Reengagement Panel Final Report

Assessment of Capacity and Approval of QA Procedures

Part 1   Details of provider

1.1   Applicant Provider

Registered Business/Trading Name:	Irish Defence Forces School of Catering
Address:	Defence Forces School of Catering, McKee Bks, Blackhorse Avenue, Dublin 7
Date of application:	03.07.2020
Date of resubmission of application:	
Date of site visit (if applicable):	12.11.2020
Date of reconvene meeting (if applicable)	09.02.2021
Date of recommendation to the Programmes and Awards Executive Committee:	08.04.2021

1.2   Profile of provider

The Defence Forces School of Catering was established in 1922 and provides professional military training and education to all Defence Forces cooks and other Defence Forces personnel as required. It provides catering advice and support to units and personnel preparing for overseas deployment, collaborate with physios and medical staff in providing the health and fitness information for Defence Force personnel, offers guidance to those responsible for HACCP and food safety; and direction, in

collaboration with the Ordnance Group, on the procurement of equipment for the various kitchens and cooking installations throughout the Defence Forces.

The Defence Forces School of Catering is an atypical provider of programmes as learners are also employees and it only recruits students onto its programmes who are military personnel. Students on all courses within the Defence Forces need to pass an annual fitness test and a medical exam to be considered eligible for entry to the programme. Students are recommended by their units and are selected by their brigades according to operational needs. The School of Catering is one of 17 schools of training for military personnel within the Defence Forces which is one of the largest training organisations in the state. The Defence Force's training and education policy is aligned to the White Paper on Defence and the Strategic Planning Framework and all training conducted is underpinned by a doctrinal framework. This framework is managed by the Doctrinal Committee with a Training Management Section, a Training Evaluation Section and a Training Education Section all of which operate under the management of the Director of Training Policy and Education.

The Defence Force School of Catering has operated under QQI and before that with HETAC/FETAC. The typical number of students qualified each year on QQI awards is 30. The Defence Forces recognises the potential in extending the range of qualifications offered through QQI validation but is not currently seeking any extension to its scope of provision.

The School of Catering is in McKee Barracks and the school has two state-of-the-art kitchens, a large lecture room as well as a briefing room, a teaching room and office facilities to carry out its programmes.

The following are the QQI and Non-QQI courses provided:

Programme	Duration	Validation
Young Entry Cooks Course	37 weeks	QQI Level 5
Advanced Cooks Course	13 weeks	QQI Level 6
Junior Management Course	4 weeks	

Standard Management Course	5 weeks
Senior Management Course	6 weeks
Food Safety Courses	
Field Catering Courses	
Professional Baking bread	

The Young Entre Cooks course is a lengthy syllabus which brings learners up to the standard of a Level 5 QQI award and they then return to their units or are deployed overseas. They can then return to do the Advanced Cooks Course which is certified by QQI at Level 6. The non-QQI awarded Management courses offered by the provider are completed in the same way and learners are also advancing through the ranks of the military as they complete each stage. Learners are trained as soldiers primarily and they can apply to the School of Catering at various stages of their careers within the Defence Forces. As a result, learners are first and foremost soldiers, even while on courses qualifying up within other areas. The courses that the School of Catering provides are like civilian courses in content and skill acquisition except for the requirement for field catering that is an essential part of the programmes. Learners need to be able to work in environments outside their normal bases like the Glen of Imaal, Shannon airport, Portlaoise Prison or overseas in areas like Chad or other places where Irish military personnel are involved in peacekeeping missions.

In completing the gap analysis, the provider identified the need for a third classroom. Another issue is a gap in qualified trainers which sometimes arises as trainers may be deployed elsewhere in the organization. This strain on resources occurs when two courses are running simultaneously, as well as running management training. The provider has identified a pool of previously qualified experienced instructors who can fill this training gap.

Part 2   Panel Membership

Name	Role of panel member	Organisation
Dr. Michael Hall	Chair	Head of Department of Health and Leisure Studies, IT Tralee
Dr. John D. Mulcahy	Hospitality FE & QA Specialist	Independent Food Tourism Advisor & Researcher
Anne Higgins	Quality Assurance expert	Quality Assurance Co-ordinator Galway Roscommon ETB
Celestine Rowland	Report Writer	Director, Galway Business School

Part 3   Findings of the Panel

3.1   Summary Findings

At the outset of this report, the Panel makes several commendations in relation to the Defence Forces School of Catering's approach to the reengagement process.

The Panel commends the Defence Forces School of Catering on the holistic approach to the development of the learner as a person both within and without the School of Catering. The provider's vision of a safe but demanding environment of learning is underpinned by the core military principles of respect, loyalty, selflessness, physical courage, moral courage and integrity. Learners progress through a course of study while still working as employees of the Defence Forces and living the vision they serve. The Panel commends the provider on the implementation of the Learner Diary as an instrument that supports and enhances the teaching and learning experience of the student, making them critically aware and giving them opportunities for self-reflection and evaluation of their own learning.   The expertise of the instructors and obvious care for students of both the instructors and of management is

to be commended. It was clear to the Panel during the virtual site visit the obvious passion and energy of the Instructors on the programme and the clarity of the processes as they are being lived.

The Panel commends the Defence Forces School of Catering team for the open and frank discussion that took place during the virtual site visit.

It is to be commended that the intent of the provider is to seek continuing national certification for its work-based learning. As one of the largest training organisations in the state with 17 different schools, it is impressive that the Defence Forces School of Catering is seeking to benchmark its programmes to national qualifications while still fulfilling specific military training requirements.

The Panel commends the provider's commitment to a lifelong training culture. It is evident from the gap analysis that the provider has identified the solution to ensuring a continuing stream of qualified and experienced instructors for their courses. Identification of potential instructors happens during the running of a programme and plans are put in place to ensure that any gaps in their academic or professional careers are filled before they take up such roles. During the gap analysis, the provider also identified the need for a third classroom in the training facility in McKee barracks.

These commendations notwithstanding, at the conclusion of the site visit, the Panel had concerns around quality assurance and governance, the learner voice, internal approval of results, benchmarking of programmes to other providers and the Academic Council's system of self-evaluation. These were identified as proposed mandatory changes and are outlined in detail in Section 7.1 of this report. Additional items of specific advice are included in Section 7.2. The Panel deferred its decision and allowed the provider six weeks in which to address the issues identified.

Following the meeting of the Panel on February 9th, 2021 and a desk review of the revised documentation submitted by the Defence Forces School of Catering, the Panel would like to commend the provider on the substantive work undertaken and on its openness in discussions with the Panel and with QQI. The diagrams on Pages 39 and 43 of the documentation are very useful and give a substantial overview of the organisation. The Panel is of the view that the provider has the ability to maximise the

implementation of its revised policies and procedures and is well placed to continue the enhancement of its QA system.

The Panel is now of the view that the provider has satisfactorily addressed the proposed mandatory changes and has responded appropriately to the Panel's initial recommendations. The Panel makes an additional commendation as the provider has engaged in the process in a very meaningful way and has substantially updated its QA policies and procedures to reflect those changes. Notwithstanding the work that has been undertaken, the Panel have a number of conditions and some items of specific advice that are detailed in Sections 6.1 and 7.2 of this report. The Panel consequently recommends that QQI approve the Irish Defence Forces School of Catering QA policies and procedures.

3.2   Recommendation of the panel to Programmes and Awards Executive Committee of QQI

	Tick <u>one</u> as appropriate
Approve Defence Forces School of Catering draft QA procedures	X
Refuse approval of Defence Forces School of Catering draft QA procedures **pending mandatory changes** set out in Section 6.1 (If this recommendation is accepted by QQI, the provider may make a revised application within six months of the decision)	
Refuse to approve Defence Forces School of Catering draft QA procedures	

Part 4   Evaluation of provider capacity

4.1   Legal and compliance requirements:

	Criteria	*Yes/No/ Partially*	*Comments*
4.1.1(a)	**Criterion:** *Is the applicant an established Legal Entity who has Education and/or Training as a Principal Function?*	**Yes**	The Defence Force is a legal entity which has education and training as a Principal function, including the School of Catering which is being assessed in this application.
4.1.2(a)	**Criterion:** *Is the legal entity established in the European Union and does it have a substantial presence in Ireland?*	**Yes**	The legal entity is established in the European Union and has a substantial presence in Ireland.
4.1.3(a)	**Criterion:** *Are any dependencies, collaborations, obligations, parent organisations, and subsidiaries clearly specified?*	**Yes**	The Defence Force School of Catering occupies a small but key role within the Defence Forces as a whole.
4.1.4(a)	**Criterion:** *Are any third-party relationships and partnerships compatible with the scope of access sought?*	**Yes**	There are no collaborative or third-party relationships or partnerships outside the of Defence Forces.
4.1.5(a)	**Criterion:** *Are the applicable regulations and legislation complied with in all jurisdictions where it operates?*	**Yes**	All applicable regulations and legislation are complied with by the Provider.
4.1.6(a)	**Criterion:** *Is the applicant in good standing in the qualifications systems and*	**Yes**	The applicant in good standing with QQI and has been a recognised provider of QQI

education and training systems in any countries where it operates (or where its parents or subsidiaries operate) or enrols learners, or where it has arrangements with awarding bodies, quality assurance agencies, qualifications authorities, ministries of education and training, professional bodies and regulators.		programmes and previously of HETAC / FETAC programmes.

Findings

The Panel has been assured that the Defence Forces School of Catering meet the legal and compliance requirements within 4.1 and the Panel accepts this assurance and evidence presented and is of the view that the provider meets this criterion in full. The DF School of Catering has a track record of providing QQI validated programmes.

4.2 Resource, governance and structural requirements:

	Criteria	Yes/No/ Partially	Comments
4.2.1(a)	**Criterion:** *Does the applicant have a sufficient resource base and is it stable and in good financial standing?*	**Yes**	The applicant has a sufficient resource base and is government funded through the Department of Defence.
4.2.2(a)	**Criterion:** *Does the applicant have a reasonable business case for sustainable provision?*	**Yes**	The applicant has a reasonable business case for sustainable provision.
4.2.3(a)	**Criterion:** *Are fit-for-purpose governance, management and decision making structures in place?*	**Yes**	The applicant operates within the overall structure of the Defence Forces. While they are significant governance, management and decision-making structures in place, at the close of the site visit in 2020, the Panel identified a proposed mandatory change to the Academic Council's reporting mechanisms outlined in Section 7.1 of this report. As of February 9th, the Panel is satisfied that these issues have been satisfactorily addressed by the provider.
4.2.4(a)	**Criterion:** *Are there arrangements in place for providing required information to QQI?*	**Yes**	There are arrangements in place for providing information to QQI.

Findings

At the close of the site visit in November 2019, the Panel identified a proposed mandatory change in relation to the Academic Council's schedule of self-evaluation, monitoring and review activities outlined

in section 7.1 of this report. The Panel is now satisfied that the provider has taken on board the Panel's recommendation in relation to the Academic Board and now has a schedule of self-evaluation, monitoring and review activities in place.

4.3 Programme development and provision requirements:

	Criteria	*Yes/No/ Partially*	*Comments*
4.3.1(a)	**Criterion:** *Does the applicant have experience and a track record in providing education and training programmes?*	**Yes**	The applicant has experience and a track record of providing programmes of education and training.
4.3.2(a)	**Criterion:** *Does the applicant have a fit-for-purpose and stable complement of education and training staff?*	**Yes**	The provider has a fit-for-purpose and stable complement of education and training staff.
4.3.3(a)	**Criterion:** *Does the applicant have the capacity to comply with the standard conditions for validation specified in Section 45(3) of the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act (2012) (the Act)?*	**Yes**	The Panel is satisfied that the provider's track record of certification and its approach to the reengagement process reflects its capacity to cooperate and assist QQI with information as specified in the Qualifications and Quality Assurance Act.

4.3.4(a)	**Criterion:** *Does the applicant have the fit-for-purpose premises, facilities and resources to meet the requirements of the provision proposed in place?*	**Yes**	The provider is well established and well resourced. It has fit-for-purpose premises, facilities and resources to meet the requirements of the provision being delivered.
4.3.5(a)	**Criterion:** *Are there access, transfer and progression arrangements that meet QQI's criteria for approval in place?*	**Yes**	Access is from the corps of the Defence Forces and there is a selection system in place and progression is through courses as learner careers develop. The Panel has a proposed advice in relation to ATP policies detailed in 7.2 of this report.
4.3.6(a)	**Criterion:** *Are structures and resources to underpin fair and consistent assessment of learners in place?*	**Yes**	There are structures and resources in place that underpin fair and consistent assessment of learners.
4.3.7(a)	**Criterion:** *Are arrangements for the protection of enrolled learners to meet the statutory obligations in place (where applicable)?*	**n/a**	The learners on these programmes are also employees of the Defence Forces. Learners apply and are assigned to this training and as such

			there are no fees involved.

Findings

The Panel recognises the provider has an established track record with QQI as a provider of catering programmes for its own personnel and is well resourced. Its approach to the reengagement process reflects its capacity to cooperate and assist QQI with information as specified in the Qualifications and Quality Assurance Act.

4.4   Overall findings in respect of provider capacity to provide sustainable education and training

Overall, the Panel commends a great number of aspects of the Defence Forces School of Catering QA procedures and processes. Nonetheless, at the close of the initial site visit, the Panel identified some proposed mandatory changes (set out in Section 7.1 of this report), to be addressed before approval of the Defence Forces School of Catering QA procedures could be recommended to QQI. As these changes were discrete, the provider was permitted six weeks in which to address these changes.

Following a review of the revised documentation submitted by the Defence Forces School of Catering, the Panel is satisfied that the issues identified have all been addressed and commends the provider on the substantive work undertaken to address those proposed mandatory changes. The Panel is pleased to recommend the Defence Forces School of Catering QA Policies and Procedures to QQI for approval.

Part 5   Evaluation of draft QA Procedures submitted by the Irish Defence Force's School of Catering.

The following is the panel's findings following evaluation of Defence Forces School of Catering quality assurance procedures against QQI's Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines (April 2016). Sections 1-11 of the report follows the structure and referencing of the Core QA Guidelines.

1	GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT OF QUALITY

Panel Findings:

Following a review of the documentation submitted and at the conclusion of the virtual site visit, the panel found that QQI's Guidelines under this criterion had not yet been fully addressed.

QQI's 2016 Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines require a system of governance to be in place that protects the integrity of the academic processes and standards.

The Defence Forces and by extension the Defence Forces School of Catering occupies a unique position in Irish society and has statutory and legal obligations that govern all activities that are not pertinent to other providers. The provider differs significantly from most other State and private providers of QQI validated programmes in that it recruits its learners internally from within the larger organisation and its learners are also its employees.

Commercial considerations are not applicable as the organisation is resourced by government and only recruits its own personnel onto these programmes.

The provider is a small part of a very extensive organisation and the management structure and the attending ranks impact on the governance and management of quality assurance within the DF School of Catering.

QQI's Guidelines also require that the groups or units responsible for the oversight of education and training, research and related activities are identified in the provider's documented procedures, and that the terms of reference for these groups or units are documented and published.

The Academic Council is the body with overall responsibility for academic decision making and quality provision. New programmes must be approved by the Review Committee which are then submitted to

the Academic Council for approval. The Panel identified that clarity would be enhanced for all stakeholders to have the independence of the Academic Council represented in a diagram or workflow chart that depicts the learner and lecturing team and the relationship of the different committees within the governance structure of the provider and how they all link and support the learner throughout their programme with the School of Catering.

The remit of the Academic Council is also to self-evaluate, monitor and review activities annually for improvement and enhancement of the programmes offered and all provider activities throughout the year. This is usually done through a series or reporting structures that is documented and acted upon. At the conclusion of the site visit in 2020, the Panel proposed as a mandatory change that the Academic Council publish a schedule of self-evaluation, monitoring and review activities annually as they relate to the School of Catering. The Panel is now satisfied that the provider has taken on board the Panel's recommendation in relation to publishing a schedule of self-evaluation, monitoring and review activities.

2   DOCUMENTED APPROACH TO QUALITY ASSURANCE

Panel Findings:

Following the site visit in 2020 and a review of the documentation and having concluded the virtual site visit, the Panel found that QQI's Guidelines under the criterion of QA had not yet been fully addressed by the provider.

QQI's Guidelines require the provider's quality assurance policies and procedures to be fully documented, published and available as required in usable formats. As well as that, procedures must be effective and fit for purpose.

The role of the Registrar was created in 2012 to centralise quality assurance and to have one key point of contact for the entire Defence Forces and the General Staff. Overall responsibility for quality assurance rests with the Registrar. The Registrar takes lead responsibility for the monitoring and review of the Defence Forces School of Catering academic quality assurance policies, procedures and processes. Implementation of the above is the responsibility of the DFSOC.

There are clear roles and responsibilities for the implementation of quality assurance policies within the organisation and the reporting structures and decision making was fully described during the virtual site

visit. There are systematic formal decision-making procedures and independent oversight of significant decisions is built into the structures of the organisation under the Chain of Command, and the Defence Forces Academic Council provides strategic oversight of all DF academic processes.

A significant amount of documentation on quality assurance and on policies and procedures throughout the organisation were presented in the application for QQI reengagement and the Panel accepts the providence of the documentation and that it runs across all areas of the Defence Forces. The quality assurance and governance structures of the provider were not clearly evidenced in the documentation and the Panel proposed as a mandatory change that the provider, develop both these descriptors and diagrammatic depiction of the QA and governance processes within the School of Catering in consultation with QQI and this is detailed in section 7.1 of this report. Following a review of the revised documentation submitted subsequent to the original virtual site visit, the Panel is satisfied that the provider has developed both the descriptors and diagrammatic depiction of the QA and governance processes with the Defence Forces School of Catering.

The Panel had raised several queries in advance of the virtual site visit as to which document submitted, the TI 02/2019 or the Quality Assurance Policy and Procedures for Learning in the Defence Forces was the Quality Assurance Manual for reengagement with QQI. The Panel was of the view the QA documentation must allow for the bespoke management of QA within the remit of the applicant. The provider's documentation in relation to quality assurance has to clearly reflect the learner experience and how the quality assurance structure fits into, impacts and supports each stage of the learner journey as they progress through their course of study within the School of Catering.

The provider has ample resources and the structures in place to carry out the programmes of education and training it provides. During its gap analysis, the provider identified two areas of further enhancement and managing the risk to its resource base, namely the provision of an additional classroom, and identifying additional trainers from existing qualitied and experienced trainers within the larger organisation.

The Learner voice is represented through the Class President appointed at the start of the course by the Instructors. The Class President seeks feedback from other learners on the programme and brings any issues to the attention of the Course Director. All these issues are reviewed at the Academic Training

Conference which is held weekly for all instructors on the programme and the Lessons Learned feedback sessions include all feedback from Learners and Instructors.

The conclusion of the site visit, the Panel found that obstacles that impact on a student's completion of the course, e.g. the pace of lectures, inappropriate premises, the lead in time to complete assessments, the rescheduling of classes or assessments needed to be documented and appropriate to the educational context and separate to the military context. Specifically, academic complaints needed to be ring-fenced and have an academic structure including academic appeals so that they are dealt with locally and are more fit for purpose and do not impact on other types of complaints in relation to HR or IR issues which are not the preserve of this process. The Panel identified as a mandatory change that the provider incorporates in the Academic Training Conference process as described, the learner academic concerns raised that need to be addressed in the context of resolution and towards lessons learned and future enhancement principles. Based on its review of revised documentation submitted subsequent to the original virtual site visit, the Panel was satisfied that the provider has incorporated review processes that will, when implemented, provide a process to deal with matters arising in relation to this point.

Panel Findings:

The Panel is satisfied that the provider operates a systematic approach to programme development, monitoring and review. The Programme Review Board is the committee specifically responsible for programme review and development of new programmes. The provider engages in After Action Reviews and Lessons Learned Mechanisms as well as a process of formal end of course reviews from both learners and lecturers to identify areas for enhancement and improvement. The Programme Review Board reports to the Academic Council who discusses, reviews and decides on the revisions or changes to the programme which are then formally recorded in the minutes of the meeting and in the Registrar's Annual Report which is disseminated through the Chain of Command to all stakeholders.

There are procedures in place for a learner to resume a course should their course of study be interrupted for either career or personal needs.

Programme development needs are identified in the DF Training Needs Analysis Process and should a need be identified a preliminary syllabus proposal is submitted to the Registrar for initial review. The Registrar will provide a recommendation as to whether or not the full syllabus should then be referred to the Programme Review Board for consideration. The proposal can include the desired learning outcomes for an existing or new programme, or a module within an existing programme. A very detailed system of review (leading to approval, conditional approval or rejection) of the preliminary syllabus proposal is outlined in TI 02 / 2019. All new programmes are in line with the provider's strategy and must have explicit learning outcomes.

The provider seeks to maintain a learning environment in which individuals can realise their potential and the DF understands the need for all programmes of training and education to be benchmarked against nationally recognised qualifications and to be externally validated to ensure quality. Training equips learners to better fulfil their diverse roles that they preform throughout their careers and better prepare them for a return to civilian life. The provider's commitment to its life-long training culture is to be commended.

Access onto programmes is based on a comparative Training Needs Analysis by the Training and Education Branch. Information on all new programmes or upcoming courses are published on the provider's intranet. Pre-course training and administration for lecturers and learners is carried out systematically and clearly documented ensuring adequate pre-course induction. Information about learner workload, minimum intended learning outcomes and modes and methods of assessment are all clearly defined in the programme documentation. There is formal internal approval for access on a programme as well as the intended mode of delivery and the learning environment in the provider's HQ. The provider provides progression from one course to another from the Young Entry Cooks Course to the Advanced Cooks Course.

Learners are selected for courses based on this identified need and are awarded places on upcoming courses with enough time to complete all pre-course qualifying criteria and pre-course administration. Access onto programmes was fully described during the virtual site visit and the Panel advises the provider to further develop the Access Transfer and Progression policy to underpin existing practices.

4 STAFF RECRUITMENT, MANAGEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

Panel Findings:

QQI's Guidelines require that a provider assures itself as to the competence of its staff, that the pedagogical standards of teaching staff are maintained and enhanced, and that procedures be in place for performance management.

The Director of Defence Forces Training and Education leads, directs and controls the staff within all 17 schools in the Defence Forces. Personnel join the Defence Forces as Recruits or Cadets and progress through the ranks by meeting certain key milestones. All personnel in the DF School of Catering have the required academic qualifications and are specialist in the culinary arts or in management as appropriate to their role.

The provider has a very comprehensive system of recruitment, training and promotion of staff within the organisation. There is a clear system of performance management within the organisation and communication with staff is through IKON, the internal intranet system. The provider is just one small school within the larger military organisation and there are ample opportunities for professional development of teaching staff within the School of Catering and in the wider organisation. Once a leaner has moved through the programme, they are now being identified as a potential future instructor. The provider makes a business case for the potential instructor to do additional training or degree qualifications and are taken onto the programme on a temporary basis initially to evaluate suitability and competence. The provider has identified enhancements to the learning environment as already mentioned in this report.

Instructors on all courses are chosen based on their academic achievement and expertise in the area of culinary arts. There is a formal process of instructor induction and enough time is given for preparation in advance of the course which is usually two weeks. For instructors onto a programme, the Instructors Preparation Course must be completed once every three years and is signed off by the School Commandant or the Unit Commander. During this period, instructors will become familiar will all aspects of their responsibilities including the keeping and management of learner records and learner journals. It was clear to the Panel the obvious passion and energy of the Instructors on the programme during the virtual site visit and the clarity of the processes as they are being lived.

The provider liaises with other leading providers of similar programmes to keep up to date with external developments in training in craft and equipment so as to be aware of what is happening in the wider catering community. Continuous CPD courses are undertaken by the lecturing team as well as annual attendance at craft and culinary fairs.

All information in relation to the course is recorded on the Training Management System (TMS) which is accessed by all stakeholders. Training Diaries record the training performance of all learners and are reviewed weekly by the Officer in Charge and reviewed by the School Commandant / Unit Commander regularly throughout the programme and are held securely by the Officer in Charge. The Panel would like to commend the provider on the implementation of the Learner Diary as an instrument that supports and enhances the teaching and learning experience of the student.

A Corrective Action Log is maintained to correct mistakes, promote military discipline and clarify the standards of behaviour expected from learners on a programme.

5   TEACHING AND LEARNING

Panel Findings:

The Panel found that QQI's Guidelines under this criterion have been fully addressed.

QQI's 2016 Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines require that a provider respects and attends to the diversity of learners and their needs and encourages a sense of autonomy in the learner while encouraging adequate support and guidance.

The vision of the Defence Forces is an organisation that is flexible, deployable, sustainable, interoperable and adaptable, capable of deploying and sustaining high quality military forces on demanding national and overseas expeditionary operations in support of government security and foreign policy objectives. The Defence Forces training and education facilitates this vision, and good quality learning experiences result in the training needs of the organisation being met by suitably qualified personnel who are capable and confident in their given role.

The provider's vision of a safe but demanding environment of learning is underpinned by the core military principles of respect, loyalty, selflessness, physical courage, moral courage and integrity. The Panel would like to commend the provider on the development of the learner as a person both within and without the School of Catering and on the open and frank discussion that took place during the site visit, particularly with the Instructors on the programme.

Based on the discussion during the virtual site visit, the Panel is satisfied that the college has a very clear teaching and learning strategy that is learner centred and supports the learner throughout their journey.

The Panel are satisfied that the Officers and NCOs employed as Instructors receive additional training and continuous professional development and are professionally and pedagogically competent to deliver the programmes offered to an ever-changing student body. The Panel would like to commend the provider on the expertise of the instructors and the obvious care for students by both the instructors and by management.

The Panel would like to commend the intent of the provider to seek continuing national certification for their work-based learning programme.

Work based learning forms a significant element of the programmes and there are clear procedures in place to monitor that effective teaching and learning is taking place. Critical reflection is clearly evidenced in the Workplace Learning Portfolio where every task is recorded and submitted to the Instructor to complete the 'Assessors Evaluation of Evidence'. Once complete and the required learning has been achieved, the learner completes the reflective learning section of the Portfolio for the relevant task. This process fosters the personal and professional development of the learner.

Blended learning is under review and is being trialled. Various platforms to support blended learning are being investigated as to their suitability with a plan to integrate a blended learning element into the teaching and learning strategy at some point in the future.

The Panel noted the significant contributions by the Instructor team to the proceedings of the panel meeting. The Instructors described the support extended to the learners in terms of day-to-day monitoring as well as the overall development of the learner towards achieving programme learning outcomes. The learner mentoring process appeared to have both informal (verbal conversations with learners, not based on rank distinction) and formal (e.g. based on learner diary) components, with regular follow-up. The Panel understood the strong sense of collegiality and peer support aimed at the holistic, 'rounded' development of the learner as a person, a member of the wider Defence Forces and as a graduate of the School of Catering, while the assessment process retained the appropriate independence and objectivity.

6   ASSESSMENT OF LEARNERS

Panel Findings:

Following a review of the documentation and the virtual site visit, the Panel found that QQI's Guidelines under this criterion had not been fully addressed.

QQI's 2016 Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines require a provider's policies and procedures to ensure the credibility and security of assessment procedures and to address how assessment promotes and supports effective learning and teaching and enables learners to demonstrate the achievement of learning outcomes.

The assessment process begins with the convening of an Assessment Board, a Review Board, the appointment of an Assessment Author and the appointment of invigilators. The Assessment Author compiles the assessment which is then passed to the Review Board to ensure it is fit-for-purpose.

The programmes are a blend of practical and theory, and all elements are assessed. All of the information and documentation in relation to assessment of learners is contained in the document Conduct and Administration of Authorised Courses in the Defence Forces – TI 02/2019.

There is a process of continuous assessment for practical work and some short and in-house exams with a final written exam at the end of each module. There are Learner Portfolios (Learner Diary / Training Diary) that have entries every two weeks during the course of the programme, and these are internally reviewed by the Academic Director and validated by the External Authenticator.

There is a clear audit trail in the assessment process from the outline of the exam task or brief, the setting of exams, supervision of exams as well as marking of exam scripts, records of learner assessment and final awards. Assessment is fair and consistent and is carried out professionally. There is an appeal process both within the School of Catering and when the candidate returns to his home base. A Senior Instructor oversees hearing the appeal and the Academic Director oversees the Review Board.

Following discussions during the site visit, the Panel was of the view that the process by which results are approved internally was not fully clear in the documentation and proposed as a mandatory change that the provider needed to clarify the process by which results are approved internally before being issued to QQI. Based on its review of revised documentation submitted subsequent to the original virtual site visit, the Panel is now satisfied that this proposed mandatory change has now been fully addressed by the provider.

At the end of the programme, students get the Course Report (a Military Format) which is filled in by the Instructor and the learner signs off on the Course Report. The Course Report is a record of achievement on the programme including a copy of the learner's results.

If the learner decides that the Course Report is a fair reflection of their progress, the document is then signed off by the school and is sent to their CO in their home base.

The Panel propose a number of conditions in relation to the development of an effective review of marks facility for learners.

The Panel has also offered specific advice in relation to the provider ensuring that the grade ranges given comply with QQI FET requirements. These are detailed in section 7.1 and 7.2 of this report.

7   SUPPORT FOR LEARNERS

Panel Findings:

The panel finds that QQI's Guidelines under this criterion have been fully addressed.

QQI's 2016 Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines require that a provider respects and attends to the diversity of learners and their needs, and encourages a sense of autonomy in the learner, while encouraging adequate support and guidance.

The Panel would like to commend the provider on the holistic approach to learner development as already noted in this report. The ethos of the provider is student centred. Throughout the programmes, learners are being supported to succeed academically but also as soldiers and to demonstrate throughout their course of study, the core military principles of respect, loyalty, selflessness, physical courage, moral courage and integrity. It was clear to the Panel during the site visit that the management and academic teams work very diligently on behalf of each student and have a very clear and cohesive support system in place.

Each learner, as a serving member of the Defence Forces has a centralised profile from their first day in the Defence Forces to their final exit. The Academic Director and the Instructor can tap into those online records and can look at candidates' records and interact with all other departments in relation to the learner to further support the learner's trajectory in the School of Catering. It is an interactive system and access is dependent on role and rank. Those training records can also indicate and identify potential leaders and potential promotion of different candidates within the DF.

Learners get substantial information in advance of their programme all of which is uploaded onto IKON with pertinent information posted on notice boards. The Learner Diary is a key document that is overseen by the Academic Director and it identifies areas where a learner may need support in a very timely manner. All entries are very transparent to the learner leading to a very supportive environment in which a learner can learn independently and critically review their own progress and learning.

Learners are mature and are undertaking a course of study to progress their careers within the Defence Forces so are therefore committed and engaged.

There are Standard Operating Procedures and instruction manuals for every part of the process that gives great support to learners. The provider provides a wide range of ancillary supports for learners on its programmes.

Issues with academic misconduct and plagiarism are a rarity and depending on the seriousness of the issue, sanctions are applied from monetary fines to more serious sanctions in line with the Defence Forces disciplinary measures.

8   INFORMATION AND DATA MANAGEMENT

Panel Findings:

The panel is satisfied that QQI's Guidelines under this criterion of QA has been addressed.

QQI's 2016 Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines require that reliable information and data are available for informed decision-making.

There is a clearly documented approach to access of information and depending on the rank and the role of the individual within the organisation, all information needed to perform their duties or follow the course of study is available on IKON.

There is a coherent and complex structure in place and the provider employs an administrative office whose responsibility is to ensure that all documentation needed is in place and all standard operating procedures are up to date and fit for purpose and available to the appropriate personnel.

The provider has its own intranet which is very sophisticated. The provider is also required to maintain hard copies of records and secure storage of files as required by military law. Electronic information and hard copies of information has the same levels as security as all other areas in the military. There are different levels of security and there are lots of procedures applicable to different levels of authority and management.

9　　　　　　PUBLIC INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION

Panel Findings:

QQI's 2016 Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines require that policies and procedures are in place to ensure information published is clear, accurate, objective, up to date and easily accessible.

The requirement for publication of the provider's quality assurance policies and procedures will be dealt with separately by QQI considering the nature of the provider as part of the national Defence Forces. Providers have a legal obligation to publish approved QA procedures and that is something that would normally be a given, but in the case of the DF some procedures fall within the Defence Force's classified material and so a legal tension exists.

The extent to which documentation is to be published is to beyond the scope of this Panel but is a discussion to be had between QQI and the Defence Forces School of Catering.

The Panel proposed as a mandatory change that the provider, in consultation with QQI, developed and publishes a document that describes the quality assurance and educational processes of the School of Catering and the implementation of these with the organisation.

The Panel recommends the provider to continue to be cognisant of the need to have public information appropriate to the courses of education and training as appropriate to the provider and as would be expected by QQI.

Based on its review of revised documentation submitted subsequent to the original virtual site visit, the Panel is now satisfied that the provider has addressed the issue in relation to publication of its QA policies and procedures.

10 OTHER PARTIES INVOLVED IN EDUCATION AND TRAINING (incl. Apprenticeships)

Panel Findings:

n/a

11 SELF-EVALUATION, MONITORING AND REVIEW

Panel Findings:

QQI's 2016 Core statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines require a provider to review, evaluate and report on education and training services it provides and the QA systems and procedures that underpin these.

The Panel recognises that the provider has met this criterion. The Registrar takes the lead responsibility for the monitoring and review of academic quality assurance policies, procedures and processes. The results of Lessons Learned and the reports from monitoring and review groups ensures that the changes and enhancements made are recorded and communicated throughout the organisation. Self-evaluation also allows for existing effective practices to be validated.

The Annual Training Conference reviews all elements of the programmes with feedback sought from learners and instructors so that Lessons Learned can be acted on and issues resolved as well as providing greater enhancement of the programme.

It is evident that the Learner Diary / Training Portfolio provides a frequent and immediate monitoring and review of learner achievement on the work-based learning element of the programme and both instructors and learners receive immediate feedback on the effectiveness of the training and the capability of the learner.

Evaluation of draft QA Procedures - Overall panel findings

The Panel acknowledges the established track record and good standing of the Defence Forces School of Catering with QQI and with its stakeholders. The reengagement process involves a comprehensive review of a provider's QA policies and procedures, as well as a site visit to the provider's premises that facilitates a full day of discussions between the Panel and the provider.

In the case of the Defence Forces School of Catering and in the current circumstances arising from the COVID-19 pandemic, a virtual site visit was organised on 12th November 2020 between the DF School of Catering team and the Panel members.

The DF School of Catering representatives engaged in a consistently open and frank manner with the Panel during the virtual site visit. In Section 3.1 of this report, the Panel has offered several well-deserved commendations to the Defence Forces School of Catering.

Notwithstanding those, following review of the documentation submitted and at the conclusion of the site visit, the Panel had concerns about quality assurance and governance, the learner voice, internal approval of results, benchmarking of programmes to other providers and the Academic Council's system of self-evaluation. These were identified as proposed mandatory changes and are outlined in detail in Section 7.1 of this report. Additional items of specific advice are included in Section 7.2.

Given that these issues were discreet, and in the Panel's view could be addressed quickly by the provider, the Panel availed of the option to defer its overall decision for a period of six weeks, and allowed the Defence Forces School of Catering this time to submit evidence to the panel that the changes identified have been satisfactorily addressed.

On 8th February 2021, the Panel reconvened to consider the revised documentation submitted by the Defence School of Catering. The Panel is satisfied that the proposed mandatory changes have been appropriately addressed and commends the substantive work conducted by the provider between times. The Panel is now happy to recommend approval of the Defence School of Catering's QA procedures to QQI.

Part 6 Conditions of QA Approval

6.1   Conditions of QA Approval

- The Panel strongly encourages an early presentation of the provider's programmes to QQI for revalidation as part of the overall process of embedding its QA systems within the Defence Forces School of Catering and revise where necessary the validation and programme development process.

- The Panel strongly encourages the provider to revisit its QA documentation within the next 24 months to ensure that it reflects what is happening in practice.

- Effectively develop a procedure for a review of academic achievement and the Panel makes it a condition that 7.1e 4 and 7.2 g under Ongoing Evaluation are deleted ('*no appeals of this grading system are allowed'*) in both instances.

- The word *'seminal'* needs to be deleted from 1.7.

Part 7   Mandatory Changes to QA Procedures and Specific Advice

The following proposed mandatory changes were identified at the conclusion of the site visit on 12.11.2020 by the Panel. The panel availed of the option to defer its decision to allow Defence Forces School of Catering an opportunity to address these issues within a six-week period.

7.1   Mandatory Changes

Proposed Mandatory Changes

7.1.1   The provider, in consultation with QQI:

- publishes a description of the quality assurance and educational processes of the Defence Forces School of Catering and the implementation of these within the organisation given its unique

operating context, which differentiates it from other education and training providers, both public and private; and

- develop a strategy to publish as much of its QA procedures as possible, given the classified nature of some of the materials in the broader Defence Forces context. This should include a diagrammatic depiction and descriptors of the QA and governance processes in the context of the Defence Forces School of Catering.

7.1.2   Incorporate the management of academic concerns raised by learners into the Academic Training Conference process, so as to provide for resolution, lessons learned and quality enhancement outside of the Defence Forces' general complaints process.

7.1.3   The Panel has identified as a proposed mandatory change that the provider needs to clarify the process by which results are approved internally before being issued to QQI.

7.1.4   The Panel has proposed as a mandatory change that the provider consult with QQI and other further education providers to benchmark the programme development and validation processes against the wider further education and training sector.

7.1.5   The Panel has proposed as a mandatory change that the Academic Council publish a schedule of self-evaluation, monitoring and review activities annually as they relate to the School of Catering.

7.2   Specific Advice

1.   1 The Panel recommends that the provider develops further the Access Transfer and Progression policy to underpin existing practices

2.   The Panel recommends the provider to continue to be cognisant of the need to have public information appropriate to the courses of education and training as appropriate to the provider and as would be expected by QQI.

Following the Panel meeting on the 9th February 2021, the Panel set out the following items of specific advice linked its recommendation of approval:

3.   Ensure that the grade ranges comply with QQI FET requirements as set out in QQI https://qhelp.qqi.ie/providers/certifcation-queries/grading-classifications/

4.   At the beginning of the document, include a Table of Contents, a Glossary of Acronymises, a List of Annexes and a Definition of Terms.

Part 8   Proposed Approved Scope of Provision for this provider

NFQ Level(s) – min and max	Award Class(es)	Discipline areas
Level 5-6	Major	Catering and associated subject areas.

Part 9   Approval by Chair of the Panel

This report of the panel is approved and submitted to QQI for its decision on the approval of the draft Quality Assurance Procedures of the Defence Forces School of Catering.

Name:

Date: 25th February 2021

Annexe 1:   Documentation provided to the Panel in the course of the Evaluation

Document	Related to
Annex A	Training and Education Vision and Strategy
Annex B	TED 2018-2020
Annex C	Defence Forces Training and Education Policy 2019
Annex D	QA Policy and Procedures 2020
Annex E J7	Training and Education Branch Structure
Annex F	T1 02 / 2019 The Conduct and Administration of Authorised Courses in the Defence Forces
Annex G	Training Needs Analysis
Annex H	Lessons Learned Process
Annex 1	Admin Instr. Part 10 Personnel Matters
Annex J	DF Policy SLDs
Annex K	WBLP Booklet
	QQI Application Form
	Learner Diary
	Risk Assessment Forms
	Training Diary Incidents

Annexe 2:   Provider staff met in the course of the Evaluation

Name	Role/Position
Comdt. Martin McGrath	Officer Commanding School of Catering
Capt. Angela Lyons	Second in Command & Training Officer
CMQS Noel Murphy	Academic Director School of Catering
Sgt Fergal Cahill	Senior Instructor
Sgt Paul Shelley	Senior Instructor
Lt Col David Fitzpatrick	DF Registrar

Appendix: Provider response to the Reengagement Panel Report

Óglaigh na hÉireann
DEFENCE FORCES IRELAND

11th January 2021

QQI Awards
Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI)
26/27 Denzille Lane,
Dublin 2.

To whom it may concern,

Re: Formal response to QQI regarding the Defence Forces School of Caterings Reengagement Panel Report

We would like to formally acknowledge receipt, and acceptance, of the QQI Panel Report and we welcome the panel's recommendation that QQI approve our draft QA procedures as of the Virtual Site visit on the 12th November 2020.

Thank you also for inviting us to identify any factual inaccuracies in the report. We have reviewed the report in detail and are happy to report that we cannot identify any inaccuracies and are happy that the report be published as is.

We wish to thank the panel. We were given a very fair hearing and the feedback, insights and advice provided by the panel was very constructive and useful. We would also like to record our thanks to all the QQI staff members that we worked with on the re-engagement journey; they were helpful, courteous and responsive.

The Defence Forces School of Catering benefited enormously from the process and we have no doubt that it contributed to the development of a more robust, practicable and accessible QA which will, in turn, benefit our learners through the enhancement of our training provision.

The Defence Forces School of Catering look forward to continuing its relationship with QQI as a recognised provider. Please contact me if there are any points you need to clarify or discuss further.

MC GRATH. M
COMDT
Defence Forces School of Catering,
DFTC.
McKee Barracks.

Scoil Lónadóireachta Óglaigh na hÉireann, Dún Mhic Aoidh, Baile Átha Cliath 7
Defence Forces School of Catering, McKee Barracks, Dublin 7
t: +353 (0) 1 804 6149   f: +353 (0) 1 804 6004
www.military.ie