External Quality Assurance Audit Report

STC Higher Education
Carried out between the 18th and 3rd and 5th October 2017
# Table of Contents

**Abbreviations List** .................................................................................................................. 3

1. Executive Summary .................................................................................................................. 4
   1.1 Section A: Background ......................................................................................................... 4
   1.2 Section B: Key Findings, Judgements and Recommendations ............................................... 4

2. About the External Quality Audit ............................................................................................ 10
   2.1 Introduction .......................................................................................................................... 10
   2.2 Reviewers ............................................................................................................................ 10
   2.3 Institutional Context ............................................................................................................. 11
   2.4 General Terms of Reference, Aims and Objectives of the EQA ............................................. 11
   2.5 Specific Terms of Reference and Research Questions ......................................................... 14

3. Analysis and Findings of Panel ............................................................................................... 15
   3.1 Standard 1: Policy for Quality Assurance ............................................................................ 15
   3.2 Standard 2: Institutional Probity ......................................................................................... 16
   3.3 Standard 3: Design and Approval of Programmes ............................................................... 17
   3.4 Standard 4: Student-centred Learning, Teaching and Assessment ...................................... 18
   3.5 Standard 5: Student Admission, Progression, Recognition and Certification ..................... 21
   3.6 Standard 6: Teaching Staff .................................................................................................. 22
   3.7 Standard 7: Learning Resources and Student Support ........................................................ 24
   3.8 Standard 8: Information Management ............................................................................... 25
   3.9 Standard 9: Public Information ........................................................................................... 26
   3.10 Standard 10: On-going Monitoring and Periodic Review of Programmes ............................ 27
   3.11 Standard 11: Cyclical External Quality Assurance .............................................................. 28

4. Response by the Provider ......................................................................................................... 29

Annex: Review Panel Bio Notes ................................................................................................. 33
## Abbreviations List

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ECTS</td>
<td>European Credit Transfer System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QA audit</td>
<td>External Quality Assurance Audit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IQA</td>
<td>Internal Quality Assurance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MQF</td>
<td>Malta Qualifications Framework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCFHE</td>
<td>National Commission for Further and Higher Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCC</td>
<td>NCC Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NQAF</td>
<td>National Quality Assurance Framework for Further and Higher Education</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. Executive Summary

1.1 Section A: Background

This report is a result of the External Quality Assurance process undertaken by an independent peer review panel. The panel evaluated the documentation submitted by the educational institution and conducted an on-site audit visit. The panel was responsible for giving judgments on Standards 1 and 3 – 11. As outlined in the External Quality Audit Manual of Procedures, the NCFHE sought external expertise to evaluate and give judgment on Standard 2. Through this report, the panel also highlighted areas of good practice, which in view of an NCFHE peer review panel, make a positive contribution to academic standards and quality and are worthy of being emulated and disseminated more widely.

1.1.1 The Peer Review Panel

The Peer Review Panel was composed of:

Chair of Panel:
Ms Anne Marie Vincenti

External Peers:
Dr Mary Muscat

Student Peer Reviewer:
Mr Joseph Agius

QA Managers (NCFHE):
Ms Lorraine Vassallo, Ms Sibby Xuereb

1.1.2 Specific Terms of Reference and Main Lines of Inquiry

Following the Scoping Visit carried out by the EQA Panel on the 7th August 2017 and the perusal of documentation presented by STC, the initial main lines of inquiry for this QA audit were:

i. The relationship between NCC Education and STC.
ii. The management of Quality Assurance at STC.
iii. STC’s capacity and resources to ensure a student-centred approach to teaching and learning, especially given that it operates solely with part-time teaching staff.

1.2 Section B: Key Findings, Judgements and Recommendations

1.2.1 Standard 1 - Policy for Quality Assurance

Good Practice Identified
Approval of Programmes

Good Practice Identified

N/A

Judgment

STC meets standard 3


**Recommendations**

N/A

---

**1.2.4 Standard 4 - Student-centred Learning, Teaching and Assessment**

**Good Practice Identified**

**GP. 4.1** The commitment to a personal approach to students and the accommodation individual student needs.

**GP. 4.2** The strategy to offer courses required by industry and/or which put student on a direct pathway to achieving a higher education programme.

**GP. 4.3** The soliciting of feedback from students while the module is already under way with a view to the immediate remedying any shortcomings.

**Judgment**

STC requires improvement to meet standard 4 [in terms of key recommendation 4.1]

**Recommendations**

**R.I 4.1 Key Recommendation** - The panel recommends that STC reviews its current procedures with regard to local examinations and as stated under R1.3, within one month of publication of this report, submit its documented procedure for the handling of exam scripts which it receives from NCC to the NCFHE.

**R.I 4.2** STC should find ways to better inform students about the procedure for appeals and complaints.

**R.I 4.3** STC should employ a ‘Welfare officer’ directly tasked with the pastoral care and support of students during their time at STC.

**R.I 4.4** STC should consider set-up a system of student representatives.

---

**1.2.5 Standard 5 - Student Admission, Progression, Recognition and Certification**

**Good Practice Identified**

N/A

**Judgment**

STC meets standard 5
**Recommendations**

**N/A**

### 1.2.6 Standard 6 - Teaching Staff

**Good Practice Identified**

**G.P 6.1** The employment of lecturers who lecture at other HE institutions, especially at MUM, and lecturers who are expert industry practitioners.

**G.P 6.2** The maintaining of a reserve list of recommended potential lecturers who they may turn to should they need a lecture at short-notice.

**G.P 6.3** The soliciting of student feedback regarding lecturers’ performance at the relative beginning of a course with a view to ironing out any problems.

**Judgment**

STC meets standards 6

**Recommendations**

**R.I. 6.1** STC’s equal opportunities policy should also cover recruitment.

**R.I. 6.2.** STC should either recruit a Director of Studies or else employ two of its current lectures, from the computing and business diplomas respectively, on a full-time basis and task them with coordinating lecturing staff and staff feedback and fostering a sense of academic community.

**R.I. 6.3** There should be more opportunities for lecturers to meet amongst themselves to discuss issues related to their programmes.

**R.I. 6.4** Providing lecturers with the (anonymized) information gathered via the student feedback forms as a means to monitoring and continually improving their performance. To that effect, STC may wish to consider collecting student feedback also at the end of the module.

### 1.2.7 Standard 7 - Learning Resources and Student Support

**Good Practice Identified**

**N/A**

**Judgment**

STC meets standard 7

**Recommendations**

**R.I. 7.1** Same recommendation as R.I. 4.3
1.2.8 Standard 8 - Information Management

**Good Practice Identified**

**G.P. 8.1** Attendance is closely recorded as a means of monitoring student progression and to instil a sense of accountability in students’ regular attendance. It is also used to ensure that oversees foreign students are fulfilling their visa and immigration requirements.

**Judgment**

STC meets standard 8.

**Recommendation**

R.I. 8.1 The panel recommends that STC adopts its own data-protection policy which specifies who has access to which student data under which conditions.

1.2.9 Standard 9 - Public Information

**Good Practice Identified**

**G.P. 9.1** Details such as tuition fees, payment plans, links to scholarship and where to ask for further help are easily accessible.

**Judgment**

STC meets standard 9

**Recommendations**

**RI 9.1: Key recommendation** - NCC's policies and procedures should be easier to find on the website as should STC's own quality assurance policy/manual when it develops this.

**RI 9.2: Key Recommendation**: The website should include information such as the potential career paths that students can take.

**RI 9.3**: Website information needs to be accurate. There is an instance of mismatch between the photo provided and the profile information for a particular tutor (as one is copied in the other’s profile). Not all lecturers have a profile on https://www.stcmalta.com/about-stc/our-tutors/. Furthermore, there are members of staff who have a doctorate degree and are listed as 'Mr' rather than 'Dr’, which is misleading.

**RI 9.4**: The business courses and tutors seem to be under represented vis-à-vis ICT courses. Also, not all the courses on offer have a contact point.
1.2.10 Standard 10 - On-going Monitoring and Periodic Review of Programmes

**Good Practice Identified**

N/A

**Judgment**

STC meets standard 10

**Recommendation**

N/A

1.2.11 Standard 11 - Cyclical External Quality Assurance

**Judgment**

STC surpasses Standard 11
2. About the External Quality Audit

2.1 Introduction

The External Quality Assurance audit is a tool for both development and accountability. The QA audit shall ensure that the internal quality management system of the provider is:

- fit for purpose according to the provider’s courses and service users
- compliant with standards and regulations and contributing to the development of a national quality culture
- contributing to the fulfilment of the broad goals of Malta’s Education Strategy 2014-24
- implemented with effectiveness, comprehensiveness and sustainability.

2.2 Reviewers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation subject</th>
<th>STC Higher Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peer Panel Members</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External Peers:</td>
<td>Ms Anne Marie Vincenti</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dr Mary Muscat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Peer Reviewer:</td>
<td>Mr Joseph Agius</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QA Managers (NCFHE):</td>
<td>Ms Lorraine Vassallo,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ms Sibby Xuereb</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Timeline</th>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Milestone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>19th April 2017</td>
<td>Panel received induction and preparation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>22nd August 2017</td>
<td>Panel met to determine the specific terms of reference, aims, objective and research question of the QA process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25th August 2017</td>
<td>Preliminary Provider meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3rd and 5th October 2017</td>
<td>On-site audit visit at STC</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.3 Institutional Context

STC Higher Education was founded in 1997 when fourteen IT firms, all banks in Malta, and the Government of Malta set up a joint venture agreement to found a training centre that would offer IT courses. That year STC signed an agreement with the National Computing Centre, that is NCC Education - an awarding body founded by the British Government in 1966, that offers British qualifications in Business and IT in more than fifty (50) countries around the world - to start offering NCC diplomas pegged to the MQF up to level 4. In 2007, STC made an agreement with Middlesex University to start offering a top-up programme for a degree and in 2009, the two institutions partnered up. STC was a franchise of Middlesex University until 2013, when they became two separate institutions. STC, nevertheless, is still a shareholder in Middlesex University.

In 2013, STC was licensed by the NCFHE as a Further and Higher Education Institution, holding license number 2007-TC-07. STC and Middlesex University Malta (MUM) have an agreement which allows students to further their studies at MUM after having successfully completed NCC diplomas mapped to the MQF at level 5. There are currently eighty-three (83) full-time and twenty-six (26) part-time students enrolled at STC, of which forty-five (45) are following Business courses and sixty-four (64) are following Computing courses.

During the audit visit, the panel was informed that in 2015 there was a complete overhaul of management and staff following a decision made by the Board of Directors. Mr Dave Shaw was appointed CEO and is presently the CEO of both STC and MUM. The other roles making up the Administration team of STC are: Administration and Admissions Manager, Student Recruitment Executive, Sales and Business Development Manager and two administration support officers.

Prior to 2015, STC used to follow internal quality assurance procedures outlined in the STC handbook, however, during the on-site audit visit, the panel learnt that this handbook was not passed on to the new management and thus, STC has been following the policies and procedures set out by NCC.

STC is currently licensed to offer the following business and IT programmes awarded by NCC:
- Three (3) diplomas at MQF level 4; and
- Six (6) diplomas at MQF level 5.

STC have informed the panel that, in the future, they would like to start offering home-grown courses at MQF levels 4 and 5 to address niche areas in the labour market.

2.4 General Terms of Reference, Aims and Objectives of the EQA

Quality assurance in Malta is underpinned by six principles that determine the remit and function of the National Quality Assurance Framework for Further and Higher Education, and the relationship between internal and external quality assurance to enhance learning outcomes.

i. The Framework is based on the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) and enriched by the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET) perspective.

ii. The Framework contributes to a National Culture of Quality, through:
   - increased agency, satisfaction and numbers of service users,
   - an enhanced international profile and credibility of providers in Malta,
• the promotion of Malta as a regional provider of excellence in further and higher education.

iii. The Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) is fit for purpose.

iv. The External Quality Assurance (QA audit) is a tool for both development and accountability. The QA audit shall ensure that the internal quality management system of the provider is:

- fit for purpose according to the provider’s courses and service users,
- compliant with Standards and regulations and contributing to the development of a national quality culture,
- contributing to the fulfilment of the broad goals of Malta’s Education Strategy 2014-24,
- Implemented with effectiveness, comprehensiveness and sustainability.

v. The Quality Improvement Cycle is at the heart of the Framework.

vi. The integrity and independence of the QA audit process is guaranteed.

The QA audit provides public assurance about the Standards of further and higher education programmes and the quality of the learning experience of students. It presents an opportunity for providers to demonstrate that they adhere to the expectations of stakeholders with regard to the programmes of study that they offer and the achievements and capabilities of students. It also provides a focus for identifying good practices and for the implementation of institutional approaches to the continuous improvement in the quality of educational provision.

NCFHE has a responsibility to ensure that a comprehensive assessment is conducted for all higher education providers in Malta. The QA audit provides an opportunity to assess the Standards and quality of higher education in Malta against the expectations and practices of provision across the European Higher Education Area, and internationally.

The QA audit examines how providers manage their own responsibilities for the quality and Standards of the programmes they offer. In particular, the following issues are addressed:

• The fitness for purpose and effectiveness of internal quality assurance processes, including an examination of the systems and procedures that have been implemented and the documentation that supports them.
• The compliance with the obligations of licence holders with established regulations and any conditions or restrictions imposed by NCFHE.
• The governance and financial sustainability of providers, including assurances about the legal status of the provider, the appropriateness of corporate structures and the competence of staff with senior management responsibilities.

The QA audit benchmarks the QA system and procedures within an institution against eleven (11) Standards:

1. **Policy for quality assurance**: entities shall have a policy for quality assurance that is made public and forms part of their strategic management.
2. **Institutional and financial probity**: entities shall ensure that they have appropriate measures and procedures in place to ensure institutional and financial probity.
3. **Design and approval of programmes**: self-accrediting providers shall have appropriate
processes for the design and approval of their programmes of study.

4. **Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment**: entities shall ensure that programmes are delivered in a way that encourages students to take an active role in the learning process.

5. **Student admission, progression, recognition and certification**: entities shall consistently apply pre-defined and published regulations covering all phases of the student 'life-cycle'.

6. **Teaching staff**: entities shall assure the competence and effectiveness of their teaching staff.

7. **Learning resources and student support**: entities shall have appropriate funding for their learning and teaching activities and sufficient learning resources to fully support the students' learning experiences.

8. **Information management**: entities shall ensure that they collect, analyse and use relevant information for the effective management of their programmes and other activities.

9. **Public information**: entities shall publish information about their activities which is clear, accurate, objective, up-to-date and readily accessible.

10. **On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes**: entities shall implement the 'Quality Cycle' by monitoring and periodically reviewing their programmes to ensure their continuing fitness for purpose.

11. **Cyclical external quality assurance**: entities should undergo external quality assurance, approved by NCFHE, at least once every five years.

Peer-review panels essentially ask providers the following question about their arrangements for quality management:

'What systems and procedures are in place and what evidence is there that they are working effectively?'

The approach to quality assurance can be encapsulated in a number of key questions which providers should ask themselves about their management of quality.

- What are we trying to do?
- Why are we trying to do it?
- How are we trying to do it?
- Why are we doing it that way?
- Is this the best way of doing it?
- How do we know it works?
- Could it be done better?

Answers to these questions should form the basis of the provider's critical assessment of and response to the self-evaluation questionnaire.

The approach of QA audit is not simply about checking whether providers adhere to the regulations; it examines how providers are developing their own systems in addressing the expectations of sound management of educational Standards and the quality of their learning and teaching provision. It does not involve the routine identification and confirmation of criteria -- a 'tick-box' approach -- but a mature and reflective dialogue with providers about the ways in which they discharge their obligations for quality and the identification of existing good practices.
2.5 Specific Terms of Reference and Research Questions

Following the Scoping Visit carried out by the EQA Panel on the 7th August 2017 and the perusal of documentation presented by STC, the initial main lines of inquiry for this EQA were:

i. The relationship between NCC Education and STC.
ii. The management of Quality Assurance at STC.
iii. STC’s capacity and resources to ensure a student-centred approach to teaching and learning, especially given that it operates solely with part-time teaching staff.
3. Analysis and Findings of Panel

3.1 Standard 1: Policy for Quality Assurance

Policy for quality assurance: entities shall have a policy for quality assurance that is made public and forms part of their strategic management.

Main findings

In the last two years, STC has undergone a change in management which resulted in a complete overhaul of management and administration. Since then, there has been a keen focus on the quality of the education provision especially when it comes to the quality of teaching and student satisfaction. The panel could see evidence of this during the audit visit at STC through examples of direct, corrective action being taken.

Being an NCC centre, STC is obliged to adhere to QA policies and practices outlined by NCC Education. These include, inter alia, an Equality and Diversity policy, Academic Regulations, a Complaints Policy, an Assessment and Awarding Contingency Plan, a Centre Monitoring Policy, Instructions for Conducting Exams, a Malpractice and Maladministration Policy as well as Special Considerations Policy and Procedures. These policies can be found online on NCC's website. In an annual monitoring exercise, NCC checks that STC follows its policies and procedures. The panel was provided with the latest two annual monitoring reports dated 30th September 2016 and 10th March 2017, which show that effectively STC does indeed comply with these standards.

STC has not yet developed its own interpretation and adaptation of these policies nor has it developed any other policies and procedures with regards to its operation. During the scoping visit the review panel presented STC’s top-management with a copy of an STC QA handbook which previous management had submitted to the NCFHE. The current management indicated that this manual was not in operation and indeed they were unaware of its existence. They identified the need to develop a quality assurance manual however they were not able to provide a clear commitment as to when this would be in place. The panel observes that the SAR which STC submitted to the NCFHE as required documentation in support of the audit was of very poor quality; the exercise could and indeed should have been used by STC as an opportunity to develop its own mechanisms and to document them. The panel also wishes to express its disappointment at the fact that the CEO was not available throughout the duration of the audit visit.

Apart from the annual monitoring exercise carried out by NCC, the procedures dictated by NCC and NCC’s own quality assurance procedures covering the design of programmes, quality management at STC are informal. The CEO and the Administration/Admissions Manager are the driving force and main actors. The quality management is too centralised and mostly dependent on the ability, experience and charisma of the person currently occupying the position of Administration/Admissions Manager; the Admin Manager is de facto acting as a QA manager and performing tasks well beyond those outlined in the role-description. The panel observes that this approach is positive and has been very important especially in the initial phase of developing and fostering a quality of culture at STC, as evidenced by the results. However, the panel is concerned that this approach is not sustainable, being too dependent on the qualities and experience of a single person who thus comes to occupy a ‘key-stone role’ in the edifice of QA. The importance and irreplaceability of the person currently occupying the position of ‘Administration and Admissions Manager’ could be confirmed by the panel throughout all the interviews it held with different stakeholders from STC with one student articulating the common sentiment that “if Marisa were not there, STC would die”. Top Management are aware of this and are considering the creation of the post of a Director of Studies and a Welfare Officer.
The panel recommends that STC sets up a less centralised quality management structure which includes clearly defined roles and documented standard operating procedures. STC should also develop a public quality assurance policy which includes all processes and procedures in place that secure the quality of education provision at STC and addresses all the QA standards in the *National Quality Assurance Framework for Further and Higher Education*. The policy should be fit for purpose and include STC's mission statement. It may also take the form of a quality assurance handbook.

As a matter of urgency, the panel recommends that STC immediately develops and documents a procedure for the handling of local exam scripts which it receives from NCC. The panel expresses its concern that during the audit visit it could not identify a robust process as to who has access to the exam scripts and when.

### Good Practice Identified

| N/A |

### Overall judgment for Standard

STC requires improvement to meet Standard 1.

### Recommendations for improvement

**R.I. 1.1. Key Recommendation:** STC should develop a public quality assurance policy which includes all processes and procedures in place that secure the quality of education provision at STC and that addresses all QA standards in the *National Quality Assurance Framework for Further and Higher Education* and publishes this on its website. The policy should be fit for purpose and include STC’s mission statement.

**R.I. 1.2. Key Recommendation:** STC should develop its own interpretation and adaptation of NCC policies and also establish its own internal procedures.

**R.I. 1.3. Key Recommendation:** Within one month of publication of this report, STC must submit a documented procedure for the handling of exam scripts which it receives from NCC to the NCFHE.

**R.I. 1.4. Key Recommendation:** The panel recommends that STC sets up a less centralised quality management structure which includes defined roles and documented standard operating procedures.

**R.I. 1.5. Key Recommendation:** STC should use the NCFHE audit as an opportunity to conduct an in-depth strategic review of operations and update accordingly. A future SAR needs to provide much more detail of the institutions operations, and include an assessment of current performance, strengths, weaknesses and planned improvements across each standard.

### 3.2 Standard 2: Institutional Probity

**Institutional and financial probity:** entities shall ensure that they have appropriate measures and procedures in place to ensure institutional and financial probity.

### Main findings

The company holds 99.99% in the ordinary share capital of STC Training Limited, a limited liability
company incorporated in Malta, whose principal activity is to run a training centre for teaching and training in information technology, computer science and management skills. The investment in associate consists of an investment in Middlesex University Malta Limited. The objectives of the associate are to carry on the business of providing education services in Malta to local and international students, and to administer a University campus in Malta. The objectives of the associate are in line with those of STC Training Limited, being that of providing education services.

The panel was informed that with regards to procedures related to the management of accounts, this has been outsourced to Grant Thornton. Through the financial accounts presented during the QA audit process, it was noted that the Group’s revenue from training courses has decreased from 2015 to 2016. As a result, the Group registered a loss before tax as opposed to a profit before tax in 2015. Furthermore, the company’s investment income decreased between 2015 and 2016. The company registered a loss before tax in 2015. The Group’s Administrative Expenses have increased between 2015 and 2016 mainly due to an increase in the following expenses during 2016: Depreciation and amortisation, Directors’ remuneration, General Expenses, Printing, postage and Stationery, Rent expense, Repairs and maintenance and Water and electricity. The Group has a negative net asset position since Current Assets are not sufficient to cover the Trade and other payables. There was a drop of Income from catering services between 2015 and 2016. In respect of the current year, no dividend was declared or paid at the Annual General Meeting. The group has a guarantee placed with the Malta Environment and Planning authority.

With regards to the headship positions at STC, the panel was informed that the recruitment of the main position within the entity, namely the Chief Executive Officer, is the responsibility of the Board of Directors. The Board comprises of different representatives from various companies which helped in the establishment of STC Training Centre. The Board of Directors are deemed to be fit-for-purpose. The panel has noted that there are no written down selection criteria for headship positions. During the interviews, the panel noted that the institution has a very informal way of inviting staff to form part of their organisation. It is highly recommended that this institution develops clear recruitment processes inclusive selection criteria and develop links with recruitment agencies. In order to facilitate the recruitment process, it is recommended that the institution has a clear structure of the roles within its mode of operation.

Good Practice Identified
N/A

Overall judgment for Standard
STC meets the Standard 2

Recommendations for improvement

RI 2.1: **key recommendation**: STC Training Centre should develop a clear organigram structure in order to facilitate the identification of roles needed within its operations structures.

RI 2.2: **key recommendation**: STC Training Centre should develop clear selection criteria for headship positions.

**3.3 Standard 3: Design and Approval of Programmes**

**Design and approval of programmes**: self-accrediting providers shall have appropriate processes for the design and approval of their programmes of study.
Main findings

NCC has ownership of its programmes with respect to the curricula and associated quality procedures relating to programme design and review. ALL NCC qualifications offered at STC have been referenced to the UK’s Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF) and are regulated by Ofqual. All these qualifications have been submitted by STC to the NCFHE for recognition and levelling to the Malta Qualifications Framework.

Should STC wish to develop its own awards or qualifications and accredit these with the NCFHE then the panel recommends that STC develops an internal procedure to that effect in line with the criteria under standard 3 of the NQAF.

Good practice identified

N/A

Overall judgment for Standard

STC meets standard 3.

Recommendations for improvement

N/A

3.4 Standard 4: Student-centred Learning, Teaching and Assessment

Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment: entities shall ensure that programmes are delivered in a way that encourages students to take an active role in the learning process.

Main findings

STC prides itself on being customer-centred, its customers being its students. In this sense STC is committed to a student-centred approach in learning and teaching. STC tries hard to accommodate individual student needs and to ensure the overall satisfaction of all students.

The panel was presented with several examples to that effect. One of which was an example of a student whose course of study was disrupted due to political turbulence in his home country. STC offered to provide the student with lectures via Skype. This turned out to be not possible and the student eventually had to re-register for the Diploma (from the beginning) the following year, with STC offering him evening lectures in the interim while it made arrangements with NCC. The panel found STC’s close following of students and its attempt to offer all possible assistance commendable. Although STC does not have a written mission statement, when asked to articulate what STC’s mission statement would be, the common theme was (by the CEO and teaching staff alike) was that STC aims as providing an alternative educational pathway that facilitates their progression both within and to higher education and to help individuals already in the industry to progress in their career. This ethos is reflected in the profile of students at STC, with full-time students being mainly either international students or Maltese students who for some reason could not follow the conventional paths to higher education in Malta; part-time students are individuals already working
in the industry. This is also reflected in the fact that all the NCC Diplomas offered by STC are part of a learning pathway that leads to degree programmes, since successful completion of these programmes qualifies students for entry into either the second or third year of the respective Middlesex University Degree programme. This, together, with STC’s close links with MUM, which includes the proximity of the MUM campus to STC, the fact that STC students make use of MUM’s library facilities and canteen, the fact that STC’s CEO is Head of Campus and that several lecturers at STC also lecture at MUM, has the direct effect of making University Education more accessible to the students. Several STC students do indeed go on to read for a Degree programme at MUM and many current students, who the panel spoke with, expressed their intention of continuing on to the degree programme at MUM.

The modular approach of its programmes and the fact that STC runs its programmes on a full-time and part-time bases allows for flexible learning pathways. Students can shift from full-time to part-time and vice-versa and they can suspend their studies, granted that they finish their diploma within 3 years. STC liaises with NCC to enrol students even after the late registration date has passed. To this end STC makes provision for students who join a course after it starts to follow the missed lectures or modules, either by the students following those modules running at a later date, for example in summer, or even by providing the students with one-to-one sessions. Flexibility is also afforded to STC students in the fact that they may opt to transfer or resume their studies overseas with another NCC centre.

The ‘Administration and Admissions’ Manager has a one-to-one relationship with the students and follows the attendance and progress of full-time students on an individual basis. Throughout the visit the panel saw that this person is overwhelmingly the go-to person for students regarding any problems or queries they might have at STC. As has already been stated, the panel is concerned about the sustainability of this state of affairs especially given the considerable other duties that this person performs. Furthermore, should a student have a clash with this person, it is not clear what other avenue/s remains. The strain of one person maintaining such a high level of individual attention could also be seen in the fact that this person’s open door policy recently had to be modified. Instead of students dropping in at any time to speak to the Administration/Admissions Manager, a reception stand has been placed at the entrance of the Administration Office and students now have wait at reception and, unless it is urgent, are invited by administration support staff to make an appointment to talk to the Manager. The Administration/Admission Manager acknowledged the panel’s concern regarding sustainability and mentioned the possibility of STC employing a ‘Welfare Officer’ who would take over some of the pastoral duties she currently has with the students.

STC makes every effort to cater for students with a disability. During the scoping visit, top management mentioned that a limitation they faced in that regard is not having been able to install a lift due to the building being scheduled. They have however once again applied for such permission and awaiting a reply from the Planning Authority. In the meanwhile, to address this shortcoming, they have shifted one computer lab to the ground floor to ensure that all classes with students that have access disabilities can be scheduled downstairs.

Students that the panel met during the visit expressed satisfaction at the teaching at STC especially at the way lecturers explain and contextualise NCC material. They are also satisfied with the level and timeliness of the feedback and support they receive from their lecturers. From its interviews with students and staff, the panel could see that lectures employed a variety of pedagogic methods as appropriate and there exists a feeling of mutual respect within the learner-teacher relationship.

Two to three weeks into a module, students are asked for written feedback regarding their experience of the module mainly with regard to the lecturer’s performance and attitude. This is done by means of an anonymous feedback form which is distributed as hard copy to the students.
by the Administration and Admission Manager during the course. The CE0 and the Administration and Admissions Manager review the results and act accordingly. Apart from this, however, students feel comfortable to complain to management should a problem arise and the panel could ascertain that the message gets across quite quickly. Both students and top management gave examples of teachers being replaced while a course was underway due to negative feedback. STC does not have the process of student representative and one may argue that, as things stand, in terms of student feedback, such a process is not necessary since feedback gets conveyed both to management and to lecturers quite effectively. Nonetheless, students showed interest in this and it may be an interesting option to consider in terms of helping to foster a sense of democratic participation and autonomy in students.

All assessments for NCC Education qualifications are set by NCC Education and quality assurance procedures pertaining to assessment are laid down by NCC Education. NCC Education has a comprehensive set of regulations and procedures for ensuring the consistency, fairness and validity of the assessment of its qualifications and it provides its centres with instructions on the marking and moderation processes for its qualifications. These can be found in the ‘Assessment Instructions Document’, the ‘Teaching Standardization Handbook’ and in the ‘Qualification Specification Document’. NCC also periodically carries out teacher standardization training at STC. The moderation practices and procedures applied by NCC Education are in compliance with Ofqual’s General Conditions of Recognition and meet the NCFHE expectation under the relevant standard.

Students are informed of the criteria and methods of assessment for each course well in advance as these are published in the Qualification Specification Document. NCC Education also makes arrangements for reasonable adjustments and special considerations in the case of disabled students or those facing exceptional circumstances. These can be found in NCC Education Special Consideration policy.

NCC Education also has a formal complaints and appeals procedure Post-Results Service Policy. Students were aware that they could appeal but they did not know what the procedure was. They also perceived it to involve prohibitive costs but did not have clear knowledge of the details. The panel recommends that STC find ways to make this information more accessible to the student.

Assessment at STC is administered by NCC and falls under three types of assessment: Global Assignments, Global Examinations and Local Examinations. Global Assignments are marked by centres using a mark scheme provided by NCC Education. Turnitin is used to check all assignments. Global examinations are marked centrally by NCC Education. Exam papers are sent to centres by courier and completed scripts are returned by the centres to NCC Education UK Head Office for marking and moderation. Local examinations are marked by each individual centre using a marking scheme provided by NCC Education. They are sent electronically to the Centre Co-ordinator by NCC Education a few days before the examination is scheduled to take place. Centres are responsible for the initial marking of local exam scripts and must then send a sample of each assessment to NCC Education for moderation.

During the audit visit the panel learned of a case when an examination was believed by STC to include questions that were out of the syllabus. This resulted in students becoming very agitated and angry. Because of this experience, in cases where there have been changes to the content or format of a module, certain lecturers are given accompanied access to the exam paper prior to the examination in order that they may alert management of any possible problems, for management to be ‘at the ready’ to take action and notify NCC immediately should there be a complaint during or after the examination. The panel identifies this practice as possibly being open to abuse. It recommends that STC entirely removes this practice or barring that, that it develops a strict written procedure stating when and how such exceptional circumstances are to take place and which includes appropriate safeguards such as approval by NCC.
Good practice identified

GP. 4.1 The commitment to a personal approach to students and the accommodation individual student needs.

GP. 4.2 The strategy to offer courses required by industry and/or which put student on a direct pathway to achieving a higher education programme.

GP 4.3 The soliciting of feedback from students while the module is already under way with a view to the immediate remedying any shortcomings.

Overall judgment for Standard

STC requires improvement to meet standard 4 [in terms of key recommendation 4.1]

Recommendations for improvement

R.I 4.1: Key Recommendation: The panel recommends that STC reviews its current procedures with regard to local examinations and as stated under R1.3, within one month of publication of this report, submit its documented procedure for the handling of exam scripts which it receives from NCC to the NCFHE.

R.I 4.2 STC should find ways to better inform students about the procedure for appeals and complaints.

R.I 4.3 STC should employ a ‘Welfare officer’ directly tasked with the pastoral care and support of students during their time at STC.

R.I 4.4 STC should consider set-up a system of student representatives.

3.5 Standard 5: Student Admission, Progression, Recognition and Certification

Main findings

The eligibility criteria and requirements for each course are set by NCC Education and can be found in the qualification specifications on its website. STC is responsible for the recruitment of candidates, making entry admission decisions in accordance with the entry requirements, and, checking and authenticating the qualifications presented by candidates. These tasks are performed by the ‘Sales and Business Development Manager’ and the ‘Marketing and Student Affairs Executive’. Currently, the demand is such that STC is able to ensure that all candidates that meet the entry requirements are guaranteed a place in class.
Depending on the programme of studies, NCC’s entry requirements make provision for vocational experience and specific recognition of prior learning applicable to mature students. There is also a free NCC Education Standard English Placement Test which students may take to provide evidence of a level of English language appropriate for the studies to be undertaken.

After a prospective student has been vetted and accepted to STC, a physical file is opened. Once the candidate pays the 10% deposit, the file is then passed on to the Administration and Admission Manager who inputs their details on STC’s school management system and on NCC Education’s Connect web portal. At the time of the audit visit STC was in the process of migrating from Aulano, their old school management system, to Myschool.

The decision to switch to Myschool was taken in order to improve the efficiency and security of student records (especially with regards to the attendance) and because of the increased functionality that Myschool offers in terms of monitoring progression and in communicating with the students. The panel observed that attendance is closely monitored at STC. Lecturers record the attendance at the beginning of each lesson and record it on the school management system. Administration support staff review this on a daily basis and incidences of absence are immediately followed up by the Admissions and Admissions manager with the student and/or their parents.

During the first week of an academic year, STC provides all the students with an induction to STC and the programme they follow. On successful course completion of their Diploma, STC gives students certificates supplied by NCC Education together with supporting documentation that includes the MQF level and Diploma description.

**Good practice identified**

N/A.

**Overall judgment for Standard**

STC meets standard 5.

**Recommendations for improvement**

N/A

### 3.6 Standard 6: Teaching Staff

| Teaching staff: entities shall assure the competence and effectiveness of their teaching staff. |

**Main findings**

The recruitment process of teaching staff at STC is through head-hunting. The CEO and Administration/Admission Manager have a good grasp of what expertise exists locally and approach potential lectures directly. Lecturers have also been approached on recommendation by members of the board of directors or through recommendation by STC lecturing staff. The CEO ultimately approves all recruitment of lecturing staff. In the case of those teaching on NCC Diploma courses however selected staff need approval by NCC education. All teaching staff at STC are employed on a part-time basis. The SAR contains a document stating that STC is an equal
opportunities employer in terms of its treatment towards its employees and, although the panel did not find evidence to the contrary, the document does not cover the actual hiring of employees.

When possible, STC recruits lecturers who have, as minimum, a level 7 qualification. Exceptionally, however, STC they may recruit lecturers who do not have this academic background but are experts in the field or have significant industry experience. Four lecturers out of the fifteen lecturers who teach on the NCC Diploma Programmes hold a Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education and another two are currently following a pedagogy course at another institution. STC itself does not provide continuous professional development and lecturers are expected to be responsible for their own improvement and the updating of their relevant skills.

The Management pointed out that operating solely with part-time lecturing staff means that they suffer from a high-turnover rate. However, they also pointed out that it enabled them to offer students the experience of being taught by staff who are industry practitioners and/or who have links with other institutions, notably Middlesex. Another advantage seems to be that, should STC need to act on feedback in regard to lecturers’ performance, it can do so more efficiently.

Although there is no active assessment of the lecturers’ pedagogical skills through observation by STC management staff, assessment comes through students’ feedback. As has already been mentioned, this comes both through formal written feedback and informal verbal feedback on the part of the students directly to management and is taken very seriously at STC. The panel was presented with an example of a lecturer being replaced due to severe language communication issues which were resulting in students struggling with the module. The panel was impressed by the fact that action was taken immediately, a replacement was found quickly and, as attested to by the students, the transition proved smooth and did not affect negatively the delivery of the course.

This could be done because the Administration and Admission Manager, together with the CEO, is constantly on the look-out for potential lecturers and keeps a list of recommended people to tap into should such a need arise. This is also one way of dealing with the high teaching staff turnover mentioned above. The situation is also helped by the fact that all material in relation to course content, including lecture slides, is provided by NCC.

While the panel noted with approval the soliciting of formal written feedback regarding lecturers’ performance, it was surprised that STC did not provide lecturers with the students’ anonymised feedback on them as a matter of course. As things stand, management relays feedback to lecturers only if this is negative. The desire to have access to the student feedback on their teaching was expressed by all lecturers and is to be encouraged. To that effect, STC might also wish to collect formal feedback at the end of the modules.

The panel ascertained that, except for when NCC representatives visit and conduct workshops and the Christmas staff party, lecturers hardly meet as a community. This means that there is little to no opportunity for peer-to-peer feedback and support, and for exchange of ideas. At the moment all feedback to and from lecturers is channelled through and analysed centrally either by STC management or NCC. In the interest of fostering a sense of academic community and common purpose and for the exchange of relevant information and peer feedback, the panel suggests that STC requires all lecturers teaching on a Diploma to meet amongst themselves few times during the academic year to discuss issues related to their programmes. The panel also recommends that STC either recruits a Director of Studies or else that two of its senior lectures, from the computing and business diplomas respectively, be employed on a full-time basis and take on the role of Head of Department.

This notwithstanding, the panel notes with approval that, despite operating solely with part-time lecturing staff, STC has managed to foster a sense of identity among the lecturers. This has been achieved through STC’s standing relationship with MUM (as mentioned under 3.4) and due to the
personal qualities of the Administration and Admission Manager and the CEO.

**Good practice identified**

**G.P 6.1** The employment of lecturers who lecture at other HE institutions, especially at MUM, and lecturers who are expert industry practitioners.

**G.P 6.2** The maintaining of a reserve list of recommended potential lecturers who they may turn to should they need a lecture at short-notice.

**G.P 6.3** The soliciting of student feedback regarding lecturers' performance at the relative beginning of a course with a view to ironing out any problems.

**Overall judgment for Standard**

STC meets standards 6.

**Recommendations for improvement**

**R.I. 6.1** STC's equal opportunities policy should also cover recruitment.

**R.I. 6.2** STC should either recruit a Director of Studies or else employ two of its current lectures, from the computing and business diplomas respectively, on a full-time basis and task them with coordinating lecturing staff and staff feedback and fostering a sense of academic community.

**R.I. 6.3** There should be more opportunities for lecturers to meet amongst themselves to discuss issues related to their programmes.

**R.I. 6.4** Providing lecturers with the (anonymized) information gathered via the student feedback forms as a means to monitoring and continually improving their performance. To that effect, STC may wish to consider collecting student feedback also at the end of the module.

---

**3.7 Standard 7: Learning Resources and Student Support**

**Learning resources and student support:** entities shall have appropriate funding for their learning and teaching activities and sufficient learning resources to fully support the students’ learning experiences.

**Main findings**

Teaching staff and students alike seem to be generally satisfied with the resources available for teaching and learning. During its annual monitoring exercise NCC checks that STC have the necessary learning resources and student support services.

NCC Education provides registered students with course material including lecture slides, past papers as well as a selection of e-books related to their area of study. Students may access these through the NCC and STC student portal. Although STC does not have its own physical library, students have free access to the Library at MUM round the corner which caters for the Diplomas offered at STC. Typically, there is one textbook for every ten students. The library opens until 21:00 hours and even longer during the examinations period.
Although students are encouraged to bring their own device, STC has 15 laptops that are available to students to use whilst on premises, free of charge. STC has also 2 computer labs that have 40 PC’s highly specked that can be used for programming and 3D animation, and also 2 complete racks of Cisco switches and routers that are used to teach networking. Courses include CCNA and CCNP. STC has a yearly budget of 35,000 allocated to learning resources.

The building itself is spread over two floors and most of it is used as teaching space. The classrooms are equipped with projectors and white-boards and are generally comfortable. The administration office and the office shared by the CEO, the Sales and Business Development Manager’ and the ‘Marketing and Student Affairs Executive’ are located on the ground floor. Also on the ground floor is a small board room. There is no staff room for teaching staff nor student common area. STC students however are encouraged to make use of the canteen and student common area at MUM.

As mentioned under 3.4, a limitation that STC faces in its effort to cater for students with accessibility issues is that they have not yet obtained permission to install a lift due to the building being scheduled. STC is currently awaiting permission from the Planning Authority to install a lift. In the meantime, arrangements have been made to ensure that classes attended by wheelchair-bound students are scheduled in more accessible rooms. NCC Education has also a ‘Special Considerations Policy’ which STC adheres to and which outlines the support that STC must provide to students with special needs during examinations.

**Good practice identified**

N/A

**Overall judgment for Standard**

STC meets standard 7.

**Recommendations for improvement**

R.I. 7.1 Same recommendation as R.I .4.3

### 3.8 Standard 8: Information Management

**Information management:** entities shall ensure that they collect, analyse and use relevant information for the effective management of their programmes and other activities.

**Main findings**

Student information is stored in physical student files, electronically on STC’s school management system, and on NCC Education’s Connect web portal. Only the ‘Administration and Admissions manager’ as ‘Centre Co-ordinator’ has access to the NCC portal. The panel recommends that STC creates a written procedure for who may access the student physical records and also the data on STC’s school management system.

As already noted under 3.4, course participation in terms of attendance is closely recorded and used to monitor student progression. It is also used to ensure that oversees foreign students are fulfilling their visa and immigration requirements. Also noted under 3.4 is that student feedback in terms of
student satisfaction is collected both formally via the filling in of feedback forms and during NCC's annual monitoring exercise as well as informally throughout the academic year. The panel saw clear evidence of STC acting upon this feedback.

The panel also ascertained that STC uses data on student retention, assessment marks and pass rates to measure of their performance.

STC keeps student assignments in physical folders for a year after the publication of the result, in a room that serves as archives. This practice was born out of the experience of having results published late by NCC, as late as 2 months after the exam session.

**Good Practice identified**

G.P. 8.1 Attendance is closely recorded as a means of monitoring student progression and to instil a sense of accountability in students’ regular attendance. It is also used to ensure that oversees foreign students are fulfilling their visa and immigration requirements.

**Overall judgment for Standard**

STC meets standard 8.

**Recommendations for improvement**

R.I. 8.1 The panel recommends that STC adopts its own data-protection policy which specifies who has access to which student data under which conditions.

### 3.9 Standard 9: Public Information

Public information: entities shall publish information about their activities which is clear, accurate, objective, up-to-date and readily accessible.

**Main findings**

The website has a creative design that works well aesthetically and functionally. Details such as tuition fees, payment plans, links to scholarship and where to ask for further help are easily accessible.

There seems to be missing information or lack of information specifically with reference to the list of tutors and with business courses. There are fourteen (14) tutors represented but there are more who are not included and this can be misleading. The information needs to be amplified in this respect and there is an instance where the same photo is applied to two profiles.

The policies are hard to find and although the student handbook has links to NCC, policies should also be available on the STC website.

There is a news section that includes successful student placements and success stories but although there is a very high percentage of student passes and progression on to MUM, this is not represented on the website.
The outline course descriptions given on the website are NCC-dependent. The information on certain IT professional courses is more accessible than other courses, such as having a downloadable brochure, whereas for other courses students have to ask for more information.

**Good practice identified**

**G.P. 9.1** Details such as tuition fees, payment plans, links to scholarship and where to ask for further help are easily accessible.

**Overall judgment for Standard**

STC meets standard 9.

**Recommendations for improvement**

**RI 9.1: Key recommendation** - NCC’s policies and procedures should be easier to find on the website as should STC’s own quality assurance policy/manual when it develops this.

**RI 9.2: Key Recommendation** - The website should include information such as the potential career paths that students can take.

**RI 9.3** - Website information needs to be accurate. There is an instance of mismatch between the photo provided and the profile information for a particular tutor (as one is copied in the other’s profile). Not all lecturers have a profile on [https://www.stcmalta.com/about-stc/our-tutors/](https://www.stcmalta.com/about-stc/our-tutors/). Furthermore, there are members of staff who have a doctorate degree and are listed as ‘Mr’ rather than ‘Dr’, which is misleading.

**RI 9.4** - The business courses and tutors seem to be under represented vis-à-vis ICT courses. Also, not all the courses on offer have a contact point.

**3.10 Standard 10: On-going Monitoring and Periodic Review of Programmes**

**Ongoing monitoring and periodic review of programmes**: entities shall implement the ‘Quality Cycle’ by monitoring and periodically reviewing their programmes to ensure their continuing fitness for purpose.

**Main findings**

NCC monitors and reviews its qualifications in line with Ofqual requirements. The panel was presented with an NCC internal document which outlines the processes which need to be followed with regard to the development, monitoring and maintenance of their qualifications. The Annual Monitoring exercise is used by NCC as a way of gathering feedback from centre staff and students regarding its programmes. The panel could see that STC and NCC have a good working relationship and that STC are very proactive in providing the latter with feedback and suggestions. The panel also saw evidence of feedback relayed to the NCC by its centres being taken on board.
3.11 Standard 11: Cyclical External Quality Assurance

Entities should undergo external quality assurance by, or with the approval of, the NCFHE on a cyclical basis, according to NCFHE guidelines, once every five years.

Main findings
STC fulfilled this standard by virtue of hosting the external quality audit referred to in this report. In addition, the STC undergoes an annual monitoring review by NCC Education where the latter monitors STC’s compliance with NCC Education’s Centre Regulations.

Overall judgment for Standard
STC surpasses Standard 11
4. Response by the Provider

1. Preamble

Reference is made to the audit report issued by NCHFE based on an audit visit spread over two days in October 2017.

The visit was set on 11 standards, whereby STC Higher Education met ten of these standards with minimal recommendations which STC has taken into consideration and have either been implement or will be implemented in the short term.

In Sections 2 and 3, a detailed reply has been prepared in connection with key recommendations and proposals that the QA Audit Report has identified.

On a concluding note, STC Higher Education is satisfied by the observations/findings highlighted in this report which is encouraging and fruitful for the Management Team as a way forward.

2. Response to comments and proposals made by the Peer Review Panel in connection with Standards where the judgment was “Standard met or surpassed”

1. Analysis of Findings of Panel

The CEO wishes to express apologies for his absence during one audit visit. However, as communicated during the visit, the CEO had been called to attend to an urgent Middlesex Board meeting which could not be rescheduled.

STC is of the opinion that the panel is giving too much weight on one student’s comment. The CEO and the Administration and Admissions Manager were the only two who were interviewed at length by the panel. It is advocated by the CEO that roles are shared and executed by all those concerned due to the fact that STC Higher Education is a small organisation.

Recommendation to set up a less centralised quality management structure has been actioned. (Please refer to the updated Organisational Chart (Document “C”) and the description of roles (Document “H”).

Local Examination Procedures have been made available to NCHFE as per R1.1.3 and later endorsed by NCC Education as per Document “B”.

Main Findings (Fact and Analysis)
RI.2.1: Organisational Chart has been revised” together with the role description. Please refer to documents marked “C” and “H”.

29
RI 2.2. Selection criteria of Headship positions require a minimum level of education of Masters Degree (MQF Level 7) and/or a minimum of ten years experience in the Educational Sector.

1.2.2  - Standard 2  – Institutional Probity
RI 2.1 Please refer to R.I.1.4 – Refer to Document “C”

RI 2.2. Selection criteria of Headship positions require a minimum level of education of Masters Degree (MQF Level 7) and/or a minimum of ten years experience in the Educational Sector.

1.2.3  - Standard 3: Design and Approval of Programmes.
Although home-grown programmes are not the main focus and strategy of STC Higher Education, STC Higher Education will develop the necessary internal procedure for the development of home-grown programmes in line with the criteria under standard 3 of the NQAF

1.2.6 Standard 6 – Teaching staff
RI 6.1 Recommendation is being made so that when recruitment of lecturers is carried out, this should be open to both male and female alike. Emphasis is being made to point out that the lecturing Staff at STC are provided with equal opportunities, STC would like to emphasize that this already exists at STC, so much so that we have a gender balance amongst our active lecturing staff. However upon NCHFE recommendation, upon recruitment, STC shall ensure to inform prospective employees that STC is an equal opportunities employer.

RI 6.2 STC has completed a feasibility study to assess the possibility of recruiting two full-time academic leaders as per your recommendation. However, it was concluded that it is not financially viable for STC Higher Education to recruit two full time academic leaders. This would have a negative impact on student experience as this would entail in giving a substantial amount of modules (to make up the 40hr/week) to the two individuals hence the students will not have the opportunity to experience subject matter experts as they currently enjoy from the pool of the various industry practitioners. Therefore it is STC’s intention to recruit two academic leaders (one for each qualification) on a Part-Time Basis.

RI 6.3 Our Lecturing Staff meet up on a yearly basis together with the NCC Representatives when they hold the Annual Monitoring Visit. However, STC acknowledges the need to for more opportunities to meet socially. This will be handled by the eventual Academic Leaders that STC are proposing to recruit.

RI 6.4 Following our meeting in October with NCHFE, lecturers are now provided with such information. We also circulate the student feedback form more than once especially when the lecturer is new or when a module has been updated by NCC Education. Furthermore, the feedback form is currently in discussion with our IT support whereby we are considering to implement the feedback form within the School Management System.

1.2.7 Standard 7 – Learning Resources and Student support.
R.1.7.1. Please refer to RI 4.3 STC is in discussion with a Ms. Lorleen Farrugia to handle the welfare of STC students.
1.2.8 Standard 8 – Information Management
R.I.8.1. We refer to Appendix F of NCC Education found in Centre Handbook and the attached Document “F”. In addition to this, a disclaimer is made available to the students upon enrolment and STC has asked The School Management System Provider to confirm the above mentioned access rights. (Please refer to document marked “G”).

1.2.9 Standard 9 – Public Information
R.I. 9.1 NCC policies and procedures will be made available on the school management system for every student who is enrolled on our programmes. STC will provide the students access to the Quality Assurance Manual.

R.I9.2 Such information would be premature and potentially misleading to students. This is because STC cannot display different career paths since these are decided when students may progress for further education. Currently STC does not deliver the Level 5 and level 6 qualifications in Computing and the level 6 qualifications in Business.

R.I.9.3 Recommendation has been actioned.
R.I9.4 STC has looked into this recommendation together with the lecturing staff concerned. It has been agreed to remove all Lecturer’s Profiles from STC’s website. This is mainly in support of privacy, data protection and poaching of lecturing staff from other institutions.

3. Response to comments and proposals made by the Peer Review Panel in connection with Standards for which the Peer Review Panel decided “improvement is required”

1.3.1 Standard 1 – Policy for quality assurance
R.I.1.1 Reference is made to your comment in connection with an existing quality assurance manual parts of which are outdated. In view of this, a revised Quality Assurance Manual is being developed by a third party. This would ensure that relevant policies and procedures reflect the current programmes and that a high quality assurance manual is completed. The mission statement is marked as Doc “A”.

R.I.1.2 Same as above.
R.I.1.3 Endorsed Document “B”
R.I.1.4 Refer to Document “C”
R.I.1.5 SWOT Analysis will be concluded when the Quality Assurance Manual is completed.

1.3.4 Standard 4 – Student centred learning Teaching and assessment
STC would like to make reference to the access to an examination paper prior to an examination. This practice was inherited from previous management with the aim of eliminating any issues that may arise during an examination which is due to the fact that examination papers are set by NCC Education. In view of a number of instances whereby errors in the examination papers
have been identified, the current management continued with this practice only with the modules the course content of which were updated. In these circumstances STC limited the access to the examination paper by giving access to the lecturer, 30 minutes prior to the start of the examination. If errors were identified, STC would take the necessary action to inform NCC Education and students alike. In this way, students remain calm and in the right frame of mind to complete the examination. Furthermore, STC would like to highlight that following the NCHFE audit visit and recommendation examination papers under no circumstances are made available to lecturers.

RI 4.1 Please refer to RI.1.3 –Endorsed Document “B”

RI 4.2 Appeals and complaints form as well as NCC policies and procedures will be made available on the school management system for every student who is enrolled. Permission as per Document marked “D” has been granted by NCC.

RI 4.3 STC is in discussion with a Ms. Lorleen Farrugia to handle the welfare of STC students.

RI 4.4 The Document marked “E” was circulated amongst all current students who are registered at STC Higher Education and are studying on a Part-Time basis. A student representative from the Diploma in Computing and the Diploma in Business who are studying on a Full Time basis will be selected from the next intake in October 2018.
Annex: Review Panel Bio Notes

In the setting up of the review panel for **STC training Centre**, the NCFHE sought to maintain a high degree of diligence in the process of selection of the members of Peer Review Panel. The Panel sought to be composed of specialists in quality assurance to act as External Peers, professionals and practitioners of quality assurance frameworks, as well as students who, prior to the audits, attended professional Training Seminars organised by the NCFHE.

The following bio notes present the profiles of the members of Peer Review Panel. The bio notes are correct as at the time of when the QA audit was carried out **3rd and 5th October 2017**.

**Head of Review Panel/External Peer: Ms Anne Marie Vincenti**

Anne Marie Vincenti graduated BA (Hons) in Philosophy (with First Class Honours) from the University of Malta in 2008 and subsequently MSc (with Distinction) in the Philosophy and History of Science from King’s College London and (jointly) the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) in 2010. She has taught at various levels in higher education; currently she lectures ‘Philosophy of Science’ and ‘Baroque Science’ part-time at the University of Malta. Anne Marie has extensive experience in quality assurance in education and has also worked as an officer with the NCFHE and previously within the Academic Programmes and Quality Resources Unit (APQRU) of the University of Malta.

**External Peer: Dr Mary Muscat**

Dr Mary Muscat is currently a full-time lecturer with University and a part-time child advocate at the Family Courts. She is posted at the Faculty of Laws, Civil Law Department, and she is coordinating the practicum of the Masters in Advocacy (M.Adv). Her task is to prepare 5th year law students for their legal practice and eventually sitting for their warrant exam.

She frequently lectures at the Academy of Disciplined Forces, formerly known as the Police Academy, mostly in criminal law, police law and policing subjects to police recruits, prison guards, and Frontex borderguards. She is also the Malta Police’s Science and Research Correspondent within CEPOL, the EU Agency for Law Enforcement Training. She works closely with the police and OSCE in developing a training programme that sensitizes police officers with regards to identifying and tackling hate crime. She is also currently involved in developing a set of textbooks for police officer and prison guard training.

Before becoming an academic, she was a Police Inspector for 13 years, hence her current specialisation in training related to law enforcement. She hold degrees in criminology, law, canon law, geography, history and environmental management. Her PhD research focuses on the role of the ‘green’ court in ensuring environmental governance.

**Student Peer: Mr Joseph Agius**

Joseph’s mission in life is to pastor and to promote Christian education. Together with his wife, he pioneered and pastor Word of Life and Gozo Jesus Pentecostal Holiness Churches. He also oversees
the Pakistani PH congregation. Joseph also pioneered the first evangelical work in the Maltese Correctional Facility (CCF). In 2008, Joseph accepted the responsibility to direct the first recognized Evangelical Bible School in Malta. He is the director and national representative of Global University USA which operates under the name of Global Institute of Theology in Malta. He was also the first Maltese pastor with recognized Biblical and theological qualifications. Joseph earned B.A.s in Bible education and Christian Education. He continued his studies and graduated with a Master of Arts in Biblical studies; a graduate certificate in education; and a Master of Divinity degree. He is currently a doctoral student. His goal now is to see Evangelical Pastors and leaders academically qualified in their ministry.