Quality Assurance Handbook PART A1

POLICY No.2: Quality assurance, monitoring, and enhancement policy

2. Purpose of policy

Policy No.2 summarises FIT's approach to the management of Tech Apprenticeship programmes, noting the associated quality assurance policies regarding monitoring and enhancement activity and the overarching management of academic quality and work-based learning. This policy provides all stakeholders with an overview of FIT's commitment and approach to ensuring quality in the provision of Tech Apprenticeships, whether delivered in a face-to-face setting or via a blended mode.

2.1 Policy scope

The scope of this policy is to provide an overview of the underlying principles of quality assurance infrastructure developed and approved for use by all Tech Apprenticeship stakeholders. In addition, this policy notes the requirement for all relevant stakeholders to have access to concise and transparent documentation, policies, and aligned procedures.

2.2 Overarching considerations

FIT takes primary responsibility for a provider-owned[1] view of quality assurance in the delivery of Tech Apprenticeships and the provision and assurance of quality educational programmes. FIT recognises the breadth of institutional actions, approvals, policies, and processes required to manage broad provision. The provision includes traditional face-to-face delivery and blended-learning provision[2], particularly relating to various technologies that provide access to digital learning resources. FIT is committed to ensuring that our quality assurance system makes appropriate use of external persons, independent of FIT and the broader FIT ecosystem, qualified to make national and international comparisons.

2.3 Policy statement

It is the policy of FIT to design, implement and maintain a governance system that quality assures all aspects of our training provision as a Coordinating Provider for Tech Apprenticeship training and that provides for the separation of responsibilities between those who produce or develop material and those who approve it. Our governance system reflects our mission, defines the policies and associated procedures that ensure all stakeholders understand all quality processes, and provides comprehensive, structured guidance on how the governance system will operate. The system incorporates ongoing formative self-monitoring and periodic summative self-evaluation to ensure a continuing focus on process improvement and enhancement, particularly relating to adopting new technologies to enhance learning.

FIT will ensure that our staff, apprentices, and those to whom we delegate programme activities recognise and accept their responsibility for maintaining quality standards and excellence. In addition, FIT will provide sufficient resources to enable the system of governance to operate efficiently and effectively. Changes to quality assurance policies and

[1] Policy on Quality Assurance Guidelines (QQI, 2016). In accordance with Section 4.4.1, The Provider-Owner QA Principle.
[2] Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Blended and Fully Online Learning Programmes (QQI, 2023/V3).

procedures, where FIT can be reasonably expected to make those changes, are subject to approval and ratification by FIT's Academic Council.

This policy notes the broad areas in which stand-alone policies determine how various governance activities operate. However, these policies are informed by legislation, the 2012 Education and Training Act, statutory apprenticeship legislation, and QQI policies, including but not limited to QQI Core Policies and Criteria for the Validation of Programmes of Education and Training (QQI, 2017), Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines (QQI, 2016), Topic Specific Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Statutory Apprenticeship Programmes (QQI, 2016), Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Blended and Fully Online Learning Programmes (QQI, 2023).

FIT notes that the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) were endorsed by the Bologna follow-up group in September 2014 and adopted by the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) in May 2015[3].

Whereas FIT understands that ESG guidelines pertain to programmes of Higher Education and Training, our quality assurance system, through the provision of Further Education and Training technical apprenticeship programmes, follows the above-mentioned QQI guidelines, which broadly reflect the ESG Guidelines.

Accordingly, and with a view to ensuring best practice in the provision of Tech Apprenticeships and in meeting essential QQI requirements, FIT ensures that policy is formed and documented in several areas, including:

- Policy for quality assurance;
- Programmes of education and training;
- Staff recruitment, management, and development;
- Teaching and learning, including blended learning;

[3] http://www.enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/ESG_2015.pdf

- Assessment of apprentices/learners[4];
- Supports for learners;
- Information and data management;
- Public information;
- Other parties involved in education and training;
- Self-evaluation, monitoring, and review; and
- Quality enhancement.

2.3.1 Documented approach to quality

FIT documents the quality assurance system comprehensively and transparently to facilitate access by all stakeholders to necessary information as required, in usable formats. Our policies and procedures form an integral part of our strategic management. They are fit for purpose and are informed by the QQI quality assurance guidelines and principles of equality, innovation and accommodation. All programme activity delegated or sub-contracted to other providers will be managed by means of dedicated, documented control procedures. All policy and procedure documents will be periodically reviewed to ensure continuing efficacy and compliance with relevant guidelines and applicable legislation.

2.3.2 Programmes of education and training

FIT provides technical apprenticeship programmes consistent with our mission to enhance access to employment for marginalised job seekers and those at risk of long-term unemployment, while also providing access to all applicants who meet the entry requirements. In addition, FIT promotes and makes available wide-ranging supports to facilitate access for those with a physical or hidden disability and those who are neurodiverse. FIT strives to serve the ICT sector by identifying current and future industry

[4] The terms 'apprentice' and 'learner' are interchangeable. However, the FIT quality assurance mostly utilises the term 'apprentice' to identify an active and enrolled individual.

needs through inclusive internal and external consultation, designing and reviewing proposed programmes, and planning and professionally delivering our programmes. FIT will underpin the quality of programme activity by rigorous administrative processes, the provision of suitable facility and training resources, ongoing programme review, vigilant oversight of our training partners, and adherence to good health and safety practices. FIT will facilitate candidates' access to, and successful participation in, our programmes, and, where appropriate, will provide structured placement opportunities. FIT will implement suitable information provision and candidate selection processes based on transparency, consistency and fairness. In instances where transfer and progression or recognition of prior learning (RPL) opportunities exist, FIT will make apprentices fully aware of such opportunities and assist them in availing of them.

2.3.3 Staff recruitment, management and development

FIT takes responsibility for the quality of its staff and for providing them with all the support they require to perform their role effectively. FIT will ensure that delivery and development staff are qualified, competent, empathetic to apprentices/learners, and professional in the performance of their respective roles. To this end, FIT will recruit and engage qualified staff through documented, transparent, equitable and ethical selection processes. FIT will provide induction and ongoing in-service training and development to our staff to help them to maintain and enhance their skills. FIT will monitor the performance of sub-contracted staff to ensure continuing compliance with appropriate pedagogical and technical standards.

2.3.4 Teaching and learning, including blended learning

It is the policy of FIT to monitor the learning experience on an ongoing basis. FIT will ensure that the content of our programmes reflects relevant advances in the field and that the delivery methodology, including delivery formats, is inclusive and takes account of

national and international best practices[5]. FIT will promote an ethos of mutual respect between apprentices and their tutors and will ensure that any issues that may arise will be addressed fairly and consistently by transparent and appropriate complaints and appeals procedures. FIT will ensure that learning environments are conducive to the achievement of the programme and module learning outcomes, whether provided in-house, through training delivery partners, or in workplace settings. This commitment applies to physical resources such as premises and equipment, support services, tutoring and supervision, and broader needs such as access to online learning resources, where applicable.

2.3.5 Assessment of apprentices

The fair and consistent assessment of apprentices is a crucial cornerstone of FIT quality assurance policy. It ensures that all assessment of learner achievement is reliable, valid, and conducted professionally by qualified staff in accordance with documented assessment procedures notified in advance to enrolled apprentices. FIT will ensure the proper development of assessment instruments and marking schemes that are consistent with the award standards to which they apply. FIT will ensure that communication and administration of the assessment, including providing timely feedback, is unambiguous and useful to apprentices in enabling them to understand their module-level progress. FIT will ensure that records of learner achievement are recorded securely and accurately in a manner that facilitates easy retrieval for the purposes of information provision, certification and data analysis. FIT will ensure that the assessment review takes place periodically and takes account of feedback from key stakeholders such as tutors, learners and employers.

[5] FIT employs the use of the Conversational framework: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oZzlNdyuaF0

2.3.6 Supports for candidates and enrolled apprentices

FIT's policy is to ensure that the resources available to learners is constantly monitored for adequacy and that required changes are made promptly. FIT will ensure that the process of providing support to candidates is efficient, including the provision of broader support to support a candidate's application in cases of disability, etc. For those enrolled in a Tech Apprenticeship programme, access to information and support is matched to the needs of the award standard.

Apprentices are advised of available supports; these supports are easily accessible and fit for purpose, and feedback by apprentices on supports being provided and other matters of concern to them is regularly solicited and acted upon. FIT will ensure that the wellbeing of apprentices in terms of pastoral care, employment support, career guidance, administrative and technical services, reasonable accommodations, and information provision is central to the provision of FIT's programmes.

2.3.7 Information and data management

It is the policy of FIT to implement and maintain a secure and robust management information system to gather, store, analyse and report on programme and learner data for the purposes of data provision and process improvement. FIT will identify key performance indicators such as rates of satisfaction, completion, certification, progression, etc., and will measure the performance of our programmes against these indicators regularly. FIT will put appropriate controls in place to comply with data protection and freedom of information legislation and will establish retention periods for learner data. FIT will endeavour, across all FIT's mechanisms and infrastructure for storing information on a data subject/natural person, to follow the requirements of the General Data Protection Regulation (EU, GDPR 2018).

2.3.8 Public information

FIT complies with the provisions of the Qualifications And Quality Assurance (Education And Training) Act 2012 concerning the information provided to enrolled apprentices [Section 67], the preparation of quality assurance procedures, and the publication of self-evaluation reports [Section 28], and the publication of draft quality assurance procedures "in such form and manner (including on the internet) as the Authority [QQI] directs and shall provide a copy of the procedures as published to the Authority." [Section 30].

FIT will provide apprentices with details of all relevant programmes and awards including the name of the awarding body, the title of the award, whether it is recognised on the National Framework of Qualifications, and if so, regarding which award type and level. FIT will also provide details of any relevant access, transfer or progression (ATP) procedures and provisions for the protection of enrolled learners (where applicable). [Section 67]. FIT will furnish draft procedures for approval by QQI and, if they are approved, will publish the draft procedures in the form and manner directed by QQI. [Section 30]. FIT will put procedures in writing for quality assurance to establish, ascertain, maintain and improve the quality of education, training, research and related services that it we provide, while also evaluating our services and publish a report of that self-evaluation. [Section 28].

2.3.9 Other parties involved in education and training

It is the policy of FIT to collaborate with reputable national and international awarding or accreditation bodies and organisations, as well as second providers and external independent experts while ensuring that all aspects of such relationships are subjected to internal and external quality assurance. FIT will collaborate where relevant and appropriate with QQI, City and Guilds, and quality-assured industry certification providers such as Microsoft, Google, IBM, Accenture and Oracle to enhance training and employment opportunities for our learners. FIT will also collaborate with reputable training delivery partners, and such collaborations will be managed through Memoranda of Agreement and compliance conditions. In addition, FIT will engage external independent

expertise, as well as its own internal expertise in governance panels and boards (such as the Examinations Board and Academic Council). All Panels and key individuals will have documented Terms of Reference and, where appropriate, Contracts of Employment. FIT will, from time to time, publish details of our current partnerships on our website.

2.3.10 Self-evaluation, monitoring and review

It is the policy of FIT to review, evaluate, and report on our provision of training services, including the identification and maintenance of effective practice and the implementation and documentation of monitoring and service improvement planning. FIT will gather evidence for the purpose of continuing internal and external self-monitoring, and periodic enterprise-wide self-evaluation. This evidence will be benchmarked against defined performance criteria such as satisfaction ratings, certification rates, progression to employment or further/higher education, and non-completion rates, etc., to ensure ongoing programme relevance and consistency of provision. FIT will develop improvement plans with identified activities, completion dates, success criteria, and assigned responsibilities based on the self-monitoring and self-evaluation processes. FIT will comply with the self-monitoring and self-evaluation reporting requirements specified by awarding, accreditation, and regulatory bodies and all other agencies or organisations to which FIT is obliged to report.

2.3.11 Quality enhancement

The quality assurance system that governs the provision of Tech Apprenticeship programmes adheres to a strict regime of monitoring and improvement. While FIT is cognisant of all appliance regulations, ongoing enhancement activity continually improves apprentices' learning experience. This critical process draws on diverse sets of information to inform a coherent response that enhances quality assurance policies and procedures at local and institutional levels.

2.4. List of Tech Apprenticeship policies

Underpinning the FIT approach to quality and enhancement are the policies and procedures included in the Quality Assurance Handbook. The current list of policies is as follows:

QAH Pol No.1 Policy and Procedure Development for TAs

QAH Pol No.2 QA, Monitoring and Enhancement Policy

QAH Pol No.3 Technology Enhanced Learning Policy—Supporting Blended Delivery Modes

QAH Pol No.4 Access, Transfer and Progression Policy

QAH Pol No.5 Apprentice Code of Conduct Policy

QAH Pol No.6 Academic Impropriety and Assessment Malpractice policy

QAH Pol No.7 Candidate and Apprentice Supports Policy

QAH Pol No.8 Grievances, Complaints and Appeals Handling Policy

QAH Pol No.9 Apprentice Attendance and Engagement Policy

QAH Pol No. 10 PMC and Disciplinary Policy

QAH Pol No.11 Apprentice Analytics and Experience Policy

QAH Pol No.12 Assessment Submission and Resubmission Policy

QAH Pol No.13 Access, Retention and Destruction of Assessment Documentation Policy

QAH Pol No.14 Virtual Classroom Policy

QAH Pol No.15 Digital Learning Resources Policy

QAH POL No.16 Intellectual Property and Copyright Policy

QAH POL No.17 Tutor Recording Policy

QAH POL No.18 Results Approval and Classification of Awards Policy

QAH POL No.19 Staff and Stakeholder Continuous Development Policy

QAH POL No.20 Academic Risk Management Policy

QAH POL No.21 Invigilation and Proctoring Policy

QAH POL No.22 Acceptable AI Tools Policy

QAH POL No.23 Programme Development Policy.

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