



“From the Cleanroom to the Classroom”

Exploring Supports for Industry-Experienced, Mature Students Applying for and Completing the Part Time BSc in Quality for Industry in ATU Galway

This research was completed as part of the Applied Project Module
ATU Masters in Teaching and Learning

Presented by: Rachel Mc Carthy
Lecturer - Faculty of Science & Health, ATU Galway
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Why did I choose this Research Topic?

“The MA in Teaching & Learning Applied Module is designed to support learners in developing advanced expertise in pedagogical practice, research methodologies, and design thinking to meet contemporary challenges in education.” - source: The 25/26 module handbook

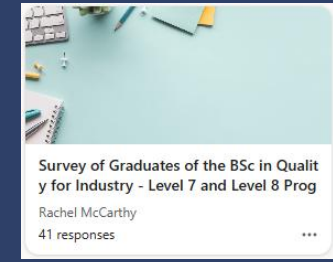
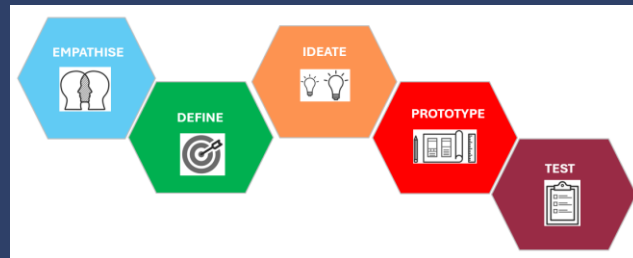
As co-founder of the Quality for Industry programmes, in conjunction with our local industry partners, I know there is a demand for our graduates. Challenge: Went from 31 graduates in 2019 to 9 graduates in 2026.

Aim of this applied project research:

- To develop supports for industry-experienced, mature students of the part-time BSc in Quality for Industry.
- To increase the number of successful applicants and much-needed (by industry) graduates of this programme.

Methodology:

- Design Thinking
- Sampling strategy - purposive
- Data collection method – anonymous surveys
- Mixed Methods

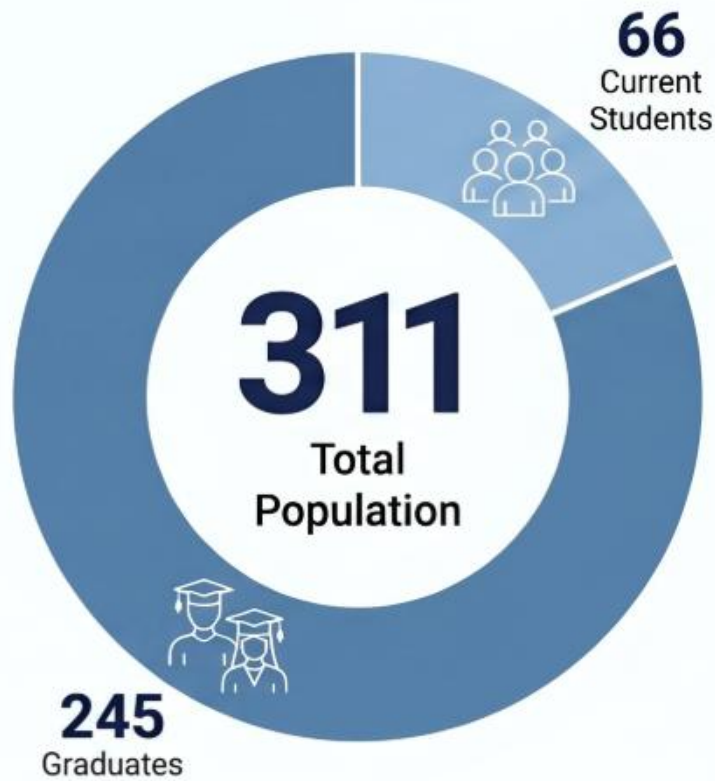


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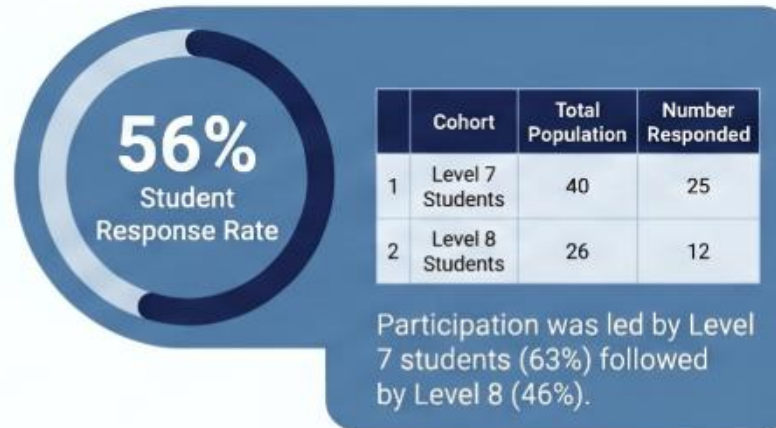
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BSc in Quality for Industry: Survey Engagement

Survey metrics and initial alumni network adoption from 311 individuals associated with the programme.



Survey Participation Metrics



Alumni Network Growth

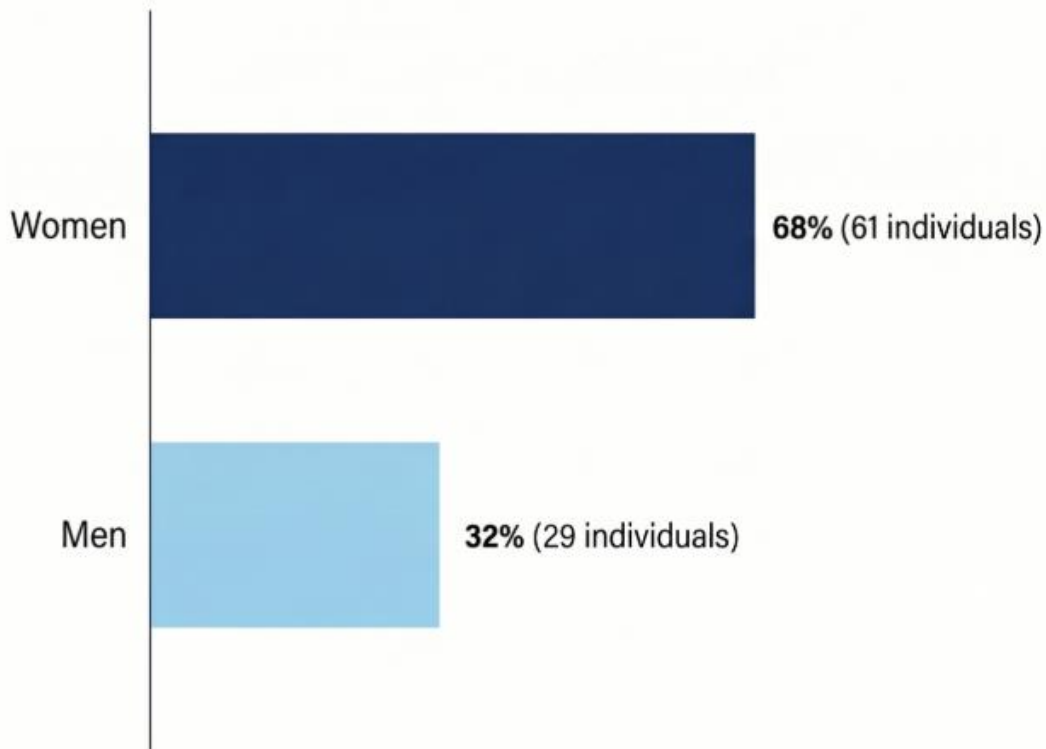


One-quarter of all 245 graduates have already joined the new group.

BSc in Quality for Industry: Participant Profile (n=90)

High-level statistical overview of 90 respondents, highlighting gender distribution, age demographics, and current academic status.

GENDER DISTRIBUTION



AGE PROFILE



ACADEMIC COHORT BREAKDOWN



Who are our students?

Some of the Humans of the BSc in Quality for Industry - A strong community of Teaching and Learning



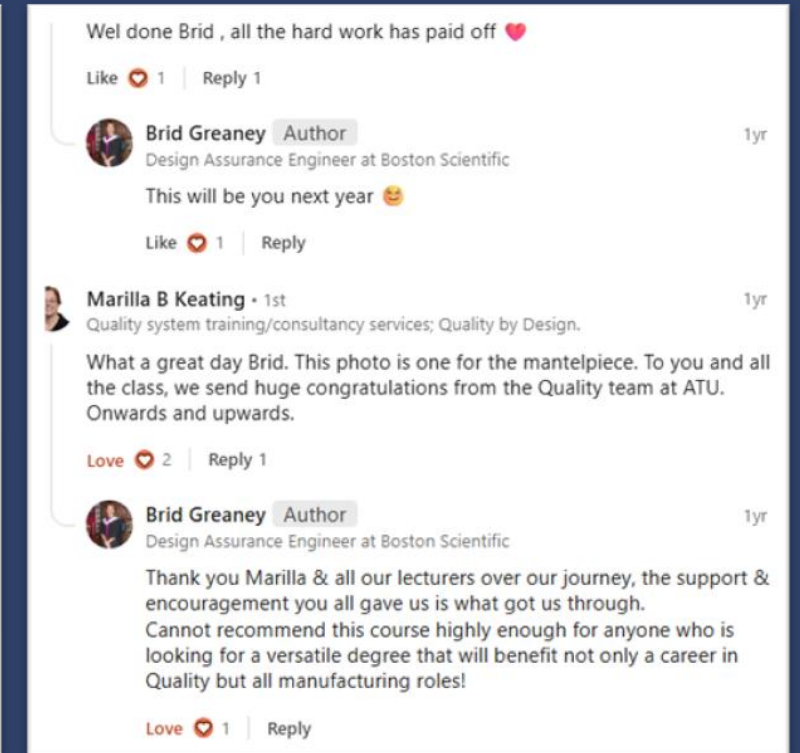
“Without the Level 7 in Quality for Industry, I would not have been able to progress my career.”

If you have been to the Galway Dublin Road campus, you have probably passed by Brid Greaney! Brid is a graduate of the BSc in Quality for Industry. She completed the Level 7 in 2022 and the level 8 in 2024. She is currently working as a Design Assurance Engineer in Boston Scientific.



A proud day in the Greaney house with a double graduation from ATU Galway! Congratulations to my daughter on achieving her Masters of Science in Conservation Behavior & I've finally achieved my Honours Degree in Quality for industry. We couldn't have done it without the support of our family, lecturers & classmates!

#classof2024
#graduation
#atugalway

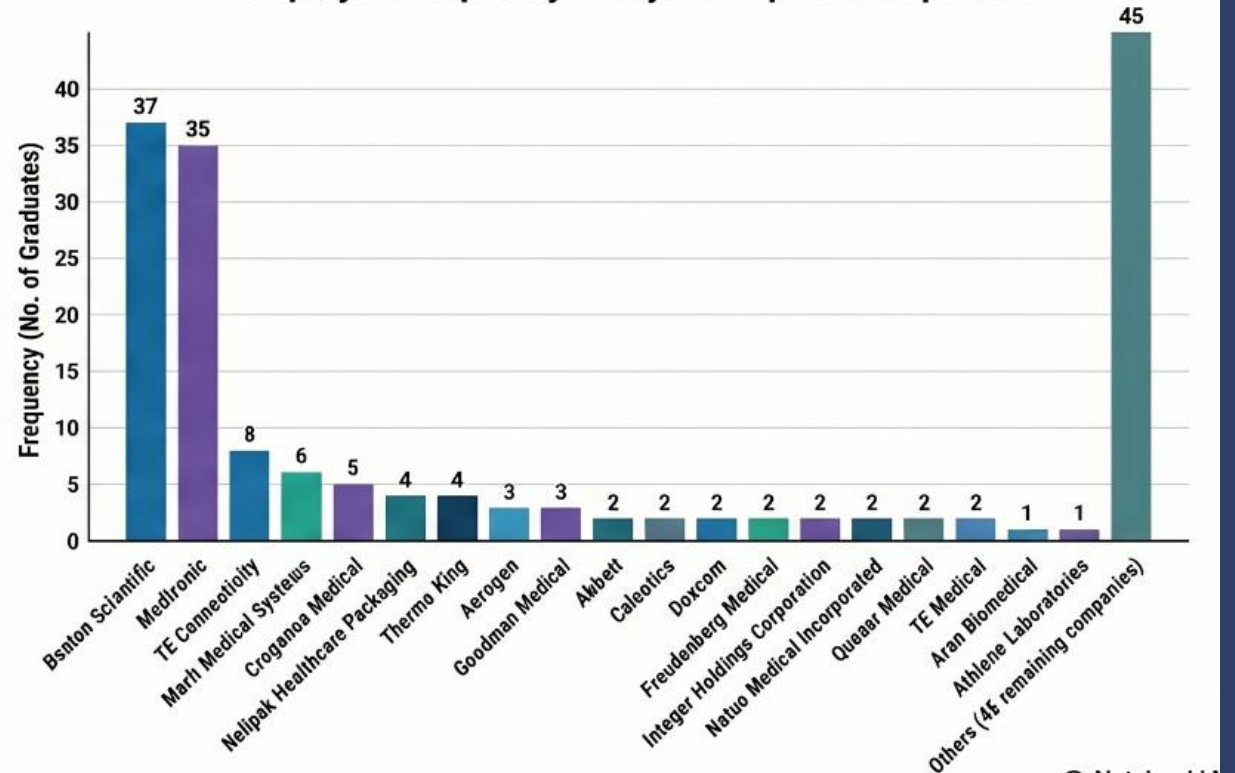


Where do the Graduates of the BSc in Quality for Industry work?

Word Cloud



Employer Frequency Analysis: Top 20 Companies



CURRENT LEVEL 7 STUDENTS

Survey Insights: Demographic and Professional Snapshot of Level 7 BSc in Quality for Industry Students (N=25)

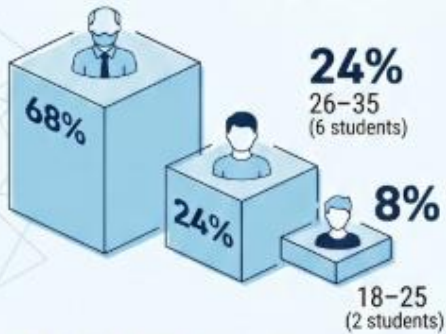
STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

MATURE STUDENT PROFILE

68%

of the cohort (17 students) are aged 36 or older.

AGE DISTRIBUTION

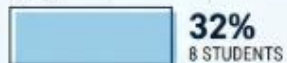


GENDER BREAKDOWN

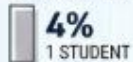
FEMALE



MALE



PREFER NOT TO SAY



ENTRY ROUTES & CAREER IMPACT

60%
ENTRY VIA RPL



15 students successfully utilised the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) process for admission.

48%



PROMOTION RATE

12 students have already secured promotions since the degree programme.

HIGH PROFESSIONAL UTILITY

Nearly half the cohort achieved career advancement while still completing their studies.

“Transformative Education in Learning and Teaching” in action:

48% of level 7 students have been promoted since starting or completing their degree.

Level 8 Graduate: “I was a 48-yr old operator when I started the course. I'm now a 55-year-old Senior Regulatory Operations Specialist.”

“Completing this course helped me in a great way, it gave me the knowledge to develop a QMS in a small start up and my career progressed to Quality Manager.”

Navigating the ATU Degree: A Comparison of Two Student Journeys

The School Leaver Student Journey (Age 17-19)

Built-in Support: "Lots of Guardrails"



Step 1: The Leaving Certificate

The journey begins with the completion of standard secondary education and the state examination.



Step 2: The CAO Application (HEAR & DARE)

Students apply via the Central Applications Office, often utilizing the Higher Education Access Route (HEAR) or Disability Access Route to Education (DARE) for reduced points entry.



Step 3: Entry to ATU

Direct admission into the university following the standard application cycle.



Destination: Level 7 or 8 Degree

A straightforward 3 to 4-year path to obtaining a primary undergraduate qualification.

The Mature Student Journey (BSc in Quality for Industry) (Age 23+)

A "Convolutd" and Non-Linear Path (marked by "few guardrails")

Phase 1: Discovery & Evaluation

Identifying the "Quality for Industry" course and evaluating its relevance to specific Medtech or Pharma career goals.



Phase 2: Application Hurdles

Navigating a complex web of portals, including the main ATU courses page, the application portal, flexible applicant guides, and the RPL site.

Portal Purpose	URL / Web Address
Course Information	www.atu.ie/courses
Direct Application	www.apply.slo-fe
Flexible Applicant Guide	www.atu.ie/study/how-to-apply/online-and-flexible-applicants
Recognition of Prior Learning	www.atu.ie/study/recognition-of-prior-learning
Registration Banner	https://ssb.gnnt.ie/StudentSe/Service/ssb/studentBummenDashboard



Phase 3: The RPL Process (Portfolio of Evidence)

A rigorous "Recognition of Prior Learning" process requiring the gathering of a detailed portfolio to prove competence through prior industry experience.

Personal Challenges



The "Triple Shift" Challenge

Mature students must balance full-time professional roles, children or caring responsibilities, and their academic studies simultaneously.



Lack of Academic Confidence

Many first-time 3rd level learners suffer from "Imposter Syndrome" and feelings of being an outsider in an academic environment.

Destination:
BSc in Quality for Industry
(Level 778)



Worth the Journey!

What is Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and what do these students have to do to get it?



RPL is a rigorous process where an applicant maps and documents previous learning, (in the case of the BSc in Quality for Industry), to gain advanced entry to a level 7 programme.

The types of learning include;

1. Existing formal learning - certified or accredited learning.
2. Non-formal learning - planned learning and training activities undertaken in the workplace.
3. Informal learning - through life and work experience.

The applicant compiles their prior learning into a portfolio of evidence to demonstrate they have learning equivalent to the overall learning of the previous stage.

“RPL gives a good basis for explaining your relevance in the workplace. Also makes it less daunting to go back as a mature student when you can clearly see what it is you can bring to the course and how it can benefit you going forward.” – Level 7 Student

The RPL team support applicants throughout the process (Thank you!).

source: <https://www.atu.ie/study/recognition-of-prior-learning>

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- The "Triple Shift" Challenge**
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- Lack of Academic Confidence**
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Some Graduate Voices about challenges with their RPL application:



Theme 1: Understanding Requirements:

“What were the expectations, guidelines – to me they did not seem very straightforward.”

“The criteria was difficult to understand.”

“Gathering the information, knowing exactly what they are looking for in the RPL.”

Theme 2: Time Required

“It can take one whole day just to map it all out before you write anything.”

“Over 100 hours, cannot remember exactly.”

“Don’t leave it to the last minute – it takes a lot of time to complete.”

Theme 3: Mapping Experience to Outcomes

“Matching my work experience to each question was the hardest part.”

“Trying to reply to questions that were not clearly asked.”

“You really had to think of your work experience and how to link it to the questions.”

Theme 4: Timing Alongside Coursework

“I would definitely prefer to have completed the RPL before I began the course.”

“Doing RPL when I should have been focusing on assignments was very stressful.”

“Completing it alongside exams made it more difficult than it needed to be.”

Supports for Industry-Experienced Students and Graduates

Outputs of the Research: Creation of an Alumni Group



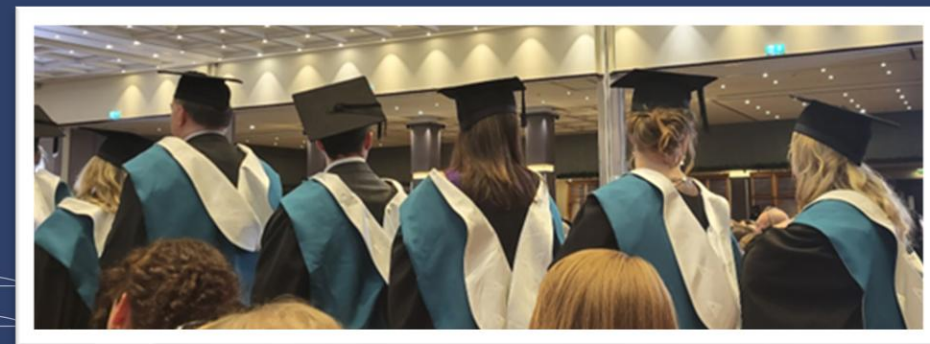
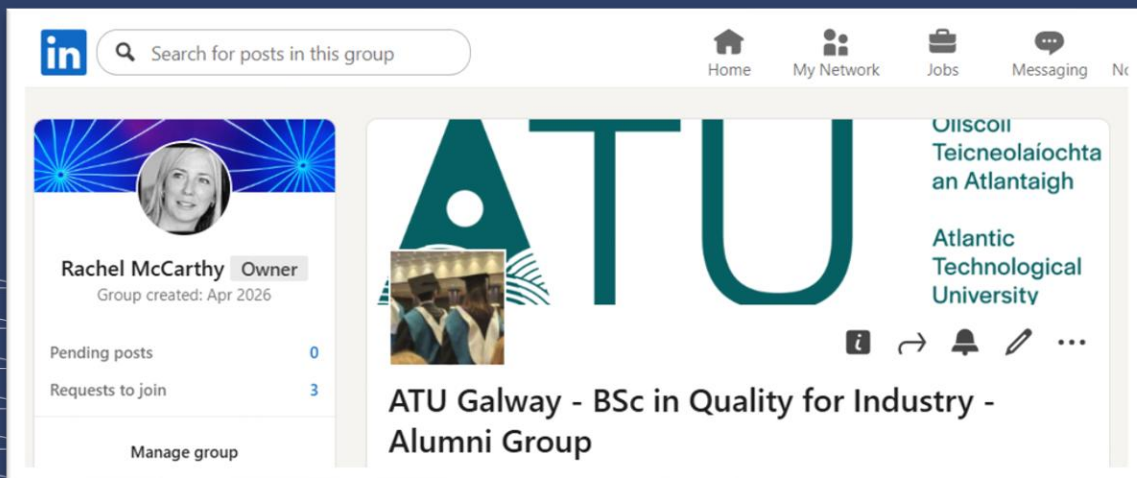
One of the aims of the research was to develop a unique support framework of Quality for Industry alumni to foster support for current and future programme applicants and students.

72% of graduates answered, “Yes” to the survey question “Would you be interested in joining the "ATU Galway - Quality for Industry Alumni Group“ of the ATU Alumni Network? ”

In April 2026 I set up a LinkedIn Group for the BSc in Quality for Industry Alumni. It is currently a working prototype as it has been set up to be graduate-led and it will evolve as their needs develop.

The hope is that the alumni will also develop into a network of guest lecturers and be a fantastic ongoing source of industry-based subject matter experts, enhancing the authenticity and relevance of the programme.

Of the 245 Graduates, so far, we have 61 members = 25% uptake to date (May ‘26)



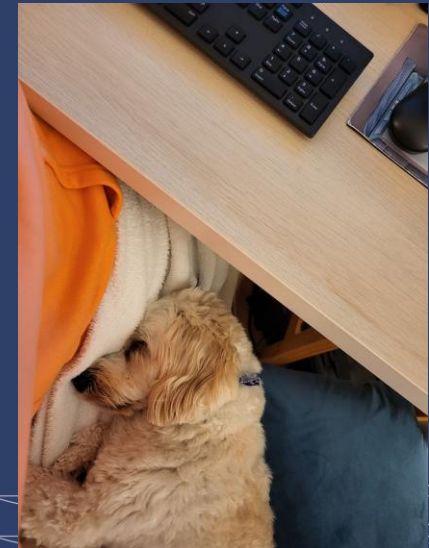
Some Supports Suggested by Students and Graduates:

1	"I think particularly at the beginning, emotional support and encouragement is needed as going back to college after many years, your self-confidence can be very low."
2	"A welcome package of general college information that you may require . More time to show the college tour before classes start, its a big place."
3	"Open nights with maybe a few previous students available to talk to current students."
4	"I would like to see former students brought back to speak to current students to give them the drive to progress and see the benefits of completing the courses." "Great to see past grads coming back, it inspires and kind of full ends the cycle, allows grads to give back."
5	"I think maybe a Teams call before you start the RPL process to ensure you understand what is required."
6	"I think it would be good for ATU to visit Industries to present this course for anyone interested in working in Quality. It is an excellent course and would be another way to create awareness."

Further Research – Next Steps

- ATU Staff Voice
- ATU Systems/ Processes

Thank You



Couldn't have done it without this guy, thanks Rolo!