

# Evaluating Quality in Online Teacher Training: Insights from Student Feedback

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## Abstract

This paper examines student feedback from MKLC's online vocational and Further Education (FE) training programmes during the period from January to July 2025. The research utilizes 57 learner reviews through descriptive statistics and thematic analysis to determine learner satisfaction levels and identify main benefits and opportunities for improvement. The evaluation results demonstrate students maintain high satisfaction levels with an average rating overall of 48.19/50 (95% CI 47.24–49.14). Student assessment results demonstrated that 63.2% of learners scored 50/50 and another 24.6% received marks between 45 and 49. The strongest feedback elements consisted of tutor support and fast feedback together with transparent communication, yet some students needed improvement in platform navigation and alignment of modules with assignments as well as live interaction features. This study advances discussions about online professional training quality assurance by demonstrating the significance of tutor involvement and immediate interaction in addition to flexible learning approaches.

**Keywords:** Quality assurance; student evaluations; vocational training; online.

## Case Studies

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Online professional training programs have experienced rapid expansion during the past few years, especially in the Further Education (FE) and vocational education sectors. Working professionals from the UK and increasingly from across the Middle East benefit from receiving accredited and regulated programmes including the Award in Education and Training (AET), the Diploma in Education and Training (DET) and assessor and quality assurance qualifications that now operate on digital platforms. Online education has consequently become more demanding for quality delivery, learner satisfaction and effective tutoring support (Martin, Sun, & Westine, 2018; Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2000).

Student evaluations represent the fundamental quality indicator for educational programmes (Gibbs, 2010). Feedback from students delivers essential information about learner experiences because it showcases both positive and negative aspects of distance learning. Research indicates that learner outcomes benefit from immediate feedback from instructors while maintaining their presence in the learning process and

delivering clear learning materials (Arbaugh, 2014; Richardson et al., 2017). Vocational education students who manage professional responsibilities while studying depend heavily on supportive tutor interactions to achieve success (Tummons, 2014).

This paper analyses a dataset of student reviews collected between January and July 2025 from MKLC, a UK training provider delivering a range of FE and vocational qualifications. By examining both quantitative ratings and qualitative comments, the study aims to identify patterns in learner satisfaction, highlight effective aspects of provision, and explore areas where improvements could enhance the online learning experience.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### Student reviews as indicators of quality

The teaching evaluation process through Student Reviews and Evaluations of Teaching (SETs) serves as a common assessment method in higher and further education institutions to measure both course quality and teaching

effectiveness. However, the literature has consistently warned against using student reviews to measure learning outcomes because they are not direct indicators. Uttl, White, and Gonzalez (2017) conducted a meta-analysis showing no significant relationship between SET scores and actual learning results which indicates satisfaction ratings do not necessarily match effectiveness levels. According to Benton and Cashin (2012), Student Evaluations of Teaching contain multiple biases including gender and cultural factors that produce inaccurate results. Nevertheless, such reviews do provide evidence of the way in which students perceive the online experience of learning.

One aspect debated in the literature is whether student reviews should be independent of providers. Independent student reviews hold greater credibility for external stakeholders including accrediting bodies, funders, and regulators because they seem less affected by provider influence (Spooren, Brockx, & Mortelmans, 2013). The method of having learners provide feedback directly to tutors or admin staff increases the likelihood of restricted critical feedback because students may feel inhibited. Independent review collection through external tools or third-party quality assurance systems reduces both social desirability bias and enables learners to share their opinions more openly. Yet providers benefit more from internal evaluation methods because they can gather detailed feedback about their modules and tutors along with their assignments (Hornstein, 2017). The recommended method to improve reviews involves maintaining their anonymity and confidentiality status whether they are administered by internal staff or external parties and to validate the reviews alongside learning outcomes, peer reviews and external examiner reports (Richardson, 2005).

## Online Course Design

Biggs and Tang (2011) emphasise constructive alignment as a fundamental principle of course design: learning activities and teaching strategies must be aligned with the intended learning outcomes and assessment tasks. Online learning becomes ineffective when there is a lack of alignment between instructional materials and assignments because it leads to student uncertainty, according to Laurillard (2012).

Online courses should incorporate scaffolding mechanisms which support students through stages of competence development while becoming independent learners (Vygotsky, 1978; Salmon, 2013). Gilly Salmon's five-stage model for online learning demonstrates how progression should occur in an organised and structured manner:

1. Access and motivation (beginning the platform),
2. Online socialisation (building community),
3. Information exchange,
4. Knowledge construction,
5. Development (applying new skills).

Learner satisfaction directly depends on interaction as multiple studies in online learning research have proven. Moore (1989) established that three forms of interaction exist between

learners and their environment: learner–content, learner–instructor, and learner–learner. More recent research indicates that learner–content interaction produces the most significant effects on knowledge acquisition while learner–instructor interaction produces the highest satisfaction rates (Martin & Bolliger, 2018).

Research findings about synchronous and asynchronous learning reveal that flexibility reaches its peak in asynchronous modes but synchronous features (e.g., live Q&A, webinars) improve both social presence and immediacy (Hrastinski, 2008). The analysis of research indicates minimal performance variations between synchronous and asynchronous learning methods, yet students generally prefer courses that incorporate some form of real-time engagement (Raes et al., 2020).

The design process of online education requires accommodations for students who differ from one another. Web Content Accessibility guidelines (WCAG standards) recommend clear navigation, consistent layouts, and multimodal resources (text, video, audio). A flexible design without proper clarity produces mental fatigue or cognitive overload in learners. Learners need clear signposts that define expectations alongside rubrics and resources so they can manage their autonomy without getting confused.

Finally, the implementation of formative feedback alongside summative assessments should be a fundamental aspect of course design. According to Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006) formative feedback serves as an essential mechanism to support self-regulated learning particularly in online educational environments.

## Feedback quality and timeliness

Student engagement and progression depend heavily on feedback as an essential element. Research evidence shows that immediate feedback which includes actionable guidance enhances student motivation yet delayed feedback results in lower satisfaction levels and reduced persistence (Espasa & Meneses, 2010). According to Hussein et al. (2025) an experimental study demonstrated that feedback delays longer than 10 days resulted in substantial motivational decreases, but shorter feedback intervals produced minimal negative effects. According to Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006), formative feedback acts as the primary catalyst for self-regulated learning.

Research experts warn against excessive automation in AI-assisted feedback systems because, although technology enhances speed and scale, human judgment ensures meaningful responses in context (Kizilcec, 2023).

## Community of Inquiry Framework

The Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2000) continues to influence the study of online learning quality. Three essential elements make up this framework which consists of teaching presence alongside social presence and cognitive presence. The research findings from Richardson et al. (2017) demonstrate that teaching presence stands out as the most effective factor for student satisfaction and learning achievement because it



includes course design and facilitation and direct instruction. Social presence as an element of belonging and interpersonal connection between students also strongly links to student satisfaction (Lowenthal & Dunlap, 2020).

The extent to which learners construct and confirm meaning through reflection and dialogue defines the concept of Cognitive Presence. In practice, are learners able to move from receiving information to applying it critically and solving problems? The degree of cognitive presence directly depends on the strength of teaching presence and social presence and reflects deeper learning outcomes.

Social Presence refers to the way learners exhibit themselves both socially and emotionally to create authentic online connections with others. In practice, do learners feel part of a community, able to share experiences, and confident that their contributions are valued? The level of social presence directly influences student retention because learners maintain their commitment to courses when they experience a sense of belonging (Lowenthal & Dunlap, 2020).

Teaching Presence assesses the design, facilitation, and direction of the learning experience, both before and during the course. Do tutors maintain organised learning paths and deliver prompt feedback together with managing interactive group activities? Teaching presence emerges as the primary factor that affects learner satisfaction together with perceived learning achievements, according to Richardson et al. (2017).

### 3. METHODOLOGY

#### Research Design

The research implemented a mixed-methods study which combined statistical descriptions with thematic content analysis. The research method follows Creswell (2018) recommendations for educational studies because it uses both numerical and textual data to deliver complete learner perception insights.

#### Data Source

The data included 57 student reviews from January to July 2025 across seven educational programmes including AET, DET, CET, assessor, Internal Quality Assurance (IQA), External Quality Assurance (EQA), Literacy, and Maths specialist modules. The review data included learner names along with free-text comments and numerical ratings between 0 and 50 which equated to the top score of 50/50. The independent survey tool collected the reviews after students finished their courses and was implemented by CustomerSure, while MKLC staff members had no influence on its operation. Students received survey participation links through their completion emails but faced no requirements to respond.

#### Data Analysis

The analysis followed a two-stage process:

1. Quantitative analysis: Numerical scores from different courses were collated to determine general satisfaction

metrics and detect variations between educational programmes. The highest possible satisfaction rating of 50/50 showed strong learner approval with students using a 10-point Likert scale to answer five questions about their online experience. Students evaluated their entire learning experience by assessing the enrolment process and Moodle site usage as well as tutor support, service quality and referral recommendations to others.

2. Qualitative thematic analysis: Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework guided the coding process to analyse reviews inductively. The analysed data led to the development of five main themes that included tutor support, feedback and communication, learning platform usability, assessment guidance clarity and student preference for interactive sessions. The investigation evaluated thematic patterns across different course categories to determine which problems appeared in specific qualifications or demonstrated universal trends.

### Ethical Considerations

The analysis of anonymised student reviews did not need formal ethical approval since they originated from internal quality purposes and were already in the public domain. However, student confidentiality was ensured in this paper by removing full names from their survey response.

### 4. FINDINGS / RESULTS

#### Quantitative Overview

The majority of students gave the highest rating of 50/50 indicating they were satisfied with all programmes. The analysis of 57 reviews showed that more than two-thirds contained either full marks or included highly positive feedback which described experiences as excellent or perfect or very supportive. The scores were mostly high since even the lowest marks indicated satisfaction rather than dissatisfaction.

The data presented in Figure I reveals the following patterns when courses are divided into their respective types:

The Assessor and AET courses received the most review submissions from students who either gave maximum ratings of 50/50 or described their experiences as excellent (Assessor: n=20, Mean 48.60; 60.0% at 50/50; AET: n=8, Mean 48.62; 62.5% at 50/50).

Students who reviewed the DET program provided only positive feedback yet several learners proposed additional live learning sessions to enhance asynchronous content delivery (DET: n=5, Mean 50.0; 100% at 50/50).

The IQA and EQA courses received high ratings from students who praised their tutors, yet some learners encountered platform navigation difficulties and unclear rubrics (IQA: n=9, Mean 48.11; 44.4% at 50/50; EQA: n=4, Mean 48.50; 75.0% at 50/50).

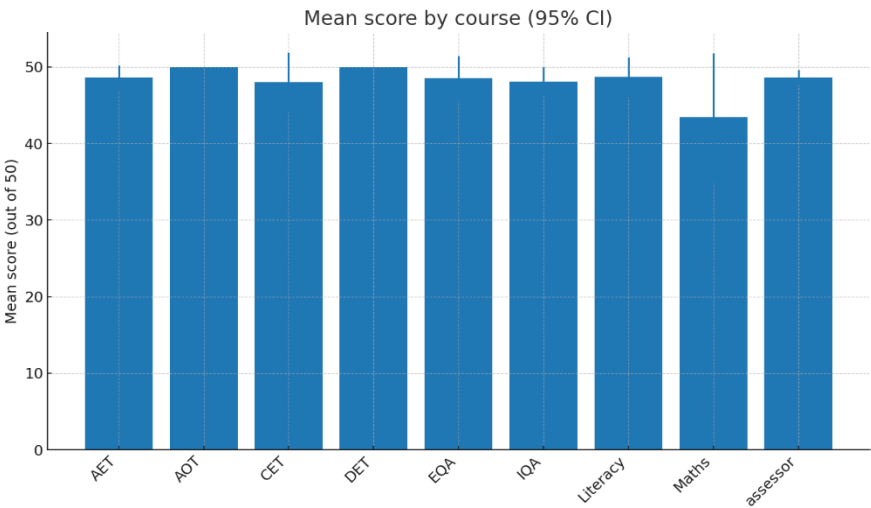
All Literacy students provided positive feedback about tutor support which received exceptional ratings (Literacy: n=3, Mean 48.67; 66.7% at 50/50).

The five Maths specialist modules received varied feedback with the following ratings (n=5, Mean 43.40 (SD 9.58); 60.0% at 50/50, 40.0% <45). The online modules received positive

feedback from multiple students who scored 50/50 and praised their tutor but other students felt the content failed to match the work requirements in assignments.

The quantitative results demonstrate high learner satisfaction levels with minor issues emerging from the design of course delivery instead of problems with tutor performance.

Figure I - Mean score by course



The scores were closely grouped (M = 48.19/50, SD = 3.66), indicating a low spread of scores around a high mean; the upper limit was limited by the 50/50 maximum score, suggesting a ceiling effect.

### Qualitative Thematic Analysis

Five main themes were identified from the thematic coding of reviews:

#### i. Tutor Support and Responsiveness

Tutor support was the most frequently mentioned positive aspect across all courses. Students frequently commended specific tutors with their names, emphasising their accessibility, tolerance, and helpfulness in giving feedback. Learners particularly appreciated the quick turnaround time for marking assignments.

*“Thank you for your patience and support, J. I don’t know how you turn around marking so quickly but I really appreciated that you did.”* (DET learner)

*“L is an exceptional tutor who goes above and beyond! Her support and encouragement made a huge difference.”* (Literacy learner)

This strong tutor presence demonstrates the importance of “teaching presence” according to the Community of Inquiry

framework (Garrison et al., 2000) and seems to be a key advantage of MKLC’s delivery.

#### ii. Feedback and Communication

Students uniformly praised the feedback as being specific, helpful and encouraging. The comments were clear, enabling students to improve their assignments and remain interested in the course.

*“I found the quick and detailed feedback extremely helpful throughout the course. The tutor support was excellent, providing prompt, clear, and concise responses.”* (Assessor learner)

This matches with findings in online learning research that individualised, timely feedback has a major impact on student satisfaction and continued engagement (Martin et al., 2018).

#### iii. Flexibility and Accessibility

Students often mentioned the advantage of being able to control the pace of the course and being able to apply for extra time if necessary. For working professionals, this flexibility was a major factor in their ability to finish the course.

*“It was nice to do it at my own pace and able to get extensions when work was overloading.”* (Maths learner)

The flexibility was seen as a benefit of the course design by most learners, even though some others wanted more structured real-time interaction.



#### iv. Desire for More Live Interaction

The asynchronous delivery model was well received by most students who also felt that live sessions or Q&A opportunities would improve their understanding and create more opportunities for discussion.

*“One area for possible improvement could be offering more opportunities for face-to-face support or live online sessions, especially during key stages of the course.”* (DET learner)

*“As a suggestion for continuous improvement, you might consider adding a few short live Q&A sessions or workshops to enhance interaction.”* (IQA learner)

This shows a conflict between the benefits of flexibility and the need for interaction, a problem that is well known in online learning research.

#### v. Platform Navigation and Assessment Clarity

A smaller number of learners mentioned difficulties with the Moodle platform and clarity of assignment instructions. While the majority of learners found the system operational, some mentioned difficulties with uploading files or interpreting assessment criteria.

*“I found it difficult to navigate around the Moodle site, and had some problems uploading files, although E supported me with this issue. For the course material, it would help to have more in-depth explanations with case studies and practical examples.”* (IQA learner)

*“The modules did not set you up correctly for the amount of assignments and the amount of work the assignments were... I enjoyed the assignments but the modules did not support this.”* (Maths learner)

These comments imply that while the support from tutors resolved technical and structural difficulties, there is potential to enhance the consistency between learning resources and assessment requirements.

#### Summary of Findings

The main strengths that were mentioned were excellent tutor support, quick and beneficial feedback, flexible learning pace, and very professional communication.

Some areas that require attention include live interaction opportunities, more detailed links between modules and assignments, more visible resources, and easier navigation of the platform.

The assessment results show that the online training delivered exceptionally well because learners expressed maximum satisfaction levels in all areas of study.

#### 5. DISCUSSION

The research reveals that students at MKLC show consistently high satisfaction levels with their online vocational and FE training courses. The maximum scores (50/50) combined with highly positive reviews demonstrate that the

educational provision surpasses student expectations in most cases. The thematic analysis revealed multiple areas where additional improvements would help enhance the learning experience.

#### Tutor Support as a Critical Factor

Tutor support emerged as the most important factor according to the study results. The evaluations frequently complimented tutors for their quick response and patient nature and comprehensive feedback. Research on the Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework confirms that teaching presence functions as a crucial predictor for learner engagement and success (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2000). According to Martin et al. (2018), students most valued timely feedback and strong communication as essential factors that influenced their perceptions of online learning quality.

The results demonstrated that tutor immediacy plays an important role in the marking process since learners mentioned quick response times as one of the programme's major strengths. The immediacy behaviours in online learning environments, according to Arbaugh (2014), build learner trust and sustain their motivational levels. The research evidence indicates that MKLC's quick and helpful feedback mechanism functions as a key strength which characterizes their educational provision.

#### Flexibility and Self-Paced Learning

Learners expressed their appreciation for flexible learning because it allowed them to control their study schedule according to their personal needs. Research findings from Moore and Kearsley (2012) confirm that flexibility emerges as one of the main benefits of online and blended learning approaches. The requirement of flexibility stands essential for vocational learners who study while employed because they need flexible learning options to achieve course completion. The study participants appreciated the self-directed approach and extra help features because these aspects specifically benefit professional and adult students (Anderson, 2011).

Although learners generally preferred the flexibility of asynchronous learning, some called for additional structured elements which included live Q&A sessions and synchronous classes. The documented contradiction in online education reveals that autonomous learning methods deliver flexibility yet diminish opportunities for group interaction and community formation (Hrastinski, 2008). The addition of optional live components would enable a balance between self-paced learning and interactive elements while maintaining the flexible design that students prefer.

#### Challenges with Platform Navigation and Assessment Clarity

The learning platform and assignment clarity posed problems, according to a limited number of student evaluations. Research studies show that digital navigation problems lead to reduced learner satisfaction primarily among students who lack experience with online systems (Sun et al., 2008).

Tutor or administrative support resolved most issues at MKLC, but learners needed additional clarification on rubrics and module-assignment alignment, according to their feedback. The implementation of instructional content that aligns more closely with assessment requirements supports best practices in constructive alignment (Biggs & Tang, 2011), which would increase learner confidence and decrease assignment-related anxiety.

## Conceptual Framework

The three evaluation areas of the Community of Inquiry framework received attention in this study. The reviews demonstrate how fast tutor feedback combined with clear communication and supportive assistance demonstrates strong teaching presence. The student demand for more live sessions and Q&A workshops demonstrates their need for stronger social presence within their asynchronous learning environment. The misalignment between modules and assignments reveals student achievement but improved alignment would help students better integrate their knowledge which strengthens cognitive presence.

## 6. IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

This research supports the fundamental role of human assistance in online professional education programmes. Students place the highest importance on tutor interaction despite the advantages digital platforms provide through flexible access. Training providers in vocational training and FE should direct their resources toward staff development to maintain superior feedback systems and communication methods.

The results show that adding small changes to course design—such as better rubrics, more obvious connections between modules and assignments, and optional real-time sessions—would make the learning better without harming the existing strengths of flexibility and tutor support.

## 7. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study only used reviews from one provider for six months and therefore the results are not applicable to all online training programmes. The results are based on what students report they feel rather than what we measure from student learning outcomes. Longitudinal research would be beneficial in the future to determine if the identified themes are consistent through time or if the implemented improvements from this analysis lead to actual changes in learner experience. Research that compares different providers would also help to identify the best practices in online vocational training across the industry.

## 8. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This research studied 57 learner reviews from MKLC's online vocational and Further Education (FE) training courses within the period from January to July 2025. The findings are very clear on learner satisfaction as most of the

participants gave the maximum possible rating (50/50) and described their experiences in very positive ways. Throughout all qualifications from assessor training to AET, DET, CET, IQA, EQA, Literacy and Maths, the one common theme was the high quality of the tutors' support. Learners appreciated timely constructive feedback, friendly and supportive communication, and the responsiveness of tutors and administrators. These aspects were frequently mentioned as key elements that helped learners to progress and build their confidence.

The overall picture is very positive but the analysis also shows some areas that could be developed. Some learners found the platform navigation difficult and the assessment clarity poor, as some modules did not adequately prepare them for the assignments. Some learners felt the need for more live interaction, such as optional Q&A sessions or workshops, to complement the flexibility of self-paced learning. Even though they were less frequent, these issues show some areas for improvement in course design.

The findings support previous research that human support is vital to online learning environments to sustain learner engagement. This also shows the continuous challenge of balancing flexibility with interactivity in digital provision.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are made based on the findings:

- To continue to have high levels of tutor presence and feedback by continuing to give prompt, detailed and constructive feedback as this is highly valued by learners and related to positive feedback.
- To introduce optional live elements such as short Q&A sessions, webinars or one-to-one check-ins to increase the opportunities for synchronous interaction. This will allow learners who want to engage in real time to have more support without losing the flexibility of self-paced study.
- To improve assessment guidance and module alignment by making sure that online modules are more closely aligned to assignment tasks to ensure that learning activities more directly prepare learners for assessment requirements. Include clearer rubrics and additional examples or case studies to help learners understand better.
- To improve visibility and navigation of resources by changing the platform design to make key resources (e.g., handbooks, suggested readings, policies) more visible and easier to access. Consider learner feedback on Moodle usability to inform future updates.
- To undertake longitudinal and comparative research by collecting and analysing learner feedback over a longer period to check if the improvements address the identified issues. Compare findings with similar online providers to determine sector-wide best practice.

## 9. FINAL REFLECTIONS

The case study shows that online vocational and FE training can achieve high levels of learner satisfaction when learners have responsive, supportive and skilled tutors. The challenge for providers is to maintain this high level of human support and to make sure that learning materials, assessments, and digital platforms are well designed to support the tutor–learner relationship. Providers such as MKLC can make their provision better by addressing minor issues that recur and so continue to serve as examples of effective practice in online professional education.

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