changes is presented. It is noted that learners see positives in face-to-face learning but also value the lessened demands of travel and associated costs that online

learning offers. Learner feedback indicated that taking one module at a time was helpful in terms of focus and management of workload and also that work placement opportunities were valued.

Feedback from learners has included recommended changes to specific modules and indicated that the City and Guilds components of the programmes were not perceived to be sufficiently clear or up to date. The implication of this is the recommendation to remove these in the programme proposed for the next period of validation.

The panel heard that apprentices had expressed concerns that they were not introduced to coding early enough in the initially validated programme early enough. This concern was addressed in the revision of the programme.

Analysis of learner feedback data indicates that work placements, course content, teaching delivery and rapport with peers are all significant elements that influence the apprentice experience.

**Recommendations:**

There are no specific recommendations in relation to this aspect of the programme review.

### Evaluation of the programme by Staff

**Commentary:**

FIT requested feedback from all off the job ETB tutors who had delivered on the programme from 2018. Overall, the feedback was consistent with the feedback from apprentices with regard to specific modules.

During the virtual site visit, the panel sought to understand how FIT tutors had made input to the review of the existing programme and proposals for change moving forward.

The panel heard from a tutor that the length of the module on SQL was considered to be insufficient and had needed to be doubled. The panel also heard that apprentices were in some instances disappointed to commence with a module on customer service as they had expectations they would be focused on programming. This had been addressed by changing the sequencing of the customer service and technical modules. The panel queried whether tutors had any input to the removal of the City and Guilds modules and heard from one tutor representative that they had been notified of this decision but not involved in discussions prior to the decision. The City and Guilds content was considered to be less problematic, but it was noted that exams and content were in some instances dated, for example often referring to storage media and technologies which have been superseded.

**Recommendations:**

There are no specific recommendations in relation to this aspect of the programme review.

### External Examiner Feedback

**Commentary:**

Notably, the reports of the external examiner appointed to the programme since 2018 indicate that fair and consistent assessment has taken place across all multi-site locations. It was noted that FIT provided the external examiner with access to all required programme materials, aligned

assessments and samples of key assessment documentation for all cohort intakes as per QQI's guidelines for effective practice in this area.

**Recommendations:**

There are no specific recommendations in relation to this aspect of the programme review.

## Section E. Programme Quality Assurance

### Complaints, appeals and commendations

**Commentary:**

It was noted that no apprentice had submitted or progressed either a formal academic appeal or a complaint/grievance. However, FIT noted that queries, issues and problems raised by apprentices have been managed by the FIT registry team.

**Recommendations:**

There are no specific recommendations in relation to this aspect of the programme review.

### Quality Assurance Systems and Processes

**Commentary:**

During the virtual site visit, the panel sought to understand how the procedures presented by FIT interacted with the procedures within and across the nine ETBs delivering the programme to date. It was clarified that the programmes are delivered by ETBs using the QA procedures of FIT with oversight from the governance structures of FIT.

**Recommendations:**

There are no specific recommendations in relation to this aspect of the programme review.

### Additional Quality Assurance Systems and Processes required (e.g. online delivery / assessment)

**Commentary:**

The panel noted a special consideration pertaining to blended learning within the terms of reference. The panel is not evaluating the QA procedures of FIT for blended learning but was able to offer formative feedback pertaining to enhancements to digital learning materials. This has been provided within the subsequent IER report.

**Recommendations:**

There are no specific recommendations in relation to this aspect of the programme review.

## Section F. Summary Analysis of the programme

### **Commentary:**

The panel sought to understand in more detail how the decision had been reached to discontinue the use of City and Guilds Awards within the programme. It was noted that the programme review provided an opportunity for apprentice and employer perspectives to feed into continual enhancement of the programme. There is no capacity to change the embedded content in significant ways. It was noted that the learning outcomes were found to be very dated within the awards and feedback indicating the need to move away from the awards came from both apprentices and employers.

The panel also sought to understand what role the Academic Council had played within the review process. It was noted that both revisions to the programme and associated quality assurance procedures were required to be approved by the provider's Academic Council, which is chaired by an independent expert.

FIT presents a SWOT analysis of the programme and draws upon this and other findings in the review report to put forward its proposed revisions to the programme.

### **Recommendations:**

There are no specific recommendations in relation to this aspect of the programme review.

## Section G. Revision of the programme

### **Commentary:**

A summary analysis of revisions to the programme is presented within the review report, supported by the preceding evidence.

### **Recommendations:**

There are no specific recommendations in relation to the revision of the programme.

## Part 4. Overall Findings

### Section A. Commentary on review process:

The panel is of the view that the review process has drawn appropriately on the presented data to inform the proposed changes to the programme.

### Section B. Recommendations on review process:

The panel has no specific recommendations pertaining to the review process.

The panel offers a number of commendations to FIT on the establishment and delivery of the programme to date. Specifically, FIT is commended for:

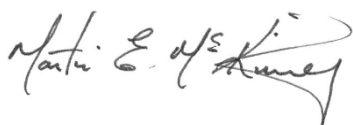
- Establishing a programme that offers a well-supported pathway into a qualification and career in ICT for non-traditional learners who may have disengaged from participation in the labour market.
- Taking a contemporary and inclusive approach to the presentation of data quantifying gender participation in its programmes within the review process.
- Actively encouraging and supporting female participation in tech apprenticeships through its 'Women Choose Tech' programme and achieving higher than average national and international averages in this respect.
- Actively encouraging and supporting pathways into the programme to learners from socio-economically deprived areas through work with over 75 DEIS schools nationally.
- Engaging in a comprehensive review of its processes in partnership with AHEAD to enhance the support FIT provides to applicants and to learners enrolled on the programme.

### Section C. Commentary on programme revisions:

The panel has no specific concerns in relation to the programme revisions FIT has proposed.

### Section D. Recommendations on programme revisions:

There are no specific recommendations in relation to the programme revisions.



**Signed:**

Panel Chairperson:

**Date:**

9 January, 2023

**QQI**Quality and Qualifications Ireland  
Dearbhú Cáilíochta agus Cáilíochtaí Éireann

# Independent Evaluation Report on an Application for Revalidation of a Programme of Education and Training

## Part 1. Provider details

<b>Provider name</b>	Fast Track into Information Technology (CLG)
<b>Date of site visit</b>	01/12/22
<b>Date of report</b>	09/01/23

## Section A. Overall recommendations

<b>Principal programme</b>	<b>Title</b>	Software Development Associate
	<b>Award</b>	Advanced Certificate in Computer Programming
	<b>Credit</b>	200 (FET Credits)
	<b>Recommendation</b> <i>Satisfactory OR Satisfactory subject to proposed conditions OR Not Satisfactory</i>	

## Section B. Expert Panel

<b>Name</b>	<b>Role</b>	<b>Affiliation</b>
Martin McKinney	<b>Chair &amp; Subject Matter Expert</b>	Professor Emeritus of Computing, Ulster University
Catherine Peck	<b>Secretary</b>	Education Consultant
Mark Deegan	<b>Academic Subject Matter Expert</b>	TU Dublin
Pat Mulhern	<b>Industry Subject Matter Expert</b>	Industry Representative
Siobhan Magner	<b>QA Expert &amp; ETB Representative</b>	QA representative & ETB Rep

## Section C. Principal Programme

Names of centre(s) where the programme(s) is to be provided	Maximum number of learners ( <i>per centre</i> )	Minimum number of learners
1. CDETB Liberties College	80	10
2. CDETB Killester College	80	10
3. CDETB Finglas Training Centre	80	10
4. DDLETB Baldoyle Training Centre	80	10
5. DDLETB Tallaght Training Centre	80	10
6. DDLETB Loughlinstown Training Centre	80	10
7. KWETB M4 Business Park Celbridge	80	10
8. CETB Cork Training Centre	80	10
9. GRETB Galway Training Centre	80	10
10. MSLETB Sligo Training Centre	80	10
11. KETB Monavalley Campus	80	10
12. LMETB RSTC Training Centre Dundalk	80	10
13. LWETB Athlone Training Centre	80	10
<p><b>Note on centres who will provide/deliver off-the-job delivery in the future</b></p> <p>The above table notes 13 locations/centres involved in the programme's off-the-job delivery. The maximum number of learners/apprentices per centre will not, in total, exceed FIT's total volume of new apprentices (350) within years 1-5 of the revalidation. The maximum figure of 80 would be split into four or more cohorts within the participating centres. FIT anticipates expanding delivery to various locations within <u>all</u> 16 Education and Training Board regions. A Memorandum of Understanding is already in place with all ETBs to support this expansion, subject to FIT's satisfactory approval of each particular site, resourcing, aligned staffing, etc.</p>		

Proposed Enrolment	
<b>Date of first intake</b>	February 20 <sup>th</sup> 2023
<b>Maximum number of annual intakes</b>	50
<b>Maximum total number of learners per intake</b>	350
<b>Programme duration (<i>months from start to completion</i>)</b>	24
<p><b>Panel Commentary on proposed enrolment:</b></p> <p>The panel has no specific concerns regarding the proposed enrolment. FIT has a complement of support and administrative staff who support the programme and work with the delivering ETBs.</p>	
Target learner groups	
<p>The target learners must be 18 years or older upon commencement of their apprenticeship programme and show a desire and motivation to work in the technology sector, specifically in a computer programming or software development role.</p>	
<b>Approved countries for provision</b>	Ireland
<b>Delivery mode: Full-time/Part-time</b>	Full-time

<b>The teaching and learning modalities</b>		
<b>Methodology / Learning Activity</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Staff to Learner Ratio e.g. 1:12</b>
Tutor	Feedback/review sessions	1:1
Tutor	Instruction/lecture	1:25
Tutor	Demonstration practical/virtual	1:25
Tutor	Group/Peer learning activity	1:25
<b>Brief synopsis of the programme</b> (e.g. who it is for, what is it for, what is involved for learners, what it leads to.)		
<p>The programme leading to an Advanced Certificate in Computer Programming placed at NFQ Level 6 aims to enable the apprentices to secure and retain employment in a software development role. The apprentice should be able to combine technical, communications, project management, and personal development skills to meet the requirements of their employer and should be able to act autonomously or as part of a team as the occasion demands. Target candidates must be 18 years or older upon commencement of their apprenticeship programme. In addition, candidates must show a desire and motivation for the technology sector, specifically for a computer programming/software development role. Finally, candidates must be willing to undertake aptitude testing, work with the FIT Tech Apprenticeship recruitment team to hone their CV, and complete mock employer interviews before placement on a panel for selection by participating employers.</p>		
<b>Summary of specifications for teaching staff</b>		
<b>Role e.g. Lecturer, Mentor, Librarian</b>	<b>Profile (Qualifications and Experience expected)</b>	<b>No. (WTEs<sup>1</sup>) of Staff on the programme with this role and profile</b>
Off-the-Job Tutor & Assessor	Level 7 or above ICT qualification and relevant subject matter expertise. Train the Trainer at a minimum.	18
On-the-Job Workplace Assessor	Level 7 or above ICT qualification and relevant subject matter expertise.	12
On-the-Job Workplace Mentor	Level 6 or above qualification and relevant subject matter expertise.	80+ active Dec 2022

<b>Learning Activity</b>	<b>Ratio of learners to teaching staff</b>
Feedback/review sessions; Instruction/lecture; Demonstration practical/virtual; Group/Peer learning activities.	1:25
<b>Panel Commentary on programme outline and staffing:</b>	
<p>The programme curriculum is discussed under Criterion 5 in this report and the programme staffing is discussed under Criterion 6.</p>	

<sup>1</sup> WTE is the whole-time equivalent number. The number 1 indicates a fulltime person fully dedicated to the programme. 0.5 indicates a part-time person available to this programme half of the time.

Programmes being replaced (applicable to applications for revalidation)		
Code	Title	Last enrolment date
N/A	N/A	N/A

#### Section D. Other noteworthy features of the application

The panel commends FIT on the quality of the self-evaluation and reflection undertaken by the team at FIT within the programme review report as well as the strong emphasis on inclusion and access throughout all areas of programme activity.

**Part 1A Evaluation of the Case for an Extension of the Approved Scope of Provision (where applicable).** Having examined appropriate QA / Governance procedures, comment on the case for extending the applicant's Approved Scope of Provision to enable provision of this programme. (Especially relevant for move to online delivery / assessment)

N/A

## Part 2. Evaluation against the validation criteria

### Criterion 1. The provider is eligible to apply for validation of the programme

<p>a) The provider meets the prerequisites (section 44(7) of the 2012 Act) to apply for validation of the programme.</p> <p>b) The application for validation is signed by the provider’s chief executive (or equivalent) who confirms that the information provided is truthful and that all the applicable criteria have been addressed.</p> <p>c) The provider has declared that their programme complies with applicable statutory, regulatory and professional body requirements.<sup>2</sup></p>		
	<b>Satisfactory? (yes, no, partially)</b>	<b>Comment</b>
<b>Principal Programme</b>	Yes	<p>The panel is satisfied that the provider is eligible to apply for validation of the programme. The approved procedures for Quality Assurance (QA) fully comprehend the programme submitted for validation. FIT has established procedures for access, transfer and progression.</p> <p>FIT has complied with section 65 in respect of arrangements for the protection of enrolled learners.</p>

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<sup>2</sup>This criterion is to ensure the programme can actually be provided and will not be halted on account of breach of the law. The declaration is sought to ensure this is not overlooked but QQI is not responsible for verifying this declaration of enforcing such requirements.

**Criterion 2. The programme objectives and outcomes are clear and consistent with the QQI awards sought**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) The programme aims and objectives are expressed plainly.</li> <li>b) A QQI award is specified for those who complete the programme. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) Where applicable, a QQI award is specified for each embedded programme.</li> </ul> </li> <li>c) There is a satisfactory rationale for the choice of QQI award(s).</li> <li>d) The award title(s) is consistent with unit 3.1 of QQI's <i>Policy and Criteria for Making Awards</i>.</li> <li>e) The award title(s) is otherwise legitimate for example it must comply with applicable statutory, regulatory and professional body requirements.</li> <li>f) The programme title and any embedded programme titles are <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) Consistent with the title of the QQI award sought.</li> <li>(ii) Clear, accurate, succinct and fit for the purpose of informing prospective learners and other stakeholders.</li> </ul> </li> <li>g) For each programme and embedded programme <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) The <b>minimum intended programme learning outcomes</b> and any other educational or training objectives of the programme are explicitly specified.<sup>3</sup></li> <li>(ii) The minimum intended programme learning outcomes to qualify for the QQI award sought are <b>consistent with</b> the relevant QQI awards standards.</li> </ul> </li> <li>h) Where applicable, the <b>minimum intended module learning outcomes</b> are explicitly specified for each of the programme's modules.</li> <li>i) Any QQI minor awards sought for those who complete the modules are specified, where applicable.</li> </ul> <p>For each minor award specified, the minimum intended module learning outcomes to qualify for the award are consistent with relevant QQI minor awards standards.<sup>4</sup></p>
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	<b>Satisfactory? (yes, no, partially)</b>	<b>Comment</b>
<b>Principal Programme</b>	Partially	<p>The panel is satisfied that the programme objectives and outcomes are clear and consistent with the QQI awards sought.</p> <p>The panel notes that the documentation provided by FIT explicitly specifies the minimum intended programme and module learning outcomes. The panel observed that the number of learning outcomes per module was highly variable and also that they varied in terms of granularity. It was noted that work could be undertaken by FIT to develop capacity internally in relation to module and programme development and to the articulation of constructively aligned learning outcomes. The panel has identified a recommended special condition of validation (No.1) pertaining to this. When undertaking this activity, some additional module syllabus detail reflecting the revised learning outcomes should be included.</p> <p>The panel queried whether the credits the documentation referred to were consistently FET credits or whether this referred in some places to ECTS, as the panel sought to understand exactly how learning hours were calculated.</p> <p>FIT representatives confirmed that the programmes proposed for revalidation were equivalent to 200 FET credits. The panel queried whether this would be overburdening the learners. Given that the</p>

<sup>3</sup> Other programme objectives, for example, may be to meet the educational or training requirements of a statutory, regulatory or professional body.

<sup>4</sup> Not all modules will warrant minor awards. Minor awards feature strongly in the QQI common awards system however further education and training awards may be made outside this system.

		<p>programme was taught over a two-year period, the overall workload was considered to be reasonable by FIT. FIT representatives also noted that an attempt had been made to align the number of hours allocated for off-the-job provision based on the ETB college week.</p> <p>It was acknowledged that the distribution of hours of learner effort and alignment to the credit system used could be reviewed to ensure consistent presentation throughout the documentation. The panel has identified a recommended special condition of validation associated with this (No. 2).</p>
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**Criterion 3. The programme concept, implementation strategy, and its interpretation of QQI awards standards are well informed and soundly based (considering social, cultural, educational, professional and employment objectives)**

<p>a) The development of the programme and the intended programme learning outcomes has sought out and taken into account the views of stakeholders such as learners, graduates, teachers, lecturers, education and training institutions, employers, statutory bodies, regulatory bodies, the international scientific and academic communities, professional bodies and equivalent associations, trades unions, and social and community representatives.<sup>5</sup></p> <p>b) The interpretation of awards standards has been adequately informed and researched; considering the programme aims and objectives and minimum intended programme (and, where applicable, modular) learning outcomes.</p> <p>(i) There is a satisfactory rationale for providing the programme.</p> <p>(ii) The proposed programme compares favourably with existing related (comparable) programmes in Ireland and beyond. Comparators should be as close as it is possible to find.</p> <p>(iii) There is support for the introduction of the programme (such as from employers, or professional, regulatory or statutory bodies).</p> <p>(iv) There is evidence<sup>6</sup> of learner demand for the programme.</p> <p>(v) There is evidence of employment opportunities for graduates where relevant<sup>7</sup>.</p> <p>(vi) The programme meets genuine education and training needs.<sup>8</sup></p> <p>c) There are mechanisms to keep the programme updated in consultation with internal and external stakeholders.</p> <p>d) Employers and practitioners in the cases of vocational and professional awards have been systematically involved in the programme design where the programme is vocationally or professionally oriented.</p> <p>e) The programme satisfies any validation-related criteria attaching to the applicable awards standards and QQI awards specifications.</p>		
	<b>Satisfactory? (yes, no, partially)</b>	<b>Comment</b>
<b>Principal Programme</b>	Yes	<p>The panel is satisfied that the programme concept, implementation strategy, and its interpretation of QQI awards standards are well informed and soundly based.</p> <p>It was noted that FIT have an ongoing dialogue with industry representatives and also benefit from direct membership of industry representatives in FIT's governance structures. During the virtual site visit,</p>

<sup>5</sup> Awards standards however detailed rely on various communities for their interpretation. This consultation is necessary if the programme is to enable learners to achieve the standard in its fullest sense.

<sup>6</sup> This might be predictive or indirect.

<sup>7</sup> It is essential to involve employers in the programme development and review process when the programme is vocationally or professionally oriented.

<sup>8</sup> There is clear evidence that the programme meets the **target learners'** education and training needs and that there is a clear demand for the programme.

		<p>the panel heard directly from employer representatives regarding their experience of participating in the programme. This input reflected positively on the programme. In one instance an employer outlined that the success of previous apprentices had led to a significantly larger cohort of 11 apprentices being taken on by that single employer. FIT noted that this pattern of taking on a full cohort had been replicated by five companies over the past 12 months.</p> <p>During the virtual site visit, FIT representatives outlined a substantive effort made to gather and analyse feedback from apprentices and employers during the programme review process and also included this information this within the programme review report. The panel heard directly from employer representatives that had been invited to give input on the programme and offer feedback that would inform the programme review during the virtual site visit. Following these discussions, members of the panel noted that FIT has presented ample evidence of engagement with employers and the development of a curriculum that satisfied industry needs.</p> <p>Following a discussion with programme tutors, the panel noted a caution on acting upon industry requests for changes or adjustments to the programme delivery on an ongoing basis. The panel were of the view that this needed to be balanced with a consideration of individual employer needs versus defined learning outcomes.</p> <p>Given the high proportion of off-the-job learning in the first six months of the programme in particular, the panel sought to understand whether FIT conceived of the programme as an apprenticeship or a training programme. FIT representatives noted that the provider viewed the programme very much as an apprenticeship given that access to the programme is dependent on an employer relationship. The FIT team note that workplace learning is central to the programme concept and objectives.</p>
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**Criterion 4. The programme’s access, transfer and progression arrangements are satisfactory**

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) The information about the programme as well as its procedures for access, transfer and progression are consistent with the procedures described in QQI's policy and criteria for access, transfer and progression in relation to learners for providers of further and higher education and training. Each of its programme-specific criteria is individually and explicitly satisfied<sup>9</sup>.</li> <li>b) Programme information for learners is provided in plain language. This details what the programme expects of learners and what learners can expect of the programme and that there are procedures to ensure its availability in a range of accessible formats.</li> <li>c) If the programme leads to a higher education and training award and its duration is designed for native English speakers, then the level of proficiency in English language must be greater or equal</li> </ul> |
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<sup>9</sup> Each of the detailed criteria set out in the Policy and criteria for access, transfer and progression in relation to learners for providers of further and higher education and training must be addressed in the provider’s evaluation report. The detailed criteria are (QQI, restated 2015) arranged under the headings

- Progression and transfer routes
- Entry arrangements
- Information provision

to B2+ in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR<sup>10</sup>) in order to enable learners to reach the required standard for the QQI award.

- d) The programme specifies the learning (knowledge, skill and competence) that **target learners** are expected to have achieved before they are enrolled in the programme and any other assumptions about enrolled learners (programme participants).
- e) The programme includes suitable procedures and criteria for the **recognition of prior learning** for the purposes of access and, where appropriate, for advanced entry to the programme and for exemptions.
- f) The programme title (the title used to refer to the programme):-
  - (i) Reflects the core *intended programme learning outcomes*, and is consistent with the standards and purposes of the QQI awards to which it leads, the award title(s) and their class(es).
  - (ii) Is learner focused and meaningful to the learners;
  - (iii) Has long-lasting significance.
- g) The programme title is otherwise legitimate; for example, it must comply with applicable statutory, regulatory and professional body requirements.

	<b>Satisfactory? (yes, no, partially)</b>	<b>Comment</b>
<b>Principal Programme</b>	Yes	<p>The panel is satisfied that the access, transfer and progression arrangements are satisfactory.</p> <p>It was noted that FIT apprenticeship programmes are distinct from other apprenticeship programmes in Ireland in that candidates are initially recruited to FIT and are supported through the process of preparing for an apprenticeship, for example, by participating in interviews with employers and being supported to hone their CVs. This facilitates access to the apprenticeship programme for candidates who may otherwise struggle due to gaps in their readiness or additional support needs.</p> <p>Given the high level of pre-apprenticeship support, the panel sought to understand how FIT distinguished between acting as a 'train and place' centre and operating an apprenticeship. FIT representatives confirmed that the risk is borne by the employers and that employers of apprentices are advised to recruit from the pool of eligible candidates that FIT puts forward. It was noted that employers often require apprentices to complete assessment and recruitment processes specific to their companies before taking them on board.</p> <p>The panel queried how the work that FIT is undertaking in DEIS schools and with guidance counsellors was intended to increase the proportion of school leavers coming directly from post primary education. It was noted that a challenge for such learners in comparison to other post leaving certificate options is that there is less certainty for apprentices surrounding commencement dates, which will depend upon finding an employer and employer capacity.</p> <p>The panel queried what occurred if an apprentice resigned from the programme following the initial six months of off-the-job learning during which they had been paid by the employer. That this was a possibility and was not desirable was acknowledged by the employers who met with the panel. However, this was considered to be a</p>

<sup>10</sup> [http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Source/Framework\\_EN.pdf](http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Source/Framework_EN.pdf) (accessed 26/09/2015)

		calculated risk against the investment of the employers in building the talent pool for their industry. FIT representatives acknowledged that there was a mix of small and large employers involved in the apprenticeship programme and that such instances were more potentially damaging to smaller employers. Acknowledging the challenges associated with this, FIT noted that the provider organisation undertook all reasonable measures to mitigate against the situation but had to accept it as a risk.
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**Criterion 5. The programme’s written curriculum is well structured and fit-for-purpose**

- a) The programme is suitably structured and coherently oriented towards the achievement by learners of its intended programme learning outcomes. The programme (including any stages and modules) is integrated in all its dimensions.
- b) In so far as it is feasible the programme provides choice to enrolled learners so that they may align their learning opportunities towards their individual educational and training needs.
- c) Each module and stage is suitably structured and coherently oriented towards the achievement by learners of the intended *programme* learning outcomes.
- d) The objectives and purposes of each of the programme’s elements are clear to learners and to the provider’s staff.
- e) The programme is structured and scheduled realistically based on sound educational and training principles<sup>11</sup>.
- f) The curriculum is comprehensively and systematically documented.
- g) The credit allocated to the programme is consistent with the difference between the entry standard and minimum intended programme learning outcomes.
- h) The credit allocated to each module is consistent with the difference between the module entry standard and minimum intended module learning outcomes.
- i) Elements such as practice placement and work-based phases are provided with the same rigour and attentiveness as other elements.
- j) The programme **duration** (expressed in terms of time from initial enrolment to completion) and its **fulltime equivalent contact time** (expressed in hours) are consistent with the difference between the minimum entry standard and award standard and with the credit allocation.<sup>12</sup>

	<b>Satisfactory? (yes, no, partially)</b>	<b>Comment</b>
<b>Principal Programme</b>	Yes	The panel is satisfied that the programme’s written curriculum is well-structured and fit-for-purpose.  The selection of modules on offer exposes the learners to a range of relevant and current software development techniques and programming paradigms and this is to be welcomed. The mix of modules chosen has been carefully considered and will enhance the employability prospects of learners. Providing learners with the opportunity to undertake work reflecting their personal interests is to be welcomed. The curriculum is

<sup>11</sup> This applies recursively to each and every element of the programme from enrolment through to completion.

In the case of a modular programme, the pool of modules and learning pathway constraints (such as any prerequisite and co-requisite modules) is explicit and appropriate to the intended programme learning outcomes.

<sup>12</sup> If the duration is variable, for example, when advanced entry is available, this should be explained and justified

	<p>sufficiently diverse as to nurture skills and inspire learners to reflect on their skills and interests and become effective in their chosen sphere.</p> <p>It was noted that some adjustments had been made to the revised programme. Specifically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Greater time was devoted SQL in the revised curriculum proposed.</li> <li>• Earlier opportunities were included in the revised curriculum for learners to build their coding skills.</li> </ul> <p>The panel sought to understand whether a focus on GDPR was an element of the programme. It was confirmed that this was included and that it was also broached with learners during induction.</p> <p>The panel queried whether consideration had been given to engaging apprentices in a project or capstone element. FIT representatives noted that this was considered in the programme review process. However, exploration of this revealed that most of the learners were engaged in undertaking projects within their workplaces as part of their on-the-job learning and work.</p> <p>Given the intention to move away from the use of City and Guilds awards and associated learning materials, the panel sought to understand whether learning materials and assessment briefs would be centralised. It was confirmed that this would be the case. The panel also noted that some of the supporting resources identified in the programme documentation appeared somewhat dated. FIT representatives noted that they were mindful of certain resources that may maintain currency over time and noted that enhancing and updating these resources was a next step for FIT. The panel were of the view that learning materials could be enhanced, reviewed and updated. The panel identified recommended special conditions of validation pertaining to this (No. 5 &amp; No. 6). The panel queried what the function of the syllabus review group was. This was confirmed to be the programme review team.</p> <p>It was also noted that learners enrolled through the ETB system would have access free of charge to learning resources and that FIT could usefully further explore this.</p>
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**Criterion 6. There are sufficient qualified and capable programme staff available to implement the programme as planned**

<p>a) The specification of the programme’s staffing requirements (staff required as part of the programme and intrinsic to it) is precise, and rigorous and consistent with the programme and its defined purpose. The specifications include professional and educational qualifications, licences-to practise where applicable, experience and the staff/learner ratio requirements. See also criterion 12 c).</p> <p>b) The programme has an identified complement of staff<sup>13</sup> (or potential staff) who are available, qualified and capable to provide the specified programme in the context of their existing commitments.</p> <p>c) The programme's complement of staff (or potential staff) (those who support learning including any employer-based personnel) are demonstrated to be competent to enable learners to achieve the intended programme learning outcomes and to assess learners’ achievements as required.</p> <p>d) There are arrangements for the performance of the programme’s staff to be managed to ensure continuing capability to fulfil their roles and there are staff development<sup>14</sup> opportunities<sup>15</sup>.</p> <p>e) There are arrangements for programme staff performance to be reviewed and there are mechanisms for encouraging development and for addressing underperformance.</p> <p>f) Where the programme is to be provided by staff not already in post there are arrangements to ensure that the programme will not enrol learners unless a complement of staff meeting the specifications is in post.</p>		
	<b>Satisfactory? (yes, no, partially)</b>	<b>Comment</b>
<b>Principal Programme</b>	Yes	<p>The panel is satisfied that there are sufficient qualified and capable programme staff available to implement the programme as planned.</p> <p>The panel sought to understand how tutors were inducted to their work on the programme and whether team meetings were facilitated for tutors working across the various locations and offerings. FIT representatives confirmed that tutors were inducted to overall processes and quality assurance as well as to the programme learning materials and platforms. It was acknowledged that knowledge sharing among programme tutors working within different ETBs could be enhanced and this was to be a focus moving forward. The panel identified a recommended special condition of validation pertaining to this (No. 3).</p> <p>The panel sought to understand how mentor training was managed and whether this was individual or group. It was noted that this was flexible, being routinely offered on a 1:1 basis but also in groups if required. The panel queried whether a one-hour training session was sufficient for mentor training. FIT representatives noted that a mentor competency profile was established and that in many instances mentors had previous</p>

<sup>13</sup> Staff here means natural persons required as part of the programme and accountable (directly or indirectly) to the programme’s provider, it may for example, include contracted trainers and workplace supervisors.

<sup>14</sup> Development here is for the purpose of ensuring staff remain up-to-date on the discipline itself, on teaching methods or on other relevant skills or knowledge, to the extent that this is necessary to ensure an adequate standard of teaching.

<sup>15</sup> Professional or vocational education and training requires that teaching staff’s professional/vocation knowledge is up to date. Being qualified in a discipline does not necessarily mean that a person is currently competent in that discipline. Therefore, performance management and development of professional and vocational staff needs to focus on professional/vocational competence as well as pedagogical competence. Professional development may include placement in industry, for example. In regulated professions it would be expected that there are a suitable number of registered practitioners involved.

		relevant experience. Additionally, buddy systems were put in place in some workplaces. The panel queried whether FIT had received any requests to develop and provide access to a community of practice from workplace mentors. It was acknowledged that this could be an enhancement for the programme going forward. The panel identified a recommended special condition of validation pertaining to this (No. 4).
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**Criterion 7. There are sufficient physical resources to implement the programme as planned**

<p>a) The specification of the programme’s physical resource requirements (physical resources required as part of the programme and intrinsic to it) is precise, and rigorous and consistent with the programme, its defined purpose and its resource/learner-ratio requirements. See also criterion 12 d).</p> <p>b) The programme has an identified complement of supported physical resources (or potential supported physical resources) that are available in the context of existing commitments on these e.g. availability of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) suitable premises and accommodation for the learning and human needs (comfort, safety, health, wellbeing) of learners (this applies to all of the programme’s learning environments including the workplace learning environment)</li> <li>(ii) suitable information technology and resources (including educational technology and any virtual learning environments provided)</li> <li>(iii) printed and electronic material (including software) for teaching, learning and assessment</li> <li>(iv) suitable specialist equipment (e.g. kitchen, laboratory, workshop, studio) – if applicable</li> <li>(v) technical support</li> <li>(vi) administrative support</li> <li>(vii) company placements/internships – if applicable</li> </ul> <p>c) If versions of the programme are provided in parallel at more than one location each independently meets the location-sensitive validation criteria for each location (for example staffing, resources and the learning environment).</p> <p>d) There is a five-year plan for the programme. It should address</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) Planned intake (first five years) and</li> <li>(ii) The total costs and income over the five years based on the planned intake.</li> </ul> <p>e) The programme includes controls to ensure entitlement to use the property (including intellectual property, premises, materials and equipment) required.</p>		
	<b>Satisfactory? (yes, no, partially)</b>	<b>Comment</b>
<b>Principal Programme</b>	Yes	<p>The panel is satisfied that there are sufficient physical resources to implement the programme as planned.</p> <p>Throughout the virtual site visit, the panel engaged directly with staff involved in technical and administrative support as well as those whose work focused on supporting learners in the workplace. The programme is delivered via ETBs with appropriate physical resources.</p>

**Criterion 8. The learning environment is consistent with the needs of the programme's learners**

<p>a) The programme's physical, social, cultural and intellectual environment (recognising that the environment may, for example, be partly virtual or involve the workplace) including resources and support systems are consistent with the intended programme learning outcomes.</p> <p>b) Learners can interact with, and are supported by, others in the programme's learning environments including peer learners, teachers, and where applicable supervisors, practitioners and mentors.</p> <p>c) The programme includes arrangements to ensure that the parts of the programme that occur in the workplace are subject to the same rigours as any other part of the programme while having regard to the different nature of the workplace.</p>		
	<p><b>Satisfactory?</b> (yes, no, partially)</p>	<p><b>Comment</b></p>
<p><b>Principal Programme</b></p>	<p>Yes</p>	<p>The panel is satisfied that the learning environment is consistent with the needs of the programme's learners.</p> <p>The panel queried how FIT would become aware if an apprentice was experiencing issues or challenges in the on-the-job component of their learning. FIT noted that the appointment of the workplace learning officer had facilitated improvement in FIT's capacity to identify issues promptly and respond to them. The workplace learning officer links in with both apprentices and mentors on a regular basis after the on-the-job component of the apprenticeship commences, and this facilitates ongoing visibility of the quality of the on the job learning experience of apprentices. Poor performance of apprentices is considered holistically, with consideration of elements including attendance. FIT receives a report from each tutor on a weekly basis.</p> <p>The panel also sought to understand how FIT learners were introduced to their mentors and how the relationships were managed. The panel heard from current FIT learners that they had had positive experiences with their mentors. The panel queried how apprentices connected with their mentors during their time in the college. The panel heard that in some instances learners were connected via WhatsApp groups, in other instances learners were introduced to their mentors after they commenced the on-the-job component of the apprenticeship. FIT representatives confirmed that in response to feedback on this, introductions to workplace mentors are now provided early in the programme and during the first semester. Overall, the learners that met with the panel expressed a high level of satisfaction with their mentor relationships.</p> <p>The panel heard from employer representatives that apprentices were well supported in the workplace. Practices outlined included the assignment of buddies as well as mentors and the use of group and individual support mechanisms.</p> <p>The panel were of the view that these were good examples of very positive practices and experiences. However, the panel felt that the one hour of mentor training at FIT could be further developed and have identified a recommendation pertaining to this (No.4). This has also been discussed in relation to criterion 6.</p>

Criterion 9. **There are sound teaching and learning strategies**

<p>a) The teaching strategies support achievement of the intended programme/module learning outcomes.</p> <p>b) The programme provides authentic learning opportunities to enable learners to achieve the intended programme learning outcomes.</p> <p>c) The programme enables enrolled learners to attain (if reasonably diligent) the minimum intended programme learning outcomes reliably and efficiently (in terms of overall learner effort and a reasonably balanced workload).</p> <p>d) Learning is monitored/supervised.</p> <p>e) Individualised guidance, support<sup>16</sup> and timely formative feedback is regularly provided to enrolled learners as they progress within the programme.</p>		
	<p><b>Satisfactory? (yes, no, partially)</b></p>	<p><b>Comment</b></p>
<p><b>Principal Programme</b></p>	<p>Yes</p>	<p>The panel is satisfied that there are sound teaching and learning strategies in place to support the delivery of the programme.</p> <p>The panel heard from current learners that there were some inconsistencies in delivery style and the way particular modules were managed and delivered that were at times challenging to adjust to. Learners shared that the on-the-job learning did not always align directly to the off the job learning components, noting variability in relation to this across employers.</p> <p>The panel noted that within the programme proposed for validation, the percentage of the time spent on-the-job had been increased to approximately 70%. It was noted that FIT is engaging in discussions with the civil service regarding the possibility of managing this in a block release rather than day release manner and that some flexible scheduling that does not impact the overall amount of time spent on each component is anticipated.</p> <p>The panel observed that the teaching, learning and assessment strategy was considered to be evolving. This was acknowledged to be the case by FIT and to be a dynamic process that had been somewhat influenced by the experience of pivoting online during the Covid-19 pandemic.</p>

<sup>16</sup> Support and feedback concerns anything material to learning in the context of the programme. For the avoidance of doubt it includes among other things any course-related language, literacy and numeracy support.

Criterion 10. **There are sound assessment strategies**

<p>a) All assessment is undertaken consistently with <i>Assessment Guidelines, Conventions and Protocols for Programmes Leading to QQI Awards</i><sup>17</sup></p> <p>b) The programme's assessment procedures interface effectively with the provider's QQI approved quality assurance procedures.</p> <p>c) The programme includes specific procedures that are fair and consistent for the assessment of enrolled learners to ensure the minimum intended programme/module learning outcomes are acquired by all who successfully complete the programme.<sup>18</sup></p> <p>d) The programme includes formative assessment to support learning.</p> <p>e) There is a satisfactory written <b>programme assessment strategy</b> for the programme as a whole and there are satisfactory module assessment strategies for any of its constituent modules.<sup>19</sup></p> <p>f) Sample assessment instruments, tasks, marking schemes and related evidence have been provided for each award-stage assessment and indicate that the assessment is likely to be valid and reliable.</p> <p>g) There are sound procedures for the moderation of summative assessment results.</p> <p>h) The provider only puts forward an enrolled learner for certification for a particular award for which a programme has been validated if they have been specifically assessed against the standard for that award.<sup>20</sup></p>		
	<b>Satisfactory? (yes, no, partially)</b>	<b>Comment</b>
<b>Principal Programme</b>	Yes	<p>The panel queried how the assessment strategy within the taught modules functioned to develop applied, transferable skills and reflect experiential learning.</p> <p>The panel heard from learners that although the speed of feedback provided was somewhat variable, this was typically provided within a sufficient window. The panel noted that the continued development of FIT's Teaching, Learning and Assessment strategy could usefully incorporate feedback and formative feedback in future iterations.</p> <p>FIT appoints the external examiners and establishes the examination board for the programme, with delivering ETBs contributing to the process.</p> <p>The panel queried who writes the assessments for the programme. FIT confirmed that these are created by subject matter experts and tutors and that FIT holds the assessment. Tutors have access to the assessment from the outset of a module and some localised changes are allowed in certain circumstances, for example, the cases used.</p>

<sup>17</sup> See the section on transitional arrangements.

<sup>18</sup> This assumes the minimum intended programme/module learning outcomes are consistent with the applicable awards standards.

<sup>19</sup> The programme assessment strategy is addressed in the Assessment Guidelines, Conventions and Protocols for Programmes Leading to QQI Awards. See the section on transitional arrangements.

<sup>20</sup> If the award is a QQI CAS compound award it is not necessarily sufficient that the learner has achieved all the components specified in the certification requirements unless at least one of those components is a capstone component (i.e. designed to test the compound learning outcomes).

**Criterion 11. Learners enrolled on the programme are well informed, guided and cared for**

<p>a) There are arrangements to ensure that each enrolled learner is fully informed in a timely manner about the programme including the schedule of activities and assessments.</p> <p>b) Information is provided about learner supports that are available to learners enrolled on the programme.</p> <p>c) Specific information is provided to learners enrolled on the programme about any programme-specific appeals and complaints procedures.</p> <p>d) If the programme is modular, it includes arrangements for the provision of effective guidance services for learners on the selection of appropriate learning pathways.</p> <p>e) The programme takes into account and accommodates to the differences between enrolled learners, for example, in terms of their prior learning, maturity, and capabilities.</p> <p>f) There are arrangements to ensure that learners enrolled on the programme are supervised and individualised support and due care is targeted at those who need it.</p> <p>g) The programme provides supports for enrolled learners who have special education and training needs.</p> <p>h) The programme makes reasonable accommodations for learners with disabilities<sup>21</sup>.</p> <p>i) If the programme aims to enrol international students it complies with the <i>Code of Practice for Provision of Programmes to International Students</i><sup>22</sup> and there are appropriate in-service supports in areas such as English language, learning skills, information technology skills and such like, to address the particular needs of international learners and enable such learners to successfully participate in the programme.</p> <p>j) The programme's learners will be well cared for and safe while participating in the programme, (e.g. while at the provider's premises or those of any collaborators involved in provision, the programme's locations of provision including any workplace locations or practice-placement locations).</p>		
	<b>Satisfactory? (yes, no, partially)</b>	<b>Comment</b>
<b>Principal Programme</b>	Yes	<p>The panel is satisfied that learners enrolled on the programme are well informed, guided and cared for.</p> <p>The panel heard that supports for apprentices while they are on the job have been enhanced through the role of the onboarding and wellbeing officer who undertakes regular checks with learners who have commenced their apprenticeships. Learners are provided with a transition to the workplace workshop prior to progressing to their on-the-job learning after the first semester has been completed.</p> <p>It was noted that the early intensive engagement with apprentices and regular provision of attendance information from tutors enables FIT to have a good ongoing visibility of engagement and to make early interventions where required.</p> <p>The panel heard from current FIT learners about their onboarding and induction process, which included provision of a learner handbook and an overview of the modules. Learners noted that FIT representatives regularly reach out to learners and that lines of communication are clear if they or their peers are experiencing issues or problems.</p>

<sup>21</sup> For more information on making reasonable accommodations see [www.AHEAD.ie](http://www.AHEAD.ie) and QQI's Policies, Actions and Procedures for Access, Transfer and Progression for Learners (QQI, restated 2015).

<sup>22</sup> See Code of Practice for Provision of Programmes to International Students (QQI, 2015)

**Criterion 12. The programme is well managed**

- a) The programme includes intrinsic governance, quality assurance, learner assessment, and access, transfer and progression procedures that functionally interface with the provider’s general or institutional procedures.
- b) The programme interfaces effectively with the provider’s QQI approved quality assurance procedures. Any proposed incremental changes to the provider’s QA procedures required by the programme or programme-specific QA procedures have been developed having regard to QQI’s statutory QA guidelines. If the QA procedures allow the provider to approve the centres within the provider that may provide the programme, the procedures and criteria for this should be fit-for-purpose of identifying which centres are suited to provide the programme and which are not.
- c) There are explicit and suitable programme-specific criteria for selecting persons who meet the programme’s staffing requirements and can be added to the programme’s complement of staff.
- d) There are explicit and suitable programme-specific criteria for selecting physical resources that meet the programmes physical resource requirements and can be added to the programme’s complement of supported physical resources.
- e) Quality assurance<sup>23</sup> is intrinsic to the programme’s maintenance arrangements and addresses all aspects highlighted by the validation criteria.
- f) The programme-specific quality assurance arrangements are consistent with QQI’s statutory QA guidelines and use continually monitored completion rates and other sources of information that may provide insight into the quality and standards achieved.
- g) The programme operation and management arrangements are coherently documented and suitable.
- h) There are sound procedures for interface with QQI certification.

	<b>Satisfactory? (yes, no, partially)</b>	<b>Comment</b>
<b>Principal Programme</b>	Yes	<p>The panel is satisfied that the programme is well managed.</p> <p>It was noted that in line with Statutory Guidelines for Providers of Apprenticeship Programmes all employers of apprentices have signed a Memorandum of Understanding with FIT that clearly outlines obligations and expectations for all parties.</p> <p>The panel sought to understand how the governance structures of FIT interacted with those of the ETB collaborating providers. For example, how the work of the Academic Council at FIT interacted with the FET Quality Assurance Council. It was confirmed that the FIT structures for governance of the programme and oversight of the quality assurance procedures took precedence. Within this the panel explored how specific processes were managed, including results approval. It was confirmed that all ETBs involved adopted the quality assurance procedures of FIT in their management of the programme.</p> <p>The panel sought to understand how the team at FIT ensured that the quality of the learning experience was equivalent across the country. It was noted that metrics were reviewed weekly for key indicators such as assessments and attendance and formal reporting processes are in place.</p> <p>The class representative system was also noted to be a useful monitoring mechanism. The onboarding and wellbeing officer meets class representatives quarterly.</p>

<sup>23</sup> See also QQI’s Policy on Monitoring (QQI, 2014)

## Part 3. Overall recommendation to QQI

### 3.1 Principal programme:

Select one	
	Satisfactory (meaning that it recommends that QQI can be satisfied in the context of unit 2.3) of Core policies and criteria for the validation by QQI of programmes of education and training;
<b>X</b>	Satisfactory subject to proposed special conditions (specified with timescale for compliance for each condition; these may include proposed pre-validation conditions i.e. proposed ( <b>minor</b> ) things to be done to a programme that almost fully meets the validation criteria before QQI makes a determination);
	Not satisfactory.

#### Reasons for the overall recommendation

The panel is of the view that the programme presented by FIT has largely satisfied the validation criteria. Discrete conditions have been identified that the panel is confident FIT can address appropriately.

#### Commendations

The panel commends FIT on:

- The quality of the self-evaluation and reflection undertaken by the team at FIT within the programme review report;
- The strong emphasis on inclusion and access throughout all areas of programme activity.

#### Special Conditions of Validation (directive and with timescale for compliance)

1. Review the Minimum Intended Module Learning Outcomes (MIMLOs) presented within the programmes to present a consistent number of these per module. Within this:
  - Work to reduce the overall number of MIMLOs per module to 5 – 6 at most
  - Work to articulate MIMLOs at a suitable level of generality and avoid being overly granular.
2. Revise the presentation of hours of learner effort and credits within the documentation to ensure these tally consistently and are appropriately balanced across the duration of the programme.
3. Further develop and enhance practices for the induction of new tutors and the ongoing support and development of existing tutors working across multiple locations. Within this:
  - Establish a Community of Practice for tutors to facilitate peer learning and knowledge exchange;
  - Emphasize the use of interactive and innovative pedagogies for the blended and online learning environment.
4. Further develop current practices at FIT for workplace mentor training. Within this:
  - Increase the duration of the training that is provided;

- Ensure ample opportunity is provided for interaction with other and potentially more experienced mentors;
  - Endeavour to facilitate the training in groups wherever possible to maximise peer learning and knowledge exchange opportunities and foster a community of practice.
5. Develop and implement minimum quality standards for digital learning materials and assessments used within the apprenticeship programme. Within this:
    - Give consideration to consistent style and branding;
    - Give consideration to accessibility;
    - Give consideration to the inclusion of interaction and activity points within didactic material.
  6. Review the learning resources and supporting materials listed within the documentation with a view to ensuring these are consistently up to date.

## Summary of recommended special conditions of validation

As per the previous section:

1. Review the Minimum Intended Module Learning Outcomes (MIMLOs) presented within the programmes to present a consistent number of these per module. Within this:
  - Work to reduce the overall number of MIMLOs per module to 5 – 6 at most
  - Work to articulate MIMLOs at a suitable level of generality and avoid being overly granular
2. Revise the presentation of hours of learner effort and credits within the documentation to ensure these tally consistently and are appropriately balanced across the duration of the programme.
3. Further develop and enhance practices for the induction of new tutors and the ongoing support and development of existing tutors working across multiple locations. Within this:
  - Establish a Community of Practice for tutors to facilitate peer learning and knowledge exchange;
  - Emphasize the use of interactive and innovative pedagogies for the blended and online learning environment.
4. Further develop current practices at FIT for workplace mentor training. Within this:
  - Increase the duration of the training that is provided;
  - Ensure ample opportunity is provided for interaction with other and potentially more experienced mentors;
  - Endeavour to facilitate the training in groups wherever possible to maximise peer learning and knowledge exchange opportunities and foster a community of practice.
5. Develop and implement minimum quality standards for digital learning materials and assessments used within the apprenticeship programme. Within this:
  - Give consideration to consistent style and branding;
  - Give consideration to accessibility;

- Give consideration to the inclusion of interaction and activity points within didactic material.
6. Review the learning resources and supporting materials listed within the documentation with a view to ensuring these are consistently up to date.

### Summary of recommendations to the provider

There are no recommendations to the provider.

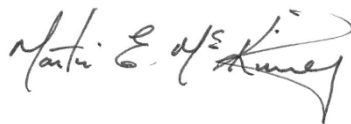
### Declarations of Evaluators' Interests

This report has been agreed by the evaluation panel and is signed on their behalf by the chairperson.

Panel chairperson: Professor Martin McKinney

Date: 9 January, 2023

Signed:



### 3.2 Disclaimer

The Report of the External Review Panel contains no assurances, warranties or representations express or implied, regarding the aforesaid issues, or any other issues outside the Terms of Reference.

While QQI has endeavoured to ensure that the information contained in the Report is correct, complete and up-to-date, any reliance placed on such information is strictly at the reader's own risk, and in no event will QQI be liable for any loss or damage (including without limitation, indirect or consequential loss or damage) arising from, or in connection with, the use of the information contained in the Report of the External Evaluation Panel.

Part 4. Proposed programme schedules

Principal Programme	Award Class	Award Level	Award Credits	Award Title						
Advanced Certificate in Computer Programming <i>Software Development Associate</i>	Major	L	200 FET	Advanced Certificate in Computer Programming						
Programme Module Number and Title (add / delete rows as required. Use numbering to indicate sequence if relevant)	M / O	On / Off the Job	Mode/s of delivery	Module credits	Weeks	Total Apprenticeship Effort Module (hours)		Assessment Techniques and Weightings		
						Directed	Self-Directed	Technique	Weighting	Assessment Due
PROGRAMME ORIENTATION	M	OFF	N/A		1	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Module End
SD-TA-001 <i>Software Development &amp; Design Fundamentals</i>	M	OFF	Off-the-Job	15	2-4	94.5	55.5	Assignment <i>Four distinct assessed tasks</i>	100%	Module End
SD-TA-002 <i>Customer Support Provision for the ICT Professional</i>	M	OFF	Off-the-Job	05	5	31.5	18.5	Assignment <i>Seven distinct assessed tasks</i>	100%	Module End
SD-TA-003 <i>Web Development</i>	M	OFF	Off-the-Job	15	6-8	94.5	55.5	Portfolio <i>Two distinct tasks</i>	100%	Module End
SD-TA-004 <i>Software Development Using SQL</i>	M	OFF	Off-the-Job	10	9-10	63	37	Assignment <i>Three distinct assessed tasks</i>	100%	Module End
SD-TA-005 <i>Data &amp; Cyber Security</i>	M	OFF	Off-the-Job	5	11	31.5	18.5	Assignment <i>Eight distinct assessed tasks</i>	100%	Module End
SD-TA-006 <i>Install, Configure &amp; Upgrade ICT Software</i>	M	OFF	Off-the-Job	5	12	31.5	18.5	Assignment <i>Four distinct assessed tasks</i>	100%	Module End
SD-TA-007 <i>Object Oriented Programming</i>	M	OFF	Off-the-Job	15	13-14	63	37	Assignment <i>Four distinct assessed tasks</i>	100%	Module End

SD-TA-008 Project Management & Agile Systems of Work	M	OFF	Off-the-Job	10	15-16	63	37	Assignment Four distinct assessed tasks	100%	Module End
SD-TA-009 Event Driven Programming	M	OFF	Off-the-Job	10	17-18	63	37	Assignment Three distinct assessed tasks	100%	Module End
SD-TA-010 Procedural Programming	M	OFF	Off-the-Job	10	19-20	63	37	Assignment Four distinct assessed tasks	100%	Module End
SD-TA-011 Quality Assurance & Software Testing	M	OFF	Off-the-Job	05	23-27 Monday	31.5	18.5	Assignment Four distinct assessed tasks	100%	Module End
SD-TA-012 Systems Development	M	OFF	Off-the-Job	10	28-37 Monday	63	37	Assignment Four distinct assessed tasks	100%	Module End
SD-TA-013 Introduction to Cloud Development Practice	M	OFF	Off-the-Job	10	Year 1*	63	37	Assignment Three distinct assessed tasks	100%	Module End
SD-TA-014 Contemporary Programming Practice	M	OFF	Off-the-Job	15	Year 2*	94.5	55.5	Assignment Three distinct assessed tasks	100%	Module End
SD-TA-015 Applied Learning in the Workplace Year 1	M	ON	On-the-Job	25**	Year 1*	525	0	Online Logbook Tasks	100%	Various Points
SD-TA-016 Applied Learning in the Workplace Year 2	M	ON	On-the-Job	40**	Year 2*	1672	0	Online Logbook Tasks	100%	Various Points

*\*Module SD-TA-013, 014, 015 and 016 will be scheduled for delivery on a cohort intake-to-intake basis in year 1 and year 2, considering the required total apprentice hours of effort.*

*\*\*FET credits associated with modules SD-TA-015 (25 FET credits/250hrs) and 016 (40 FET credits/400hrs) comprise activity in the workplace undertaken through the completion of these specific modules. In addition, remaining hours in the workplace are utilised to make up authentic self-directed learning hours noted against modules SD-TA-001, 002, 003, 004, 005, 006, 007, 008, 009, 010, 011, 012, 013 and 015.*