Reengagement Panel Report

Assessment of Capacity and Approval of QA Procedures

Part 1   Details of provider

1.1   Applicant Provider

Registered Business/Trading Name:	Irish Payroll Association (IPASS)
Address:	9 Western Parkway Business Centre Ballymount Drive Dublin 12
Date of application:	1st July 2020
Date of resubmission of application:	13th November 2020
Date of site visit (if applicable):	24th September 2020
Date of reconvene meeting (if applicable)	15th December 2020
Date of recommendation to the Programmes and Awards Executive Committee:	4th February 2021

1.2   Profile of provider

The Irish Payroll Association (IPASS) provides one programme of education and training leading to a QQI Special Purpose Award. The Certificate in Payroll Techniques (CPT) is at Level 6 on the NFQ and was revalidated in April 2019. IPASS also offers a Professional Payroll Manager Qualification which is offered to learners who have completed the Certificate in Payroll Techniques, but this programme is not certified by QQI.

IPASS's aim is to provide a platform for the promotion of excellence and professionalism within the payroll function across companies through training, education, consultancy and representation. IPASS was established in the year 2000 as a niche expert in the area of payroll. It is a multi-location provider, using a centrally coordinated approach to programme development and quality assurance. IPASS has identified a niche in the market and has become the leading payroll training provider. While some aspects of payroll are included in accountancy programmes, it is insufficient to produce the calibre of payroll professionals

with detailed knowledge of the payroll function demanded by industry. The Certificate in Payroll Techniques is nationally recognised and is the payroll qualification most often specified by employers as a requirement for a position in their payroll department becoming the industry standard.

The following is the QQI validated programme offered by IPASS:

Certificate in Payroll Techniques   Level 6   1 year

IPASS submits approximately 550 learners to QQI for certification each year on the Certificate in Payroll Techniques programme which runs for one year on a part-time evening mode. Most learners are resident in Ireland and are predominately female aged 25+. Many are already working in office administration or payroll processing or are hoping to transition into payroll processing.

The provider also runs large numbers of one-day courses annually which provide continuous professional development to payroll professionals to keep them abreast of changes in payroll and employment legislation. These courses are recognised for continuous professional development by professional bodies like the Chartered Accountants in Ireland, the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants, the Institute of Certified Public Accountants in Ireland, the Irish Tax Institute and the Law Society and Accounting Technicians of Ireland. There are more than 2,000 attendees on these courses each year.

IPASS, as a small institution, relayed to the Panel that it found the reengagement process onerous and very time consuming, particularly the gap analysis which sought to identify strengths and weaknesses of the provider in a manner that had hitherto not been undertaken. The provider was of the view that the reengagement process of one application for every provider regardless of size was more difficult for smaller institutions and quite cumbersome. That said, the team engaged with the process and a lot of energy and commitment was expended which showed through in both the documentation and during the virtual site visit. IPASS recognises that the benefits of the reengagement for the future enhancement of the college offering far outweighed the effort required in getting ready for reengagement. The Panel was impressed with the openness of the provider in identifying those improvements and areas in need of attention as the provider went through the gap analysis. One key area was the need to separate academic governance from corporate governance. While custom and practice at IPASS had always been to act in the best interests of the learner, the separation of academic and commercial decision making was not in evidence. To achieve this separation, IPASS set up the Academic Board and the Board of Directors to make the separation between academic and commercial decision making evident for all stakeholders. The provider also identified that some informal processes were not clearly documented even though the correct processes were in place, and it has endeavoured to put templates and reports on a more formalised and documented footing adding to a more robust QA.

IPASS employs eight permanent staff with up to 25 fixed term lecturers in different venues nationwide. The provider's HQ is located in the Western Parkway Business Centre in Ballymount Drive, Dublin and its

model is central control of quality assurance and of the programme. IPASS hires facilities from different education providers, mainly institutes of technology. It runs programmes in 20-25 different venues nationwide with 10 – 30 learners in each class. There are two intakes per year, September and February.

After graduation, learners are invited to become members of the Irish Payroll Association also run by IPASS which helps members keep up to date with changes in legislation affecting payroll. 2020 was a very challenging year in terms of changes in payroll due to the COVID pandemic, including the roll out of government supports for businesses which impacted on their application to payroll. IPASS dedicated significant resources to keep its stakeholders abreast of these changes.

Part 2   Panel Membership

Name	Role of panel member	Organisation
Dr. Áine Ní Shé	Chair	Cork Institute of Technology
Celestine Rowland	Report Writer	Galway Business School
McKinney, Martin	Subject Expert	University of Ulster
Dr. David McCarthy	Quality Assurance Expert	National College of Ireland
Naomi Pasley	Blended Learning Expert	Hibernia College
Aliyah Oroyinyin*	Student Representative	Apologies

*Due to unforeseen circumstances, Aliyah was unable to participate in the virtual site visit.

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 Irish Payroll Association's (IPASS) approach to the reengagement process.

The Panel commends the provider and all the team on the documentation submitted as part of the application for reengagement which was well laid out and easy to follow and navigate. It was evident that there was a lot of thought and effort expended on the QA Manual. The provider has made a genuine and serious attempt to formulate a Quality Assurance Manual that is fit for purpose and proportionate of the size of the organisation and its scope of provision.

The Panel also commends the provider on its engagement with the gap analysis and the open and very rigorous manner in which it approached the reengagement application both in advance of and during the site visit. The provider was very frank both in the documents and on the day of the site visit particularly in its analysis of the strengths and vulnerabilities of the organisation. The Panel is of the view that the provider has made a very honest and sincere attempt in getting to grips with the process.

The Panel commends the provider on the extensiveness and currency of the programme manuals provided to learners as well as the PowerPoint presentations and notes for lecturers that are all produced centrally by the Programme Board which provides for standardisation of materials to be delivered across multiple sites.

The Panel commends the provider on its systematic approach to the integrity of the final exam and as part of the provider's internal quality assurance processes. For example, each final exam paper is completed by an examiner before it is released to learners to ensure that there are no technical or other issues and the calculations compute as envisaged.

During the site visit the Panel got a real sense of a team working together, particularly the management and teaching teams, and the Panel commends the provider for its engagement on the day. The Panel was impressed with the level of expertise of the team which is underpinned by recognition of the programme as the industry standard for payroll employees. The Panel would also like to commend the provider on the large number of CPD courses delivered annually to keep graduates and payroll employees up to date with changes in legislation.

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the provider has dealt well with the move from face-to-face to online delivery. The Panel commends this, especially the Sunday Q & A activity which recaps materials covered. The provider envisages greater expansion on this student engagement initiative.

Notwithstanding these commendations, at the close of the virtual site visit, the Panel identified several proposed mandatory changes for the attention of the provider. The Panel was of the view that these changes could all be addressed within the six-week period permitted and therefore deferred its decision to recommend the provider's draft QA policies and procedures to QQI for approval. These proposed mandatory changes are all outlined in detail in Section 7.1. of this report.

The Panel reconvened on 15th December 2020 to undertake a desk review of the evidence subsequently submitted by IPASS. It is the Panel's view that the provider has now 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 exceeded the recommendations and has updated its QA policies and procedures to include the mandatory changes and advices and referenced them comprehensively throughout the documentation, noting all impacts of the changes.

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

	Tick <u>one</u> as appropriate
Approve [the provider's – insert name] draft QA procedures	X
Refuse approval of [the provider's – insert name] 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 [the provider's – insert name] 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	IPASS is a company limited by guarantee. Documentation indicates that IPASS has 550 learners registered annually on the QQI validated Certificate in Payroll Techniques special purpose award.
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 provider was incorporated on 14th April 2000 and has provided a Certificate of Incorporation, registration number 327001
4.1.3(a)	Criterion: Are any dependencies, collaborations, obligations, parent organisations, and subsidiaries clearly specified?	Yes	The provider confirmed that there are no collaborative relationships with other providers.
4.1.4(a)	Criterion: Are any third-party relationships and partnerships compatible with the scope of access sought?	Yes	The provider's application does not reflect any partnerships or relationships to the scope of the access sought.

4.1.5(a)	**Criterion:** *Are the applicable regulations and legislation complied with in all jurisdictions where it operates?*	**Yes**	The evidence provided in support of the provider's application is indicative of compliance with Irish / EU legislation
4.1.6(a)	**Criterion:** *Is the applicant in good standing in the qualifications systems and 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.*	**Yes**	The provider is in good standing with QQI. The provider is a HE HETAC/QQI provider since 2000.

Findings

The Panel has been assured that the provider meets 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 provider has a track record of providing HETAC/QQI special purpose awards since 2000.

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	Evidence submitted is indicative that the provider has a sufficient resource base and is stable and in good financial standing. IPASS's application was accompanied by: • Tax Clearance Certificate • Auditor's report pertaining to 2020 • Summary of Insurance Policy Cover
4.2.2(a)	**Criterion:** *Does the applicant have a reasonable business case for sustainable provision?*	Yes	The provider has an established track record and is regarded as the industry standard in providing training in payroll.
4.2.3(a)	**Criterion:** *Are fit-for-purpose governance, management and decision making structures in place?*	Yes	The Panel identified a number of proposed mandatory changes in relation to this criterion which are listed in Section 7.1 of this report. The Panel is now satisfied that these have now been satisfactorily addressed by the provider.
4.2.4(a)	**Criterion:** *Are there arrangements in place for providing required information to QQI?*	Yes	The provider is in good standing with QQI and has been providing its Certificate in Payroll Techniques since 2000.

Findings

The Panel commends the provider on the structure of the Academic Board in terms of separating commercial and academic decision making.

However, at the close of the site visit, the Panel has identified a number of proposed mandatory changes in relation to the Academic Board, including changes to the terms of appointment of the Chair and the learner representative, and the expansion of the membership of the Academic Board. These changes outlined in full in 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 length of service and the composition of the Academic Board and has reduced the length of service of both the external chair and the learner representative and has extended the composition of the Academic Board to include one additional lecturer and one external member.

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 provider has an established record since 2000 as a niche provider of a special purpose award in the payroll area.
4.3.2(a)	**Criterion:** *Does the applicant have a fit-for-purpose and stable complement of education and training staff?*	**Yes**	The number of full-time and part-time staff and contractors is well established.
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**	As a multi-centre provider of programmes of education and training, the provider rents premises from other educational institutions to run its programmes.
4.3.5(a)	**Criterion:** *Are there access, transfer and progression arrangements that meet QQI's criteria for approval in place?*	**Yes**	Given the general profile of applicants to the provider's programme (adult learners looking to upskill), there are no prerequisites required.
4.3.6(a)	**Criterion:** *Are structures and resources to underpin fair and consistent assessment of learners in place?*	**Yes**	The Panel identified a number of proposed mandatory changes in relation to this criterion

			which are listed in 7.1 of this report. The Panel is now satisfied that these proposed mandatory changes have been satisfactorily addressed by the provider.
4.3.7(a)	**Criterion:** *Are arrangements for the protection of enrolled learners to meet the statutory obligations in place (where applicable)?*	**Yes**	The provider has an insurance policy in place with O'Driscoll O'Neill to cover its legal obligations in relation to student refunds

Findings

The Panel recognises that the provider has an established track record with QQI as a niche provider of a special purpose award in the area of payroll and is well resourced.

At the close of the site visit, the Panel identified a number of proposed mandatory changes in relation to examinations and assessment centres, the creation of audit trails and engagement with the External Examiner which are detailed in 7.1 of this report.

The Panel is now satisfied that that provider has taken its recommendations and has developed a more robust audit trail of the assessment process and have thought through and amended all attendant procedures to reflect those changes. The Panel further advises the provider to keep its audit procedures under review and improve and enhance them where appropriate.

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

At the end of the virtual site visit, the Panel has identified three proposed mandatory changes set out in Section 7.1 of this report. The Panel deferred its overall decision to allow the provider six weeks in which to address these issues.

Following a review of the revised documentation submitted by IPASS, the panel is satisfied that the issues identified have all been addressed and commends the meticulousness with which IPASS undertook this work exceeding the recommendations of the Panel. The Panel is happy to recommend approval of IPASS's QA procedures to QQI.

Part 5   Evaluation of draft QA Procedures submitted by Irish Payroll Association (IPASS)

The following is the panel's findings following evaluation of Irish Payroll Association (IPASS)quality assurance procedures against QQI's Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines (April 2016) and Topic Specific QA Guidelines - Blended Learning. 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 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 been fully addressed.

QQI's 2016 Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines require a system of governance, management and decision-making structures that protects the integrity of the academic processes and standards.

As stated earlier in this report, IPASS identified during the reengagement process the need to separate academic and corporate governance and decision making. To achieve this separation, the provider set up the Academic Board and the Board of Directors to clearly separate academic and commercial decision making.

The recently established Academic Board which meets twice per year consists of five members, three external and two internal members drawn from the provider's own team. Membership includes an external Chair, the Quality Assurance Manager, a Senior Manager, a Learner Representative and a Lecturer and Industry expert.   The Chair is drawn from candidates who have practical payroll expertise and suitable educational qualifications. The provider stated that it is can be a challenge sourcing suitable candidate for the role of Chair as the profile is quite unusual. The provider also indicated that finding a suitable student representative is also difficult as the course lasts just one academic year. The Panel would like to commend the current Chair of the Academic Board for his inputs during the site visit.

The Panel has identified several proposed mandatory changes in relation to the length of appointment of members of the Academic Board, namely the Chair and the Learner Representative outlined in Section 7.1.. of this report. The Panel has also identified proposed mandatory changes in relation to the composition of the Board; these concern the balance of external and internal members and the appointment of two additional members to the Academic Board. These proposed changes are detailed 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 length of service and the composition of the Academic Board. It has reduced the length of service of both the external chair and the learner representative and has extended the composition of the Academic Board to include one additional lecturer and one external member.

2 DOCUMENTED APPROACH TO QUALITY ASSURANCE

Panel Findings:

Following review of the documentation and having concluded the virtual site visit, the Panel found that QQI's guidelines under the criterion of QA have 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 reengagement process requires an in-depth critique and review of the quality assurance policies and procedures to be undertaken. During the site visit, the provider told the Panel that it found the process both demanding and challenging and considered some questions in the gap analysis difficult to interpret, or not fully applicable to them as a small organisation. Notwithstanding this, the Panel was impressed with the provider's open and honest approach to the reengagement process. The provider's frank and candid approach to self-evaluation was very evident during the site visit.

As a small organisation with limited resources, the provider found the work on reengagement to be quite challenging. The Quality Assurance Manager has different roles within the organisation, including responsibility for quality assurance. The provider noted that while many processes were custom and practice in the organisation, clear documentation of those processes was sometimes missing.

The provider also found it difficult to compare itself to other similar providers due to its programme portfolio, with its single QQI offering being a niche programme. However, the Panel is of the view that there are many providers with a small number of programmes; such providers would face similar challenges and thus would be good comparators for benchmarking purposes.

The Academic Board has ultimate responsibility for approving quality assurance policies and procedures which are developed by the Programme Board with inputs from the Exam Board, Internal and External Examiners, and Learner Support.   All of these committees are engaged in the development of the programme content and material, and there are regular updates as appropriate with ultimate sign off by the Academic Board.

Quality assurance policies and procedures are relayed to all staff at induction and in the staff handbook. Learners are introduced to the quality assurance policies and procedures at induction and they are included in the Learner Handbook. The implementation of the quality assurance policies and procedures is the responsibility of all employees, particularly the Quality Assurance Manager.

Monitoring of the effectiveness of quality assurance is formally done through monitoring of the quality of class delivery, trends in attendance, completion rates, results comparisons and venue statistics. All lectures get feedback and information on course assessments. Feedback from learners and metrics are shared with lecturers and are also used to identify additional supports or training needs. There is constant review of practice and policies and procedures internally. The Quality Assurance Manager also has additional responsibilities that include oversight of registrations on the programme and

development and review of course materials, ensuring compliance with legislation as an organisation and in relation to the programme. The provider is implementing a system of standardised reporting which will formalise practice across the whole organisation. This will include information on the metrics of each venue, programme changes and development, student and lecturer feedback which will be presented to the Academic Board.   The provider also plans to implement a meeting schedule of the various committees to add clarity and currency to the meetings of different committees.

3   PROGRAMMES OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Panel Findings:

Following 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 by the provider.

QQI's 2016 Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines require a system of programmes development and validation that protects the integrity of the academic processes and standards.

The Certificate in Payroll Techniques was revalidated by QQI in 2019 and the last intake under the current validation will be in August 2024. The Panel noted that the provider's documentation contained several references to its intent not to put any new programmes forward to QQI for validation.

Arising from the discussion during the site visit, the Panel found the intention of the provider on limiting its scope of provision to be less clear than what was set out in the documentation. Cognisant of the current dynamic environment, and having noted the positive feedback by alumni and industry stakeholders on the provider's offering, the Panel is of the view that future opportunities may present themselves to the provider. The Panel proposed as a mandatory change that the provider decides on and states its intent on the scope of provision.

Should the provider decide to remain within its current scope of provision and leave its Programme Development & Approval procedures as set out in the QA Manual submitted to the Panel, then, assuming that all other proposed mandatory changes are successfully completed, it would be a condition of approval that the provider would remain within its current scope of provision or formally seek to have that scope extended before submitting new programmes for validation to QQI. In that event, should the provider subsequently wish to put a new programme forward for validation, a necessary pre-requisite would be to prove, in advance of submission of a new programme, that its Programme Development & Approval Procedures are fit for purpose. The Panel has detailed this proposed mandatory change in section 7.1. of this report.

The Panel is now satisfied that the provider has addressed this proposed mandatory change and has developed policies and procedures for Programme Development and Approval. The provider has updated its QA Manual to reflect this change, including the impact on resources that these developments entail. The panel has further advice in this regard outlined in 7.2 in this report.

The Programme Board is made up of the Quality Assurance Manager, Student Support Manager, and technical writers drawn from the management and senior lecturing teams. Informally, the Programme Board communicates almost daily and formally meets three or four times per year. The Programme Board is responsible for maintaining the academic standards of the programme, ensuring that the programme is reviewed, evaluated and updated in line with all legislative changes. Feedback from lecturers, learners and the External Examiner is also taken on board. The Programme Board also reviews the metrics of the programme. Approval of all changes to the programme is the responsibility of the Academic Board. Learner complaints and appeals are reviewed by the Programme Board and reported to the Academic Board.

The Programme Board is tasked with producing two very extensive programme manuals per year which include the core programme and all ancillary materials for each semester, as well as PowerPoint presentations for the lecturing team. All material produced is reviewed internally by expert payroll practitioners who have transitioned into education. Learner engagement and experience of the material is also continuously monitored. The Panel commends the provider for its commitment to maintaining the extensiveness and currency of those manuals as outlined during the site visit.

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

The minimum qualification for staff to lecture on the Certificate in Payroll Techniques is the certificate itself as well as being expert practitioners in the field of payroll administration. While payroll forms part of most accounting qualifications, it is usually just a small part of the overall qualification, which does not fully fill the niche that is required by industry thus creating a niche product in the Certificate in Payroll Techniques.

There are eight core members of the team, and the provider also draws on a panel of 20 – 25 expert lecturers to teach in a selection of venues across Ireland. Many members of the lecturing team have been running courses for 10+ years and, as practitioners, face few challenges in relation to the subject matter.

There is a good system of induction and a staff handbook including PowerPoint presentations for lecturers on different topics on the course. The learner manuals and ancillary materials developed centrally by the Programme Board underpin the quality of the materials available to learners and lecturers. The provider uses a VLE which is a good repository of information for both learners and lecturers. However, the Panel was of the view that the provider might consider some training for lectures in the use of the VLE; the provider assured the Panel that this training was in its future plans. The Panel also heard from the provider that it plans to develop a clear teaching and learning strategy, including leveraging Teaching & Learning expertise gained externally by some members of the team.

A significant amount of time is given to fully train new employees before they can be appointed to the Programme Board. The provider runs a key conference for lecturers each year on all the updates to the Manuals and other materials to be delivered. A key strength of the provider is that staff are very well qualified, and they are kept up to date with changes and developments in payroll through the extensive number of CPD days that the provider organises each year.

In the meeting with lecturers during the site visit, there was clear evidence of excellence in teaching and learning as well as significant support for learners on the programme. The Panel was also impressed with the ability of some members of the team to move to online delivery due to the COVID pandemic, and is of the view that there is much expertise in this area that could be shared across the organisation. Should there be a need for a new lecturer, the provider looks to its own graduates in the first instance. As the provider runs courses in various IoTs around the country, the first step is to identify the lecturer who will deliver the programme before it is advertised. There is support for further staff training, which once identified, support is given once it is appropriate to the provider's provision.

IPASS offers a lot of support for learners both centrally through the Student Support Manager and locally through individual lecturers. Learners are invited to contact their own individual lecturer directly. As the provider operates in multiple venues, lectures and materials are delivered almost synchronistical so that a learner could potentially move between venues should there be a need for them to do so without any loss in experience or delivery of content.

5	TEACHING AND LEARNING

Panel Findings:

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 finds that QQI's guidelines under this criterion have been fully addressed.

IPASS does not align its Certificate in Payroll Techniques with any payroll package of which there are more than 60 such packages on the market. Their programme is designed to ensure that learners understand and can calculate payroll regardless of the payroll package that a potential employer might use. All payroll packages are very accessible for any new hire in the payroll department. Ultimately, the provider's programme delivers practical and applicable knowledge to the learner so that they can calculate every element of payroll as well as integrate all the HR elements that impact on payroll; benefit in kind, paternity leave etc. into each payroll period. This delivers key benefits to potential or current employers in terms of training graduates with payroll expertise ensuring compliance with legislation and best practice.

Many organisations in the SME space require the payroll practitioner to have HR expertise to operate payroll successfully so that they can calculate new changes in legislation as well as all employee entitlements. There is a continuous need to update the programme as well as provide new examples of calculations as legislation in relation to payroll changes annually. The Panel commends the provider for its efforts in this regard.

The Panel commends the provider on the expertise of its teaching team as evidenced during the site visit. Topics covered during the discussion included the challenges of dealing with different types of learners, giving support to learners, ensuring that the learners engage with the material and the VLE, weekly formative assessments as well as in class assessments, the critical need for good time management during the examination, the importance of HR and its impact on Payroll, and the overall importance of the payroll function in terms of legal compliance.

The provider promotes a learner centred approach due to the eclectic mix of the student body who are all adult learners and are largely all returning to education for the first time on a part-time basis. The lecturing team is aware that there is a need to start from the beginning to create a base from where everyone can progress. There is a lot of individual support for learners by the lecturing team.

During class, learners are given plenty of opportunity to perform calculations and computations using both Microsoft Excel and Tax Cards; this ensures that learner understand how calculations function. A common suite of learning materials is provided to all students across the various venues. There are sample papers and questions in manuals and in the online repository of materials. Every lecturer receives a session plan, so that delivery and pace of delivery is standardised across multiple venues. Lecturers receive information packs including teaching tips, exam dates, and revision dates which ensures that delivery across multiple sites is on target. As previously stated, all lecturers attend a

conference where any changes to materials are discussed. The Programme Board liaises with the lecturer to give additional support. The challenge of delivering other people's material is not found to be a problem as there are so many examples and opportunities for lecturers to choose from a large body of materials and examples.

Management of the teaching and learning materials is controlled centrally by the Programme Board, and this ensures standardisation across all venues. The provider recognises that a complementary set of skills is needed to deliver the programme in a blended learning environment, and acknowledges the challenges encountered due to the immediate transition to online delivery in response to the COVID 19 restrictions .The provider is dedicating additional resources on how best to support learners and lecturers in this new blended environment. As enrolments have decreased significantly, the provider has been in the position to offer opportunities to lecturers who were willing to deliver online and there was evidence of good work happening during the meetings with the teaching team. The Panel is of the view that some of this expertise could be shared with all members of the team. Based on the discussions with the provider on the day, the panel recognises a number of resources have been developed and deployed for the delivery of online classes. However the panel is of the view that there are many additional learning resources that can be utilised to enhance the integration of different teaching and learning strategies towards the achievement of learning outcomes. Such resources would supplement and enhance the use of existing tools and methods, which could support the teaching team. The Panel noted that the lecturers clearly demonstrated confidence in the face-to-face space, and is of the view that additional training in the area of blended learning will support members of the team, particularly given the context of the pandemic.

The provider's definition of blended learning is largely based on classroom-based delivery with online access to additional resources. The provider is now looking to develop a future strategy and a policy for blended learning that would encompass what is happening due to the COVID-19. The provider has plans to develop the skills of the whole team in the blended learning space.

The lectures involved in online delivery are all experienced and the key challenge has been in increasing the use of the technology and the sharing of knowledge. The team has developed polls and quizzes, as well as getting students to use the chat and break-out features of Zoom. While there is currently a limited number of lecturers teaching online, the provider advised the Panel that it will engage with the whole team at an early stage to get them up to speed with technology so that they can revert to online delivery as needs arise.

6	ASSESSMENT OF LEARNERS

Panel Findings:

QQI's 2016 Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines require that a provider will have quality assurance procedures, structures and resources to underpin fair and consistent assessment of learners that comply with QQI policy protocols, conventions and guidelines on assessment. At the close of the virtual site visit, the Panel found that QQI's guidelines under this criterion of QA had not been fully addressed.

The Programme Board, together with the Examination Board, is responsible for all assessment of learners. The Programme Board approves course assessments and final exam papers with the External Examiner. The Exam Board is a subset of the Programme Board, the remit of which is to approve the results obtained by learners and signed off by the External Examiner.

The provider told the Panel that it uses multi in-house formative class assessments, multiple choice questions on Moodle, and mock final exam questions. These are designed to ensure that learners are familiar with questions in different sections of the final exam and that they learn to manage their time during the exam process. As legal and HR legislation form part of the course as well as payroll calculations, the provider is aware of the challenges of different types of questions for different learners and practicing exam questions underpins learning. Learners are committed to doing well in their assessments as they are undertaking this course as part of their future career trajectory.

As part of the provider's internal quality assurance processes, each final exam paper is completed by a lecturer before it is released to learners to ensure that there are no technical or other issues and to check that all calculations work as envisaged. The Panel commends the provider on its systematic approach to the integrity and quality of the final exam.

As examinations are run in multiple venues at the same time, the Panel is of the view that the process is onerous. Invigilators are drawn from IoT personnel and, as such, are familiar with running and invigilating examinations. Exam papers are distributed to centres. Examination scripts, once completed by candidates, are collated and returned to the provider's offices in Dublin. Exam scripts are then distributed to internal examiners for correction who in turn return broadsheets of marks and completed scripts to the provider's Head Office. The Exam Centre Manager is responsible for contacting any late candidates and reporting to management any issues in the conduct of the examination. There was no formalised reporting structure in the form of a written report on how the exam venue performed on the day in relation to absentee candidates, late arrivals, interferences in the exam process including external noise etc. While all the processes work well and everyone is aware of their role, there was no documented audit process of the examination process in place. The Panel recommended as a proposed mandatory change that the provider develop an audit trail and workflows to detail the examination process from examination inception to final approval of awards and this is detailed in Section 7.1 of this report.

The Panel is satisfied that this proposed mandatory change has been fully satisfied by the provider. The provider has taken seriously the recommendations of the Panel and has created a more robust audit trail and have considered their procedures and processes and carefully thought through and amended their procedures to reflect these changes.   The Panel has further advices in this regard outlined in 7.2 of this report.

7	SUPPORT FOR LEARNERS

Panel Findings:

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

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

QQI's guidelines require that in addition to learner supports and resources being integrated and coherent, that the learning environment includes pastoral care supports provided by staff for learners. There is a dedicated member of the senior management team in charge of learner support and all administration and queries in relation to the programme are managed centrally. There is little possibility of inconsistencies in applications as they are all centrally controlled. Lecturers provide academic support for students and the recently launched Sunday Q& A session is to be commended.

The key teaching tool is the Student Manuals produced centrally consist of 400+ pages of materials which are mailed out to learners each semester with a tracking number. It is the intellectual property of the provider and the organisation wishes to preserve this competitive advantage.

Communication with students is through email or instant messaging, the latter particularly for any last-minute changes; i.e. room changes.

The provider provides reasonable accommodations for learners which are handled centrally and detailed on the VLE and on the provider's website. The provider has ample experience of dealing with issues like dyslexia, wheelchair access, visual impairment etc. Reasonable accommodation applications are encouraged at application stage but will be completed if they are submitted before the final examination.

The Panel were impressed with the student representative who found the transition to blended learning advantageous as lectures and materials on the VLE environment allowed additional opportunities for review of the material.

For a programme that is run on a part-time basis for largely mature learners, at least two thirds of the student body attend the graduation ceremony each year underpinning student's engagement.

The Annual Programme Review considers learner feedback in detail particularly in relation to additional supports for learners and where enhancements can be implemented. Learner survey are paper intensive and there may be an opportunity to push more of these activities online.

The student handbook gives a lot of pertinent information to learners and the section on plagiarism is particularly clear.

8	INFORMATION AND DATA MANAGEMENT

Panel Findings:

> The panel is satisfied that QQI's guidelines under this criterion of QA have been addressed.
>
> QQI's 2016 Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines require that reliable information and data are available for informed decision-making.
>
> The student database provides a secure environment for current and historical student records. Reports can be generated from the database for enrolments per venue, assessment outcomes, completion and attrition rates. Cyclical data reports, which also include learner feedback and venue checklists are prepared by Learner support for the Programme and Academic Boards. The student database is backup up onto a secure site each night that is hosted off site.
>
> The Online Learning Management System is used to host course content both for learners and staff.
>
> GDPR and the Data Protection Act apply to the processing of personal information and the provider has detailed procedures in place to ensure that they comply with all data protection legislation and the Panel is satisfied with the provider's assurances in this regard.

9	PUBLIC INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION

Panel Findings:

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

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 provider produces publishable marketing material in a variety of media to recruit prospective learners and inform them of the course aims and objectives. All text relating to programme information in prepared by Learner Support and reviewed by the Programme Board prior to publication. Once approved, Learner Support is responsible for update the provider's website. As per QQI's Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines, the provider's QA Manual is published on their website.

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, evaluation 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 in full and the Panel commends the provider on the detailed and continuous monitoring of materials. The Programme Board is responsible for the review of all teaching materials which is undertaken twice yearly so that learners have the most up to date information available. All legislative changes introduced in that year by the Revenue Commissioners, the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection and the Workplace Relations Commission are reflected in these updates.

A Review Group of lecturers provide feedback to the Programme Board on the course material, clarity of examples and questions and any issues that arose in the previous year in relation to allocation of time to specific course topics.

All materials are then approved and signed off by the Academic Board before distribution to learners and lecturers. The Programme Board is also responsible for monitoring of the Learning Management System, monitoring of venues, review of programme delivery, monitoring of learner feedback, enrolment, attendance, course assessment forms and assessment metrics, and then reports to the Academic Board twice per year.

12   TOPIC-SPECIFIC QA PROCEDURES: BLENDED LEARNING

Panel Findings:

The provider stated that it will develop a Blended Learning Policy in line with QQI Core Statutory Guidelines on Blended Learning. Please see Section 5.5. above, where this topic is discussed in more detail. Overall, the panel found that the provider's documentation on blended learning was too early in its development for a comprehensive evaluation at this stage and so no recommendation is being made by the Panel to QQI regarding its approval. The Panel strongly encourages IPASS, however, to progress completion of its policy and related procedures on blended learning as a matter of priority and submit same for evaluation and approval to QQI.

The panel recognises that there is a blended learning policy in place, but the panel has a recommendation in this regard outlined in 7.2 of this report.

Evaluation of draft QA Procedures - Overall panel findings

The Panel acknowledges the established track record and good standing of IPASS 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 IPASS and in the current circumstances arising from the COVID-19 pandemic, a virtual site visit was organised on 23rd September 2020 between the provider's team and the Panel members.

IPASS representatives have engaged in a consistently constructive and open manner with the Panel and been responsive to requests for additional information as well as to the Panel's suggestions and observations. The Panel were impressed with the buy in and engagement of the whole team in the quality assurance and enhancement process as well as their evident ability to review their own strengths and weakness during the process.

In Section 3.1 of this report, the panel has offered several well-deserved commendations to the provider. Notwithstanding those, following review of the documentation submitted and at the conclusion of the site visit, the panel found that some areas of the provider's QA procedures needed to be addressed before they could be recommended to QQI for approval. The panel therefore deferred its decision on a recommendation for approval of the provider's QA procedures pending the proposed mandatory changes being made. These proposed mandatory changes are set out in Section 7.1 of this report.

The Panel reconvened on 15th December 2020 to undertake a desk review of the evidence subsequently submitted by IPASS. It is the Panel's view that the provider has satisfactorily addressed the proposed mandatory changes and has responded appropriately to the Panel's initial specific advices. The Panel commends the provider on its clear and considered responses to the mandatory changes and makes a further commendation on their engagement with the process and their decision to completely update and enhance their QA documentation as part of the process. The Panel consequently recommends that QQI approve IPASS's QA procedures.

Part 6   Conditions of QA Approval

6.1   Conditions of QA Approval

1.

Part 7   Mandatory Changes and Specific Advice

7.1   Mandatory Changes

In light of the documentation submitted, and the virtual site visit which was conducted with the above applicant provider, the Panel deferred its decision to recommend IPASS's quality assurance procedures for approval to QQI to allow the provider six weeks to make the following proposed mandatory changes. The Panel reconvened on 15th December 2020, and reviewed the revised documentation submitted by IPASS. The Panel was satisfied that the issues identified below were all satisfactorily addressed by the provider.

Mandatory Changes

1. **Programme Development and Approval – Core Guideline 3**
   The Panel noted from the documentation several references to the provider's intent not to put any new programmes forward for validation by QQI. Arising from the discussion during the site visit, the intention of the provider on this appears less clear. Cognisant of the current dynamic environment and having noted the positive feedback by alumni and industry stakeholders on IPASS offerings, the Panel is of the view that future opportunities may present to IPASS in this regard. The Panel proposes as a mandatory change that the provider definitively decide on and state its intent on the scope of provision.

   Should the provider decide to remain within its current scope of provision and leave its Programme Development & Approval procedure as set out in the QA Manual submitted to the Panel, then, assuming that all other proposed mandatory changes are successfully completed, it would be a condition of approval that the provider would remain within its current scope of provision. In that event, should the provider subsequently wishes to put a new programme forward for validation, a necessary pre-requisite would be to prove, in advance of submission of a new programme, that its Programme Development & Approval Procedure is fit for purpose.

2. **Audit Trails**

The Panel identifies as a proposed mandatory change that the audit trail for each of the following processes and workflows be undertaken:

- Reporting system for examination and assessment centres: While there is already much good practice in regard to assessment of multiple cohorts, the Panel requires that a system be put in place to ensure that an examination report is completed for each centre.
- Flow of examination/assessment papers over the following phases - completion by internal examiners; transit to external examiners; finalization; copying and dispatch to examination centres and final marks allocated.
- External examiner engagement – review and moderation of examination papers and other assessment instruments and how external examiners' comments on papers are represented, how consideration of changes by internal examiners to papers in light of external examiners' comments are managed.

In each case, appropriate documentary reporting material should be developed to satisfactorily evidence the process.

3. **Academic Board**

The Panel has identified a number of proposed mandatory changes in the interests of more externality and enhanced currency:

- According to the documentation and as confirmed in the site visit, the proposed term of appointment of the Independent Chair is 5 years, plus an optional 5 year add-on. Thus an independent Chair could potentially serve a total of 10 years. The Panel requires as a proposed mandatory change that this be reduced to a maximum possible total of 6 years, with the duration of the initial term being no longer than 5 years.
- The Panel requires as a proposed mandatory change that the term of appointment of the learner representative be reduced from 5 years (as is apparent from the submission) to a maximum of 3 years. The current learner representative completed the Level 6 programme in 2019-2020. Given the challenges in recruiting current students as learner representatives, the Panel accepts this as a valid solution, but requires the term to be no longer than three years. It also requires that at appointment time, the learner be either a current student or one who has graduated within the last 2 years from the programme.
- The Panel requires as a proposed mandatory change the addition of two more members to the Academic Board:
  - One additional internal member, to be a lecturer
  - One additional external member

  The Panel acknowledges the challenges in identifying suitable individuals who can provide the necessary time and commitment. However, it suggests that the second external member could be drawn from IPASS' alumni community, possibly from those of

8-10 years standing, therefore external, and able to provide insights from both learner and industry perspectives.

The Panel also wishes to note that members who are current employees are not external members. Similarly, current students are not external members, while recent graduates cannot be considered as external members.

7.2 Specific Advice

1. In relation to the Policy for Programme Development and Approval, the Panel further advises the provider develop a schematic or workflow diagram outlining the different units involved which would enhance this policy and illustrate further the distinction between the commercial and the academic processes within the institution.

2. The Panel advises that the audit trail to keep the audit trail under ongoing review to ensure that it is fit for purpose and amend and update existing forms or create new ones as appropriate for the further enhancement of the process.

3. The Panel recognises that there is a blended learning policy in place but the Panel recommends that there should be ongoing development of the policy and consideration should be given to the inclusion of interactive tools in the process.

Part 8   Proposed Approved Scope of Provision for this provider

NFQ Level(s) – min and max	Award Class(es)	Discipline areas
Level 6	Special Purpose Awards	Business

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 IPASS

Name: _____

Date: 20th December 2020

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

Document

Reengagement Application

QA Manual (Draft)

Statutory Declaration

Additional Information required by the Panel

Certificate of Incorporation

Organisational Chart

Letters from Auditors

Certificate of Insurance for PEL

Tax Clearance Certificate

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

Name	Role/Position
Vivienne Nealon	Director
Ciaran Doherty	Director – lectures on non-QQI programmes
Victor Brannigan	External Chair of the Academic Board
Mary Cullinane	Lecturer – part-time IPASS and practitioner in payroll space
Marie Asple	Lecturer – part-time with IPASS – full time elsewhere -Wexford Waterford and Kilkenny
Orla Reddy	Student Representative

Appendix: Provider response to the Reengagement Panel Report
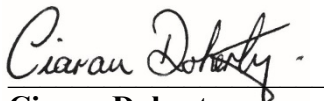
19th January 2021

Response to the report of the independent review panel convened to consider the Irish Payroll Association's re-engagement with Quality and Qualifications Ireland.

The Irish Payroll Association (IPASS) welcomes the report of the independent review panel convened to consider IPASS's re-engagement with QQI. The management of IPASS would like to take this opportunity to express our sincere thanks to the members of the panel for their professionalism, assistance, and advice during the site visit and for their constructive feedback. We also extend our sincere thanks to all at QQI for their assistance and support in this re-engagement process.

From our perspective, while we found the re-engagement process challenging and time consuming, it gave us the opportunity to carry out a critical review of the organisation and facilitated us in the development of fit for purpose quality assurance procedures.

This has been an invaluable experience for IPASS. We welcome the panel's findings in respect of mandatory changes, specific advices, recommendations, and commendations as well as its overall recommendation of IPASS's Quality Assurance Policies and Procedures. The panel afforded IPASS an appropriate timeframe to implement the mandatory changes as outlined in Section 7.1 of the report, which arose from the site visit. Having successfully implemented the mandatory changes consideration will be given to implementing the necessary changes to give effect to the specific advises to continually improve the pedagogical experience of our learners.

We would like to sincerely thank the panel for the time and attention they gave to our submission and to QQI for their assistance throughout this re-engagement process.

Ciaran Doherty
Director

Vivienne Nealon
Director