Quality Assurance Handbook PART A1

POLICY No.14: Virtual classroom policy

14. Purpose of policy

This policy explains FIT's minimum expectations for tutors and delivering partners while utilising virtual classrooms to provide off-the-job training to enrolled Tech Apprentices.

14.1 Policy scope

Tutors should access this policy along with apprentices, FIT staff, Approved Delivery Partners[1], and broader regulatory and accreditor stakeholders where appropriate. This policy is based on proven strategies that promote engagement in programme materials in instances where Tech Apprenticeships off-the-job modules are delivered using virtual classrooms, associated pedagogical approaches, and using associated technologies.

14.2 Overarching considerations

This policy aims to ensure the equivalence between fully onsite in-person delivery arrangements and those delivered through a blended format that encompass periods of online learning via FIT's virtual classroom. This policy focuses on sound principles that ensure appropriate consideration of module design, delivery and support activities.

[1] Typically an Education and Training Board.

FIT's use of virtual classroom training environments allows for a significant level of flexibility for regional employers to enrol apprentices from numerous geographic locations. This technology is a cornerstone of an evolving strategic approach to ensure Tech Apprenticeships remain accessible in developing solutions that make provision for programmes that have a national reach. Although FIT notes a variety of positive uses that justify the adoption of blended synchronous formats, FIT also appreciates the acute and possibly negative impacts should technology not be utilised in FIT's intended fashion or in instances where FIT does not sanction the platform being used. Consequently, FIT anticipates a regimen of ongoing and rigorous monitoring of key programme outcome metrics. At the outset of training, all candidates will be informed of any intended use by FIT of virtual classrooms with respect to the intake/class group they will participate in, ensuring ample time for apprentices to make appropriate preparations for programme participation.

14.3 Policy statement

With regard to virtual classrooms, tutors will ensure the posting of a concise daily/weekly schedule to the apprentices via FIT's LMS. The schedule will provide an overview of the various intended live sessions, including the scheduled start and finish times, while also making provision for the allocation of one-to-one or online group activities for the duration of the training day. In addition, tutors will establish a proactive presence in the online environment.

The technology central to FIT's LMS will facilitate a mechanism for private conversation between the tutor and apprentices, where appropriate, to facilitate the private dissemination of formative and summative feedback, while also making provision for discussion regarding personal mitigating circumstances as they arise. In addition, the tutor will ensure that apprentices are aware of response times regarding written email requests. Although this policy details minimum expectations of the virtual classroom environment, there is a good deal of overlap between it and the overarching FIT Teaching, Learning, and Assessment

Strategy. Specifically, the strategy acknowledges the various ways in which apprentices learn.

14.3.1 Single use of virtual classroom platform (via FIT's LMS)

Insofar as possible, each delivery partner and tutor will ensure that apprentices are not required to log into more than one virtual classroom platform. FIT's designated LMS, which embeds the virtual classroom infrastructure, must be used. Tutors must ensure that apprentices have been provided with an interactive overview of the functionality of the virtual classroom[2].

14.3.2 Planning a virtual class session

Tutors should plan for a series of relatively short virtual class sessions during daily training hours, making adequate provision for group discussions/debate and a virtual location for appropriate questions and answers that can be shared among the class. Apprentices should be encouraged to summarise key concepts, points and theories. Each session should provide formative assessment to include individual and group feedback. The Programme Development Policy, QAH Policy No. 23, provides additional context relating to the optimal breakdown of a virtually delivered training day.

14.3.3 Tutor-apprentice communications

Timely feedback from tutors is essential for online learners to manage their learning experience. However, apprentices must understand that there are reasonable timescales in which to expect a response. Tutors should post regular updates and announcements to update apprentices regarding available resources, events or upcoming activities, while

[2] FIT's Big Blue Button: FIT's Virtual Classroom Vendor (new intakes post 2025).

making adequate provision on the training day for providing individual and group formative and summative module feedback.

14.3.4 Establish patterns for module delivery via the virtual classroom

In tandem with the development of the delivery schedule, tutors must ensure that a regular series of diverse activities directs the delivery. The tutor should ensure that the schedule provided to apprentices includes regular features in terms of planned activities, allowing the apprentice to plan and manage their assigned training time adequately.

14.3.5 Maintaining progress by apprentices

Tutors should form a plan regarding communications relating to apprentices' progression through their various modules. The goal should be to have timely discussions with the apprentice, considering that virtual classroom formats do not, in the main, provide for as many casual interactions between the apprentice and their Tutor that can facilitate an apprentice's awareness of how they are progressing.

14.3.6 Safe and secure online interactions

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

14.3.7 Apprentice supports for the virtual classroom

FIT is conscious that apprentices, in some cases, can feel somewhat isolated from their class when studying from home or at their employer's business location. FIT ensures the

availability of a People, Analytics and Wellbeing Lead to support all Apprentices, particularly those who are in training and are using virtual classrooms.

14.4 Apprentice use of webcams in the virtual classroom setting

A thoughtful and equitable approach to webcam use allows apprentices and Tutors alike to benefit from the sense of presence that webcams can provide during remote instruction while preserving their privacy. To date, the experience of virtual classroom activity has shown the limitations of the apprentice's capacity to engage in learning when webcams are not used regularly and consistently. With the active use of webcams comes the ability to see one another, to interact, to speak and work together, and to read facial expressions and gestures—behaviours that play a significant role in the process of learning. Unless otherwise sanctioned on an individual basis, all apprentices must ensure their desktop/laptop camera is on and functioning when engaged in virtual classroom activities. The primary reason for such visibility is that much of our communication is accomplished visually, via gestures and facial expressions.

In instances where an apprentice notifies the tutor about an issue that precludes them from engaging in a camera-on approach during a virtual class session, the tutor will consider the matter. In cases where regular patterns emerge of webcams not being actively and regularly used, the tutor will notify FIT's People, Analytics and Wellbeing Lead about the matter, since this scenario can sometimes be an early indicator of apprentices' disengagement from learning. Candidates who accept the apprentice placement offer and who commence off-the-job training via blended delivery modes are advised that, before the commencement of training, FIT will require them to agree to use their cameras as part of virtual class interactions. This stipulation does not, however, preclude an individual apprentice from noting issues with camera use, which may be related to broader, additional needs.

14.5 Apprentice use of webcam backgrounds

Stark or bright backgrounds can distract others who are active in a virtual classroom setting. FIT advises apprentices to utilise only neutral palette webcam backgrounds when active in the virtual classroom setting.

Document History		
Document Name	**Virtual Classroom Policy**	
Policy document number	**FIT-POL-014**	
Version reference	**V3.0**	
Document owner	**FIT Registrar**	
Roles with related responsibility	**Registrar and Director of Academic Affairs**	
Approved by	**Academic Council**	**20/09/2022 (active)**
Revision cycle	V1.0: document created(05/22)	
	V2.0: logo updated, change of policy title, Sec 14.2, and 14.3.1 updated, Sec 14.4 and 14.5 added (04/24)	
	V2.1: text additions to Sec 14.3.1-14.3.2 (07/26)	
	V3.0: full policy and language use review (10/26)	