![QQI - Quality and Qualifications Ireland / Dearbhú Cáilíochta agus Cáilíochtaí Éireann]

Reengagement Panel Report

Assessment of Capacity and Approval of QA Procedures

Part 1   Details of provider

1.1   Applicant Provider

Registered Business/Trading Name:	Local Authority Services National Training Group (LASNTG)
Address:	Friar's Court, Abbey St, Nenagh, Co Tipperary
Date of Application:	29th April 2020
Date of resubmission of application:	
Date of evaluation:	
Date of (virtual) site visit:	7th July, 2020
Date of recommendation to the Programmes and Awards Executive Committee:	15th October 2020

1.2   Profile of provider

The Local Authority Services National Training Group (LASNTG) was originally established as the Water Services National Training Group in 1994, but has since progressed to its current form. It draws its membership from four national training groups:

- The Road Services Training Group (RSTG)
- The Water Services Training Group (WSTG)
- The Environmental Services Training Group (ESTG)
- The Fire Service Training Group (FSTG)

Learners include staff from all local authority grades within the four sectors. The diverse learner profile includes general operatives, gangers, tradespeople, drivers, supervisors, caretakers, technicians, engineers, administration staff and fire fighters.

Although the primary focus of the LASNTG is the provision of training for local authority staff, LASNTG also provides training on a contract basis to other public sector bodies and private sector contractors and employees involved in works on public roads. These include, for example, Irish Water, the Environmental Protection Agency, the Department of Communications and the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government.

LASNTG currently offer a diverse range of accredited and non-accredited programmes, and deliver these at five Regional Training Centres (RTC) in Counties Tipperary, Mayo, Donegal, Cork and Dublin. Training is delivered by training centre staff, local authority staff and contracted trainers. In 2019, LASNTG was responsible for over 33,000-person training days across the RTC network.

LASNGT achieved FETAC recognition in 2011, and the following programmes have been validated by QQI at NFQ Levels 5 - 6:
-Plant Operations for Water Treatment
-Plant Operations for Waste Water Treatment
-Site Suitability for Waste Water Treatment
-Firefighting Operations

These programmes are offered face to face only, on a part-time basis. LASNTG additionally works in partnership with IT Carlow and IT Sligo to support the range of education and training programmes available at NFQ Levels 6 – 9 in its areas of domain expertise.

Part 2   Panel Membership

Name	Role of panel member	Organisation
Dr. Annie Doona	Chair	Emeritus President IADT & Independent Consultant
Dr. Catherine Peck	Report Writer	Independent Education Consultant
Dave Collins	Panel Member	Chevron Training and Recruitment
Cecilia Munro	Panel Member	Ballyfermot College of Further Education
Tom Stritch	Panel Member	Retired Director of Services ex Cork County Council

Part 3   Findings of the Panel

3.1   Summary Findings

The panel would like to commend LASNTG on its submission of a strong application for reengagement. The panel acknowledges the significant work undertaken by LASNTG to meet QQI's guidelines and demonstrate this within its draft QA.

The panel thanks the team at LASNTG for their positive and informative dialogue with the panel members throughout the evaluation. These were accommodated virtually due to the restrictions imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic. Discussions with LASNTG representatives were consistently open and constructive, and provided the panel with insights into the many strengths within the organisation. These include a genuine commitment to quality enhancement and a progressive and informed approach to teaching, learning and assessment within the context of the programmes delivered.

The panel offers a further commendation to LASNTG in relation to its efforts to provide recognised, certified programmes for learners within its domains of operation, and to open up progression routes for those learners through the development of relationships with Sligo IT and Carlow IT.

Nonetheless, the draft QA that was presented by LASNTG for evaluation did not reflect a consistent alignment to QQI's Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines (2016). Although this prevented an immediate approval of LASNTG's draft QA procedures, the panel was of the view that the issues identified were discrete, and could be addressed by the provider within a period of 6 weeks. The panel therefore availed of the option to defer its decision, outlining in feedback offered at the close of the site visit a list of specific mandatory changes to be addressed by LASNTG in the intervening period. These are outlined in Section 7.1 of this report as proposed Mandatory Changes.

Following the adjournment, the panel reconvened on the 15th of September, 2020 to review LASNTG's updated submission. It was the view of the panel that LASNTG had worked effectively to address the issues identified during the virtual site visit. The panel determined that the revised submission reflected sufficient alignment to QQI's guidelines to allow the panel to make a recommendation that QQI approve LASNTG's draft QA procedures. At that time, the panel additionally identified further items of specific advice for LASNTG arising from the revised documentation. The panel is of the view that implementing this further specific advice will be of benefit to LASNTG in its process of ongoing quality assurance and enhancement.

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

	Tick <u>one</u> as appropriate
Approve LASNTG's draft QA procedures	X
Refuse approval of LASNTG's draft QA procedures **with 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 LASNTG's 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**	LASNTG is a public service agency and has submitted appropriate evidence accompanying its application. Education and training are the principal function of LASNTG.
4.1.2(a)	**Criterion:** *Is the legal entity established in the European Union and does it have a substantial presence in Ireland?*	**Yes**	LASNTG has a track record of certification, and was formerly recognized by FETAC.
4.1.3(a)	**Criterion:** *Are any dependencies, collaborations, obligations, parent organisations, and subsidiaries clearly specified?*	**Yes**	The panel was initially of the view that adjustments were required in relation to this criterion. MOUs had been submitted with the application pertaining to LASNTG's relationships with Irish Water, IT Carlow and IT Sligo. The relationship between LASNTG, County Councils and Regional Training Centres (RTCs) was outlined within the application materials. However, at the conclusion of the virtual site visit the panel was of the view that the relationship between LASNTG and the RTCs was more appropriately characterised as Collaborative Provision, and that some further documentation of the division of responsibilities for QA within that relationship was required. The panel's concerns pertaining to this were subsequently addressed by LASNTG in the

			interim period. The panel identified one additional item of specific advice pertaining to this.
4.1.4(a)	*Criterion: Are any third-party relationships and partnerships compatible with the scope of access sought?*	**Yes**	There is no impact of relationships and partnerships with the scope of access sought by the provider.
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 LASNTG'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**	LASNTG has certified learners on validated programmes since 2014, and offers non-certified training. LASNTG additionally works with two Institutes of Technology in the areas of needs identification, curriculum design and programme enhancement.

Findings

The panel is of the view that the evidence submitted by LASNTG is consistent with the provider meeting the majority of the criteria in this section in full. However, at the conclusion of the virtual site visit the panel held concerns regarding sub criterion 4.1.3(a). These initial concerns are discussed in further detail in Sections 5.1 and 5.10 of this report, and were effectively addressed by LASNTG during the interim 6 week period.

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 Tipperary County Council has provided a letter confirming that it administers the financial records of LASNTG. A screenshot of the verification of tax clearance for the Tipperary County Council has also been submitted, along with Insurance details.
4.2.2(a)	**Criterion:** *Does the applicant have a reasonable business case for sustainable provision?*	**Yes**	LASNTG serves an evident need for training across the domains it operates within.
4.2.3(a)	**Criterion:** *Are fit-for-purpose governance, management and decision making structures in place?*	**Yes**	The panel was initially of the view that adjustments were required in relation to this criterion. At the conclusion of the virtual site visit, the panel was not satisfied that LASNTG had governance structures in place that were clearly specified and reflected QQI's guidelines. This is discussed further in Section 5.1 of this report. The panel's concerns in relation to this were addressed during the interim period, and the subsequently presented governance structure was evaluated as fit for purpose.
4.2.4(a)	**Criterion:** *Are there arrangements in place for providing required information to QQI?*	**Yes**	LASNTG has a track record of certification with QQI. Within the organisation responsibility for QA is delegated to a QA Manager.

Findings

The panel is of the view that the evidence submitted by LASNTG is consistent with the provider meeting the majority of the criteria in this section in full. At the conclusion of the virtual site visit the panel held concerns regarding sub criterion 4.2.3(a). These initial concerns are discussed in further detail in Section 5.1 of this report, and were effectively addressed by LASNTG during the interim 6 week period.

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**	LASNTG was established in 1994 and has delivered a significant amount of education and training through the RTC network, including programmes validated by QQI.
4.3.2(a)	**Criterion:** *Does the applicant have a fit-for-purpose and stable complement of education and training staff?*	**Yes**	Training staff are not employed directly by LASNTG, but by the RTCs. However, substantive processes are in place to ensure trainers are recruited on the basis of specified criteria and appropriately inducted to the programmes they will deliver.
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 re-engagement process reflects its capacity to co-operate with and assist QQI and provide QQI with information as specified in Section 45(3) of the 2012 Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) 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**	Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the site visit for this evaluation was conducted virtually, and the panel members did not undertake a site visit to LASNTG's premises. LASNTG delivers training at five Regional Training Centres across Ireland. These are maintained by the relevant County Councils. Outreach centres that meet specific requirements may also be used for programme delivery, and processes are in place to evaluate the suitability of these. The panel is satisfied that the provider has appropriate facilities and resources in

			place based on LASNTG's track record of provision utilising these facilities, and processes for ongoing checks and monitoring in relation to their use.
4.3.5(a)	**Criterion:** *Are there access, transfer and progression arrangements that meet QQI's criteria for approval in place?*	**Yes**	The panel is satisfied that the arrangements presented are in line with QQI's criteria.
4.3.6(a)	**Criterion:** *Are structures and resources to underpin fair and consistent assessment of learners in place?*	**Yes**	LASNTG has processes in place for the appropriate design, communication, delivery, marking and verification of assessment.
4.3.7(a)	**Criterion:** *Are arrangements for the protection of enrolled learners to meet the statutory obligations in place (where applicable)?*	**Yes**	PEL arrangements are not applicable to the suite of programmes LASNTG offers or intends to offer.

Findings

The panel is of the view that the evidence submitted by LASNTG is wholly consistent with the provider meeting this criterion in full.

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

Following the virtual site visit, the panel was of the view that LASNTG had met the majority of the Criteria in Section 4 that relate to the provider's capacity to deliver sustainable education and training. The panel reviewed appropriate evidence that was submitted with the application and was indicative of LASNTG's compliance with legal requirements.

Specific issues were identified by the panel in relation to two of the sub criteria. These pertained to the dimensions of Governance and Management of QA and Other Parties Involved in Education and Training. These concerns were therefore discussed in Sections 5.1 and 5.10 of this report, and reflected in a *Mandatory Change* (7.1.1). The panel is of the view that the issues identified were effectively addressed by LASNTG during the interim 6 week period.

Part 5 Evaluation of draft QA Procedures submitted by Local Authority Services National Training Group.

The following is the panel's findings following evaluation of Local Authority Services National Training Group's 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:

The panel was of the view that further development of this aspect of LASNTG's draft QA was required in order to reflect a clear alignment to QQI's Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines.

QQI's guidelines under this dimension of QA require providers to have governance structures in place that enforce a separation of commercial and academic decision-making. During the evaluation of LASNTG's draft QA, the panel therefore sought to understand where responsibility for commercial versus academic decision-making rested within the organisation.

Resources are provided to LASNTG through government funding, and through fees paid by Local Authorities as well as other private and public sector fees. In 2019, 93% of LASNTG's training was delivered to the Local Authority sector on a cost neutral basis. The panel acknowledge that LASNTG has a number of stakeholders, and that governance of QA within LASNTG therefore takes place within a reasonably complex environment. LASNTG is bound by its host Local Authority (Tipperary) to that body's corporate governance structures and to nationally established policies and procedures. However, LASNTG has its own risk register established, and decisions regarding, for example, pursing validation of new programmes are taken by one of four training groups (Roads, Water, Environment & Fire) that LASNTG represents. LASNTG is comprised of representatives from these training groups, which have full responsibility for the expending and monitoring of assigned training grants. During the virtual site visit, the panel therefore explored how academic decision-making could be clearly separated from the commercial responsibilities of those training groups.

At the time of the virtual site visit, LASNTG identified that an Academic Board was in the process of being established for this purpose. LASNTG's representatives stated that Terms of Reference for the Academic Board were in the process of being finalised. The panel supported LASNTG's decision to invite informed externality and clearly establish a pathway within the organisation for academic decision-making, which must be demonstrably distinct from commercial decision-making or operational management. However, given the importance of the Academic Board to LASNTG's ability to demonstrate alignment to this aspect of QQI's guidelines, the panel were unable to approve the governance and management of QA within the organisation without first reviewing full and complete information pertaining to it. This requirement was outlined within proposed *Mandatory Change* 7.1.1 of this report.

During the site visit, the panel also sought to understand where overall responsibility for QA lay within the organisation. LASNTG identified that this was the remit of the Monitoring and Evaluation Committee (MEC). The MEC has an independent chair and representation from the four training groups, as well as representation from the Local Government Management Agency. In the lead up to LASNTG's application for reengagement, a QA team had been established that was responsible for the implementation of QA, and reported to the MEC. The panel was of the view that as LASNTG moves forward in addressing the panel's mandatory changes, the remit of this committee and its relationship to the Academic Board should be carefully considered and clarified in LASNTG's documentation.

A further dimension of this discussion was the division of QA responsibilities between the five Regional Training Centres (RTCs) and LASNTG. Within its application, LASNTG outlined an oversight and coordination role in relation to the RTCs, which are part of its membership. However, the RTCs function under the corporate governance of their local host authorities, while LASNTG functions under Tipperary County Council. Although LASNTG representatives stated that the RTCs functioned as geographical outlets for training delivery, it was clear to the panel that their role was not limited to the provision of training facilities. For example, training staff are at times employed and performance managed by RTCs, and not always by LASNTG directly. RTCs manage learner recruitment and admissions processes (typically via interaction with employers), and deal with requests for reasonable accommodations or other special requirements. Pre-course meetings take place between RTC managers, lead trainers and subject matter experts at which assessments, marking schemes and QA processes are reviewed. RTC managers also collect, collate and respond to feedback from learners. The panel was therefore of the view that the RTCs had a substantive role in programme delivery, and that this needed to be reflected in LASNTG's application as a form of collaborative provision (see also Section 5.10). This is outlined within proposed *Mandatory Change* 7.1.1 of this report.

Following the six week interim period allocated, LASNTG submitted evidence to the panel that it had sufficiently addressed these concerns. The delineation of roles and responsibilities in relation to quality assurance and governance was documented and submitted, and LASNTG has established its Academic Board and drafted Terms of Reference, which were inclusive of details pertaining to membership, frequency of meetings, quorum and remit.

2   DOCUMENTED APPROACH TO QUALITY ASSURANCE

Panel Findings:

The panel was of the view that further development of this aspect of LASNTG's draft QA was required in order to reflect a clear alignment to QQI's Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines.

QQI's guidelines under this dimension of QA require QA systems to be fully documented, available publicly, and published in usable formats. They must cover any elements of the provider's activities that are subcontracted to or carried out by other parties. The panel therefore notes that the issues discussed in Section 5.1 and addressed in proposed *Mandatory Change* 7.1.1 are relevant to the development needed in order for LASNTG's QA to be considered fully documented.

During the virtual site visit, the panel sought to understand how learners at LASNTG were able to access full information regarding key procedures, including complaints and appeals. LASNTG provides learners with a handbook which sets out what is expected of them and what they are entitled to. However, this does not contain the full set of policies and procedures that are relevant to learners. Learners are also informed of their right to complain during induction. LASNTG representatives stated that the procedures were not currently available on the website, which was in the process of being updated, but that it was the intention of the provider to publish these in the future.

The panel supported LASNTG's intention to use its website to publish the QA, which would make the procedures fully available to LASNTG's learners. The panel acknowledges that learners are enrolled in short courses on a part-time basis, and in that context it is entirely appropriate to make the full policies and procedures available via the website rather than including these in the learner handbooks distributed at induction. However, as LASNTG is currently delivering QQI validated programmes the panel was of the view that the QA procedures must be made available on the website without delay (and updated if and when required as part of reengagement or other processes). The panel outlined this within a proposed *Mandatory Change* (7.1.3) in this report.

Following the six week interim period allocated, LASNTG submitted evidence to the panel that it had sufficiently addressed this concern. LASNTG presented a clear timeline for publication of its policy statements and procedures, to be published pursuant to approval of the draft QA procedures by QQI. The panel has identified that LASNTG must report to QQI on the implementation of this as a condition of approval (see 6.1.1).

In addition to the relevant proposed *Mandatory Changes*, the panel has issued an item of *Specific Advice* to LASNTG with regard to this dimension of QA. This advice pertains to the structure and organisation of the QA documentation. If implemented, the panel are of the view that LASNTG will benefit during future QQI events, as presenting a set of documents that are conducive to evaluation by external panels using QQI's criteria will better facilitate the process.

3   PROGRAMMES OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING

The panel was of the view that further development of this aspect of LASNTG's draft QA was required in order to reflect a clear alignment to QQI's Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines.

QQI's guidelines under this dimension of QA require the development of new programmes to be conducted systematically, and evaluated by appropriate internal decision-making structures. The panel first explored how programmes were developed at LASNTG. The provider outlined a robust process, initiated when the need for a new programme is identified through the network of training partners. Subsequently, programme design and development teams are established (inclusive of persons with subject matter expertise and persons with pedagogic expertise). Programmes are piloted prior to delivery, with a mix of novice learners and subject matter experts invited to participate. The pilot process enables the programme design team to gather feedback and engage in discussion with the participants, and feed this back into further development where required before proceeding to a roll out of the programme.

With regard to internal evaluation and approval of programmes by management and governance at LASNTG, at the time of the virtual site visit the panel understood that decision-making processes by distinct academic and commercial units of governance at LASNTG were likely to be positively impacted by the establishment of an Academic Board (see Section 5.1). The panel is therefore unable to make detailed comment on the alignment of the programme development and approval process at LASNTG to QQI's guidelines until the Terms of Reference, including membership for the Academic Board, are submitted and subsequent updates (where required) are made to designated approvals within the QA procedures (see 7.1.1).

QQI's guidelines under this dimension of QA also require that programmes benefit from ongoing monitoring and periodic review, and that feedback from staff and learners is incorporated into these processes. During the site visit, LASNTG's representatives confirmed that learner feedback was collected by RTC managers, who deal locally with any issues arising that fall within their areas of responsibility and pass on any issues related to the programme curriculum to the LASNTG Programme Coordinator. The panel was of the view that this was problematic, and that all feedback pertaining to programme delivery should be visible to the Programme Coordinator and collated for consideration during programme review processes. The panel outlined this within a proposed *Mandatory Change* (7.1.2) in this report.

Following the six week interim period allocated, LASNTG submitted evidence to the panel that it had worked to address this addressed this concern. LASNTG presented a revised learner feedback process. The panel identified a further item of specific advice for LASNTG pertaining to this (see 7.3.2)

Learner admission, progression and recognition are considered under this dimension of QA within QQI's guidelines. During the site visit, LASNTG representatives responded to panel queries related to aspects of practice at the provider in relation to RPL. The panel was of the view that LASNTG has appropriate procedures in place surrounding these processes. The panel has also offered a commendation to LASNTG with regard to its efforts to open up progression routes for learners through its relationships with institutes of technology.

4   STAFF RECRUITMENT, MANAGEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

The panel is of the view that LASNTG has satisfied QQI's requirements with regard to this dimension of QA.

QQI's guidelines under this dimension of QA require providers to appoint suitably qualified staff to teaching roles, and to provide opportunities for further staff development. LASNTG has two internal trainers, and RTCs also employ trainers directly. A framework for the employment of trainers is established, and a minimum requirement set (achievement of an NFQ Level 6 Train the Trainer qualification) in addition to programme specific eligibility criteria. Trainers are recruited for a period of three years.

The panel sought to understand how trainers were inducted, how performance was monitored and managed, and what opportunities were provided to trainers for development. LASNTG inducts trainers to each new programme they will deliver through an iteration of that training programme. Specific training may also be provided in relation to requisite skills, for example, the use of Moodle. LASNTG acknowledged that the provider has more capacity to monitor and manage the pedagogic practices of its internal trainers, but that all trainers may be invited to annual conferences or regional seminars.

Although the panel accepts that practices at LASNTG are appropriate to QQI's guidelines within its context of operations, the panel has identified an item of *Specific Advice* in relation to this dimension of QA (7.2.2). The panel is of the view that LASNTG could benefit from formalizing its practices in this area and giving consideration to how good practice could be systematically shared.

5   TEACHING AND LEARNING

Panel Findings:

The panel is of the view that LASNTG has satisfied QQI's requirements with regard to this dimension of QA.

QQI's guidelines under this dimension of QA require providers to demonstrate a commitment to improving the quality of teaching and learning, including attending to the diversity of learners and their needs, enabling flexible learning pathways and flexibly using a variety of pedagogic methods.

During the virtual site visit, the panel sought to understand what approaches to teaching and learning were employed within LASNTG's programmes, and how teaching and learning strategies were communicated to trainers. LASNTG's representatives outlined a range of approaches which were adapted to suit the needs of different cohorts and to ensure achievement of distinct learning outcomes. LASNTG representatives also noted that in some workplace learning environments that were considered high risk, for example high speed roads, teaching and learning strategies were by necessity more directive. Trainers working with the provider confirmed that programme specific strategies were conveyed during induction to each new programme they were tasked with delivering (via an iteration of that programme by the lead trainer).

At the time of the panel's evaluation, LASNTG were introducing elements of online learning and the provision of online learning resources within some modules. Access to these resources was via Moodle, and designed to facilitate learners' acquisition of foundational knowledge and self-test their progression in this area prior to engaging in face to face skills-based learning. The panel encourages LASNTG to continue its efforts to develop online learning resources to augment its programme delivery.

Following these discussions, the panel felt confident that a genuine commitment to provision of high quality, learner-centred pedagogy was evident at LASNTG. However, the panel has identified two items of Specific Advice arising from these discussions (see 7.2.3 and 7.2.4). These emphasize the need for the team at LASNTG to revisit their use of terminology describing aspects of teaching and learning, and to give careful consideration to the implications of formalizing blended learning within their practices in the future.

6   ASSESSMENT OF LEARNERS

Panel Findings:

The panel is of the view that LASNTG has satisfied QQI's requirements with regard to this dimension of QA.

QQI's guidelines under this dimension of QA require providers to have policies and procedures in place that address how assessment supports standards based on learning outcomes, and the credibility and security of assessment procedures. During the virtual site visit, the panel explored these aspects of practice with LASNTG's representatives.

Assessment processes and weightings are outlined to learners at induction. During programme delivery, RTC managers oversee the security of assessment and issue materials to trainers. Trainers receive specific instructions with regard to what must be provided, proctoring arrangements and instructions. Trainers are fully briefed on what evidence they will gather in the case of practical assessments. Issues pertaining to academic integrity and plagiarism also have been addressed within the design of assessment in LASNTG's newer programmes. Trainers have access to defined marking schemes, and moderation is supported by pre-course meetings at which the lead trainer directs how assessments should be marked to ensure consistency. Internal verification is undertaken to review the spread of marks and identify potential anomalies or trends. The panel were largely satisfied that the approach to assessment outlined by LASNTG's representatives was outcomes based, and promoted and supported effective learning and teaching.

7   SUPPORT FOR LEARNERS

Panel Findings:

The panel is of the view that LASNTG has satisfied QQI's requirements with regard to this dimension of QA.

QQI's guidelines require that the adequacy of resources and supports available to learners is monitored on an ongoing basis, and that learners are surveyed for their impression of these and also for their feedback on learning and teaching. LASNTG's learners are part-time, and typically enrolled in training via their employers. LASNTG has minimum requirements for the learning environments in which its programmes are delivered, and the facilities for these. These are met by the RTCs and evaluated with the use of a checklist where outreach centres are used. Trainers are responsible for checking facilities and arrangements at outreach centres prior to commencement of training to ensure they are adequate and meet expectations. RTCs collect learner feedback on all aspects of their experience within a programme, inclusive of facilities and resources. During discussions with the panel, trainers at LASNTG also discussed the importance of the trainer's role in identifying learners that may be struggling or may benefit from requesting an accommodation within the context of their programmes.

8   INFORMATION AND DATA MANAGEMENT

Panel Findings:

The panel is of the view that further development of this aspect of LASNTG's draft QA is required in order to reflect a clear alignment to QQI's Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines.

QQI's guidelines require reliable information and data to be available to providers for the purpose of informed decision-making. Obligations under data protection legislation must be complied with, and this should include ensuring learner information material makes clear what personal data will be collected for what purpose and with whom it will be shared. LASNTG's representatives confirmed that records were kept within the centre, and that LASNTG is guided by Tipperary County Council with regard to GDPR. Learners are informed as to why certain information, for example, PPS numbers, is collected. The panel has issued a proposed *Mandatory Change* (7.1.3) discussed in Section 5.2, which is also relevant to this dimension of QA. This requires LASNTG to ensure that the Privacy Policy is published on its website alongside other QA procedures. Following the six week interim period allocated, LASNTG submitted evidence to the panel that it had sufficiently addressed this concern. LASNTG presented a clear timeline for publication of its Privacy Policy on the website, alongside other QA documentation. The panel has identified a condition of QA approval (see 6.1.1) associated with this.

9 PUBLIC INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION

Panel Findings:

> The panel was of the view that further development of this aspect of LASNTG's draft QA was required in order to reflect a clear alignment to QQI's Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines.
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> As discussed in Section 5.2, QQI's guidelines require QA procedures to be published in accessible formats. Under this dimension of QA, the need for providers to publish information about their quality assurance policies and procedures (and to ensure the information is clear, accurate, objective, up to date and easily accessible) is also emphasized. This has been addressed in proposed *Mandatory Change* 7.1.3. Following the six week interim period allocated, LASNTG submitted evidence to the panel that it had sufficiently addressed this concern. LASNTG presented a clear timeline for publication of its QA documentation on the website. The panel has identified a condition of QA approval (see 6.1.1) associated with this.

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

Panel Findings:

> The panel was of the view that further development of this aspect of LASNTG's draft QA was required in order to reflect a clear alignment to QQI's Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines.
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> The relationships with Institutes of Technology are specified within LASNTG's documented QA, and have been fostered to expand the range of courses available to the Local Authority sector. LASNTG is involved in need's identification, programme design, information provision and programme evaluation and enhancement. Programmes are validated by the Institutes of Technology and delivered by them under their QA arrangements with QQI. They therefore have full and ultimate responsibility for the quality of those programmes and for returning results to QQI for certification.
>
> However, the panel holds concerns that LASNTG's relationships with RTC's are less clearly specified. These are characterised by LASNTG as locations in which training is provided. However, significant QA responsibilities are devolved to the RTC managers, including the recruitment and management of trainers and the recruitment of learners. The five RTCs are governed by their respective Management and Technical Committees and subject to the corporate governance of their respective local host authorities. The panel acknowledges that the RTCs are members of LASNTG, and that there is significant complexity within the overall structure. However, the panel is of the view that the relationship is more akin to collaborative provision than to a facilities service. The panel issued a proposed *Mandatory Change* (7.1.1) to address this that has also been discussed in Section 5.1 of this report. Following the six week interim period allocated, LASNTG submitted evidence to the panel that it had sufficiently addressed this concern. The panel identified a further item of specific advice for LASNTG pertaining to this (see 7.3.1).

Panel Findings:

The panel was of the view that further development of this aspect of LASNTG's draft QA was required in order to reflect a clear alignment to QQI's Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines.

LASNTG's representatives outlined to the panel that the newly established QA team had identified a vulnerability in relation to competency-based monitoring of trainers, and that a plan was in place with monitors identified to address this upon resumption of training following the COVID-19 pandemic. The QA team reports to the MEC committee, which has oversight of this area.

As discussed in Section 5.3, LASNTG collect feedback from learners on every programme to inform monitoring and review activities. Feedback is appropriately sought in relation to learning resources and facilities, supports for learners, the programme and the quality teaching and learning. The panel identified a proposed *Mandatory Change* in relation to how this feedback is managed after collection (7.1.2) which is also relevant to this dimension of QA. Following the six week interim period allocated, LASNTG submitted evidence to the panel that it had sufficiently addressed this concern. The panel identified a further item of specific advice for LASNTG pertaining to this (see 7.3.2).

Evaluation of draft QA Procedures - Overall panel findings

The panel identified a number of areas of good practice in its evaluation of LASNTG's QA, and has commended the provider in relation to these. The panel has also acknowledged the significant amount of work involved in preparing for and submitting an application for reengagement. The panel congratulates LASNTG on its constructive engagement with the reengagement process, and successful outcome.

As stated in Section 3.1 of this report, at the conclusion of the virtual site visit the panel held concerns that some discrete issues needed to be addressed by LASNTG before the panel could recommend approval of the provider's QA procedures.

The panel was confident that LASNTG had the internal capacity to address these issues during an adjournment of six weeks. Following that period, the panel reconvened to undertake a desk review of evidence submitted by LASNTG that the issues had been addressed. The panel was of the view that LASNTG had worked effectively to address the panel's concerns in the interim period, and was pleased to make a recommendation to QQI to approve LASNTG's draft QA procedures at that time.

Part 6   Conditions of Approval

6.1.1   Report to QQI on the implementation of proposed mandatory change 7.1.3, pertaining to the publication of the draft QA and the Privacy Policy.

Part 7   Mandatory Changes to QA Procedures and Specific Advice

The following proposed mandatory changes and items of specific advice were identified at the conclusion of the site visit on 7th July, 2020 by the panel. As these issues were considered discrete, and the panel was of the view they could be addressed relatively quickly by LASNTG, the panel availed of its option to defer its decision for six weeks.

The panel reconvened on the 15th of September to evaluate the evidence submitted by LASNTG that it had implemented the required changes. The panel was satisfied at that time that LASNTG had adequately addressed the issues set out in Section 7.1 of this report, and had commenced a constructive engagement with the items of specific advice set out in Section 7.2.

7.1   Mandatory Changes

7.1.1 The panel requires LASNTG to clarify the delineation of the roles and responsibilities in relation to quality assurance and corporate governance. The panel is unable to complete its evaluation of the proposed structures for Governance of QA while that structure is in flux.

- The panel is of the view that the LASNTG's relationship with RTCs is more appropriately framed as collaborative provision. This is because the RTCs operate under separate governance and management structures, and are the employers of training staff. The delineation of responsibilities between LASNTG and the RTCs therefore needs to be documented, with a formal agreement to reflect this.

- The panel requires LASNTG to proceed with fully establishing its Academic Board, and to evidence this by submitting the draft Terms of Reference for this body to the panel. The Terms of Reference for the Academic Board must be comprehensive and contain details including membership, frequency of meetings, quorum and remit. The relationship between the Academic Board and LASNTG, the MEC and the RTCs must also be made clear.

7.1.2 Currently feedback pertaining to delivery of programmes validated by LASNTG is received by the RTC managers, who will determine what elements of that feedback is forwarded to LASNTG. This process

must be amended to ensure that both LASNTG and the RTCs are in receipt of all feedback provided by learners.

7.1.3 The QA policies and procedures must be made fully available to learners via the LASNTG website, and must be published without delay. The published QA must include the Privacy Policy, which must clearly specify who information will be shared with on the basis of learners' active consent, where consent is the lawful basis for processing that data.

7.2 Specific Advice

7.2.1 LASNTG is advised that its documented QA could be further developed to more readily facilitate evaluation on the basis of QQI's guidelines. This will be useful in future processes that LASNTG may pursue, for example, extension to its Scope of Provision to include Blended Learning and new programme validations. The panel recommends that LASNTG work to align the chapters within the QA Manual to QQI's guidelines. This would, for example, mean inclusion of all Terms of Reference for committees within the Governance and Management chapter, as well as relevant organisation charts and individual role descriptions.

7.2.2 LASNTG is advised that contextually appropriate measures for staff development in relation to pedagogic skills need to be further documented within the QA. These could usefully include mechanisms to ensure that good practice is shared.

7.2.3 LASNTG is encouraged to continue its efforts to expand its use of a Virtual Learning Environment (Moodle) to augment learners' face to face experience. LASNTG is advised to undertake a thorough review of QQI's Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Blended Learning Programmes (2018). This would enable LASNTG to undertake a capacity analysis in this area, consider the strategic merit of Blended Learning in their context, and be well-informed regarding the implications of any application to QQI in this area.

7.2.4 LASNTG is advised to work to develop understanding within the organisation of how terms like Collaborative Provision, Independent Learning, Blended Learning and Work-based Learning are defined within the current guidelines. This will be essential to LASNTG's success in engaging with QQI processes moving forward.

7.3 Further Specific Advice (identified on the 15ᵗʰ of September, 2020)

7.3.1 With regard to the collaborative partnerships between LASNTG and RTCs, the panel advises that LASNTG should undertake an annual due diligence exercise. This should encompass academic, quality, budgetary and marketing dimensions of programme delivery. The MOU documentation should capture that LASNTG, as first provider in the collaborative relationship will undertake this as a function of/within the remit of the Academic Board.

7.3.2 Integrate a mechanism into learner feedback procedures to safeguard the anonymity of learners. For example, consideration could be given to processes that involve collection of manually completed feedback forms by an individual other than the trainer, or that allow learners to submit the feedback forms online.

Note:

The panel would like to acknowledge that in the initial evaluation following the site visit, the panel identified a need for LASNTG to bring its procedures for dealing with assessment complaints and appeals into alignment with the definitions provided by QQI's Assessment and Standards, Revised 2013. LASNTG complied fully with this request, producing a coherent and appropriate procedure to guide assessment rechecks, reviews and appeals.

LASNTG concurrently notified the panel of a query in relation to this issue. This query pertained to whether LASNTG should be guided by QQI's Assessment and Standards, Revised 2013, or by QQI's Quality Assuring Assessment Guidelines for Providers (2013), on which its original procedure was based and which is frequently referenced in the context of Further Education. The panel referred this query to QQI.

QQI's representatives advised that in the context of LASNTG's ambitions for future programme development and validation, closer alignment to QQI's Assessment and Standards, Revised 2013 (as demonstrated in the revised procedure) is to the provider's benefit. However, the panel would like to clearly acknowledge that LASNTG's original procedure was wholly compliant with QQI's Quality Assuring Assessment Guidelines for Provider (2013), and therefore not deficient.

Noting the above, the panel endorse the robust procedure presented by LASNTG in its revised documentation, and comment the constructive and proactive approach to progressing this item by the LASNTG team.

Part 7   Proposed Approved Scope of Provision for this provider

NFQ Level(s) – min and max	Award Class(es)	Discipline areas
5 – 6	SPA, Minor	Engineering

Part 8   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 LASNTG.

Name:_____

Date: 29th September 2020

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

Document	Related to
No additional documentation was provided during the virtual site visit.	

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

Name	Role/Position
Tom Kirby	Secretary LASNTG
Matt Shortt	Quality Officer
Róisín Smith	Programme Coordinator
Martin Dooley	Manager Roscrea Regional Training Centre
Charlie Kerr	Trainer and Member of Programme Design and Development Team for both Programmes
Cathleen Hartnett	External QA Advisor

Appendix: Provider Response to the Reengagement Report

Local Authority Services National Training Group

(Roads, Water, Environment and Fire Services Training Groups)
LASNTG, Friar's Court, Nenagh, Co. Tipperary E45 K588
Tel. no. (0761) 06 6260, E-mail: lasntg@tipperarycoco.ie
Web Page: www.lasntg.ie

Dr. Deirdre Stritch
Manager of Approval and Monitoring - QQI Awards
Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI)
26/27 Denzille Lane
Dublin 2
D02 P266

September 28th 2020

Dear Deirdre

Re: Formal response to QQI regarding the LASNTG 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 LASNTG's draft QA procedures at the October PAEC meeting. Thank you for inviting us to identify any factual inaccuracies in the report and to make a formal response which, we understand will be published and considered by the PAEC.

We wish to thank the panel of experts we met. We faced the prospect of a virtual panel meeting with some trepidation, but we found the experience very positive and constructive. All panel members ensured we were given a very fair hearing and their advice and feedback was very helpful.
We would also like to record our thanks to all the QQI staff members who guided us on the re-engagement journey. Everyone in QQI who we contacted and communicated with was helpful, courteous and responsive. This helped greatly with the process.

As an organisation, LASNTG has benefited from re-engagement and are confident that the process, demanding though it was at times, has helped us to embed a culture of quality more deeply in LASNTG and to provide an evidential framework for our quality processes. We know that our learners will benefit as a result.

We are submitting a note of factual inaccuracies in the specified format. We are working on implementing the specific advice detailed in the original report and the further specific advice identified by the panel on September 15th.

We have noted the Condition of Approval which requires us to report to QQI on the implementation of the mandatory change pertaining to the publication of our QA Policies and Procedures.

Please contact me if there are any points you need to clarify or discus further.

Kind Regards

Tom Kirby
Secretary LASNTG