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Reengagement Panel Report

Assessment of Capacity and Approval of QA Procedures

Part 1 Details of provider

1.1 Applicant Provider

Registered Business/Trading Name:	Portobello Institute
Address:	43 Lower Dominick Street, Dublin 1
Date of Application:	5 th February 2019
Date of resubmission of application:	
Date of evaluation:	
Date of site visit (if applicable):	21 st June 2019
Date of reconvene meeting (if applicable)	15 th April 2020
Date of recommendation to the Programmes and Awards Executive Committee:	11 th June 2020

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1.2 Profile of provider

Portobello Institute (PI) was founded in 1981 to provide training for childcare professionals. The provider operated from premises in South Richmond Street. In 1991, PI relocated to the current site in Lower Dominick Street, and gained recognition from the City and Guilds of London Institute for its training in childcare. This enabled expansion and the introduction of courses outside the domain of childcare.

PI's QA was recognised by FETAC in 2005, and the provider proceeded to gain accreditation for programmes in Montessori Teaching and Special Needs Education at National Framework of Qualifications levels 5 and 6. PI was recognized by HETAC in 2009, and in 2011 the provider's Higher Certificate in Arts in Montessori Education was accredited. A number of non-QQI awards are also offered by PI. These are accredited by ITEC and BIFM. PI delivers three honours degrees in partnership with London Metropolitan University (LMU), which are accredited by LMU and subject to LMU's QA.

PI offers a number of programmes in regional locations around Ireland. Currently, the provider delivers in over 50 locations. The provider certified 1,174 learners in 2018, and offers both Major and Minor awards up to NFQ Level 6 in the following domains: Healthcare; Management and Administration; Law; Business Administration and Law; Travel, Tourism & Leisure; Childcare & Youth Services; Protection of Person & Property; Sports; Wholesale & Retail Sales; Handcrafts.

Part 2 Panel Membership		
Name	Role of Panel Member	Organisation
Mr. David Denieffe	Chair	Registrar, Institute of Technology Carlow
Dr. Catherine Peck	Secretary	Independent Education Consultant
Pamela Skerritt	Panel Member	Education Consultant
Aoife Prendergast	Panel Member	Lecturer, Limerick Institute of Technology
Matthew Waters	Panel Member	Technology Lead, An Cosan

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Part 3 Findings of the Panel

3.1 Summary Findings

The panel acknowledges the established good standing of Portobello Institute, and PI's track record of certification in Ireland. The reengagement process has involved a comprehensive review by the panel of the provider's QA documentation and a site visit to PI in Dublin. During the site the panel engaged in discussions with PI leadership and provider staff working across a range of academic, administrative and student support functions. PI's representatives engaged constructively with the panel throughout the discussions.

Following this review of PI's application documentation and QA, and a site visit to the provider, the panel held the view that some changes were necessary to PI's QA procedures. Mandatory changes were specified to ensure that appropriate structures of governance were in place, and that some discrete aspects of PI's operations were sufficiently aligned to QQI's guidelines. It was the view of the panel that PI had the capability to implement the necessary changes within an allocated period of six months, and that the team at PI would embrace the opportunity for enhancement that this presented.

The panel reconvened on 15th April, 2020 to undertake a desk review of the evidence submitted by the provider that it had implemented the specified changes. It was the panel's view that PI had undertaken a thorough review of its QA procedures in the intervening period, and sufficiently addressed the panel's mandatory changes. The panel also commends PI on aspects of the work undertaken to further develop its QA procedures throughout the reengagement process. Notably, PI's review of its processes in relation to work placement are substantially enhanced and should be commended.

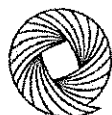
The panel is pleased to be in a position to issue a recommendation to QQI to approve the draft QA procedures of PI, and to offer its congratulations to the provider on this significant milestone.

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

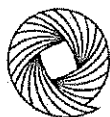
	Tick <u>one</u> as appropriate
Approve Portobello Institute's draft QA procedures	X
Refuse approval of Portobello Institute's draft QA procedures with mandatory changes set out in Section 6.1 (If this recommendation is accepted by QQI, the provider may make a revised application within six months of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

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Part 4 Evaluation of provider capacity

4.1 Legal and compliance requirements:

	Criteria	Yes/No/ Partially	Comments
4.1.1(a)	Criterion: <i>Is the applicant an established Legal Entity who has Education and/or Training as a Principal Function?</i>	Yes	PI's Certificate of Incorporation is included in its application; PI has a track record of certification at NFQ Levels 5 and 6 in Ireland.
4.1.2(a)	Criterion: <i>Is the legal entity established in the European Union and does it have a substantial presence in Ireland?</i>	Yes	PI has been an established provider in Ireland since 1981; was recognized by FETAC in 2005 and HETAC in 2009. The provider has validated 23 programmes and certified 1,174 learners in 2018.
4.1.3(a)	Criterion: <i>Are any dependencies, collaborations, obligations, parent organisations, and subsidiaries clearly specified?</i>	Yes	Appendices to the draft QA manual include Course Level Agreements between Leeds Metropolitan University (LMU) and PI. The provider's application form lists the programmes it delivers that are accredited by ITEC and BIFM.
4.1.4(a)	Criterion: <i>Are any third-party relationships and partnerships compatible with the scope of access sought?</i>	Yes	The provider confirmed that the QA associated with PI's collaboration with LMU is the responsibility of that organisation.
4.1.5(a)	Criterion: <i>Are the applicable regulations and legislation complied with in all jurisdictions where it operates?</i>	Yes	The provider's application contains a statement of compliance and declaration.
4.1.6(a)	Criterion: <i>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 enrolls learners, or where it has arrangements with awarding bodies, quality assurance agencies, qualifications authorities, ministries of</i>	Yes	PI has been a FETAC approved centre since 2005, and is in good standing in Ireland.

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	<i>education and training, professional bodies and regulators.</i>		
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Findings

The panel is satisfied that the provider's legal and compliance requirements meet criteria 4.1.

PI has a track record of engagement with FETAC (since 2005) and HETAC (since 2009). The provider submitted a statement of compliance and documentation with its application for reengagement that is indicative of adherence to the legal and compliance requirements of QQI.

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	Criteria	Yes/No/ Partially	Comments
4.2.1(a)	Criterion: <i>Does the applicant have a sufficient resource base and is it stable and in good financial standing?</i>	Yes	PI submitted the following relevant evidence: Management Accounts 2018, Director's report & financial statements 2017; tax clearance certificate 2018
4.2.2(a)	Criterion: <i>Does the applicant have a reasonable business case for sustainable provision?</i>	Yes	PI has diversified its programme offerings to mitigate risk from funding/legislative changes (see Section 5.1).
4.2.3(a)	Criterion: <i>Are fit-for-purpose governance, management and decision making structures in place?</i>	Yes	At the time of the initial site visit, PI had outlined proposed governance and management structures in its application which reflected good progress in the provider's development of this area. These needed to be clarified and further steps taken toward their establishment. Subsequent to a review of the changes made by PI in the interim period, the panel was satisfied that PI's structures were fit-for-purpose.
4.2.4(a)	Criterion: <i>Are there arrangements in place for providing required information to QQI?</i>	Yes	The provider has a track record of validation and certification, and employs a QA manager responsible for handling certification processes.

Findings

The panel is satisfied that the provider's resource, governance and structural requirements meet this criteria 4.1. PI has submitted appropriate evidence to the panel, and has a track record of certification. PI has made appropriate adjustments to its governance structure during the interim period, enabling the panel to recommend that these are fit-for-purpose.



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4.3 Programme development and provision requirements:

	Criteria	Yes/No/ Partially	Comments
4.3.1(a)	Criterion: <i>Does the applicant have experience and a track record in providing education and training programmes?</i>	Yes	PI was established in 1981, and has been a FETAC approved centre since 2005.
4.3.2(a)	Criterion: <i>Does the applicant have a fit-for-purpose and stable complement of education and training staff?</i>	Yes	PI has a core team of 30+ staff and an employs approximately 80 tutors
4.3.3(a)	Criterion: <i>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)?</i>	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: <i>Does the applicant have the fit-for-purpose premises, facilities and resources to meet the requirements of the provision proposed in place?</i>	Yes	Procedures for Evaluation of Premises, Equipment and Facilities are included in Chapter 3.5.2 of the draft QA manual.
4.3.5(a)	Criterion: <i>Are there access, transfer and progression arrangements that meet QQI's criteria for approval in place?</i>	Yes	Admission, Progression and Recognition are outlined in Chapter 3.6 of the draft QA manual. Associated procedures were discussed with the panel during the site visit.
4.3.6(a)	Criterion: <i>Are structures and resources to underpin fair and consistent assessment of learners in place?</i>	Yes	Assessment and associated procedures were discussed with the panel during the site visit. The panel requested clarification in relation to

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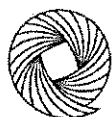
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			PI's adherence to the 2013 QQI QA Assessment Guidelines for Providers. Substantive improvements were made prior to resubmission after the 6 month interim period.
4.3.7(a)	Criterion: <i>Are arrangements for the protection of enrolled learners to meet the statutory obligations in place (where applicable)?</i>	Yes	PI states it has taken advice from QQI with regard to this criterion. Learners undertaking QQI programmes at PI are required to take out insurance as part of the registration process, and students receive a certificate from the insurer.

Findings

The panel is satisfied that the provider's programme development and provision requirements meet criteria 4.3.

Access, transfer and progression arrangements are in place that are suitable to the provider's programme context, and policies are in place to ensure Protection for Enrolled Learners. PI employs a team of appropriately qualified tutors, and has a track record of certification with FETAC and QQI.



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

The panel is satisfied that PI has the capacity to provide sustainable education and training within its current scope of provision.

Appropriate evidence was submitted as part of the provider's application for reengagement. This evidence was indicative of the provider having a sufficient resource base, appropriate staffing and established procedures.

The panel had initially identified some areas where *mandatory changes* were necessary. These were satisfactorily addressed by PI within the allocated 6 month period.

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Part 5 Evaluation of draft QA Procedures submitted by <Provider Name>

The following is the panel's findings following evaluation of Portobello Institute 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:

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

QQI's 2016 Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines require QA policies and procedures to include a description of processes. The guidelines also require roles and positions responsible for the implementation of quality assurance policies and procedures to be identified, and clearly described and designated.

During the site visit, PI representatives outlined how the provider's development of key personnel was contributing to PI's QA in relation to governance and management of quality. Work has been undertaken to ensure roles and responsibilities are well-defined, succession is better-facilitated, and knowledge is held within the organisation rather than the individual. PI is also aware of the need to clearly separate academic decision-making from undue commercial influence. During the provider's presentation to the panel, PI emphasized how the distinct roles of the College Director and Managing Director, and the mutually respectful relationship between the individuals who fill these roles, function to support this.

The panel sought to understand in more depth the processes associated with decision-making and management at PI, at director level and in relation to the role and function of various committees and panels. The panel noted as an outcome of discussions during the site visit that this area required greater clarity. However, the panel also acknowledged that increased formalisation of decision-making was a priority that PI has self-identified. Therefore, it was the panel's view that *mandatory changes* pertaining to this dimension of QA were well-aligned to the provider's strategic plan. When the panel reconvened in April 2020 to undertake a desk review PI's enhancements in this area, the panel were satisfied that significant work had been undertaken to address their initial concerns. In the interim period, PI had moved forward with the process of recruiting an external non-executive director, and had substantially revised its committee structure and associated terms of reference. This process enabled PI to further formalise some of its internal practices and relationships. The panel views this as an area where PI can continue to develop and enhance its QA, and offers some Specific Advice in relation to this within this report.

QQI's guidelines require QA systems to consider risk. PI has recognized the vulnerability that resulted from the provider's previous overdependence on early years and childcare programmes, as programme delivery in this area can be rapidly impacted by changes to funding models and new legislation. A strategy of diversification in programme offerings has been followed to mitigate risks associated with this. PI has expanded into programme offerings in niche areas of provision, where the provider is not directly competing against universities or larger providers in the sector. Diversification has also seen expansion

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into postgraduate programmes, which offer learners the opportunity to stay and progress at PI. During the site visit, PI's representatives emphasized to the panel members that the provider closely follows national and international developments in the sector, as well as changes in industry and legislation that have implications for programme offerings.

Finally, QQI's guidelines emphasize embedding a quality culture, to ensure that the totality of a provider's teaching and learning community is working coherently toward the implementation of the quality agenda. With regard to this, the panel acknowledges the significant work undertaken by PI leadership and staff in developing the provider's QA and engaging with the reengagement process. The panel saw substantial evidence of a positive attitude toward QA within the organisation, and has commended the provider in relation to this in the overall findings section of this report.

2 DOCUMENTED APPROACH TO QUALITY ASSURANCE

Panel Findings:

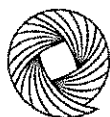
The panel is satisfied that QQI's guidelines under this dimension of QA have been addressed.

PI details its draft QA within its Quality Assurance Manual. The draft QA overviews the provider's policies and procedures, and these are congruent with the dimensions of QA as described in QQI's 2016 Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines.

During the site visit the panel explored the extent to which the draft QA submitted by PI is embedded within the organisation. This was achieved by tracing a learner journey from first point of contact through to completion. Subsequent to this discussion, the panel is generally satisfied that PI's draft QA is being 'lived' within the organisation.

QQI's guidelines require QA to include a role for learners. Chapter 1.21 and 1.22 of PI's draft QA outline student engagement through class representatives and attendance at specific programme team meetings. Discussions with the panel during the site visit confirmed that practices facilitating learner representation are established at PI.

QQI's guidelines also require QA policies and procedures to cover elements of a provider's activities that are subcontracted. With regard to the venues that PI utilizes for programme delivery, Chapter 5.4.3 of the provider's draft QA includes PI's procedure for the monitoring and review of venues for teaching and assessment purposes, in line with QQI's Assessment and Standards, revised 2013.



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3 PROGRAMMES OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Panel Findings:

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

QQI's 2016 Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines require the development of new programmes to be conducted systematically, to involve consultation with stakeholders and to be evaluated by appropriate internal decision-making structures.

PI includes a policy on Programme Development, Delivery and Review in Chapter 2.3.6 of its draft QA. Chapter 3 includes QA procedures for the Approval, Self-Evaluation, Monitoring and Review of Programmes of Education and Training.

QQI's guidelines also require that learner admission, progression and recognition be pre-defined and published, and applied consistently and transparently in accordance with national policies and procedures for Access, Transfer & Progression (ATP).

PI includes a policy on Access, Transfer and Progression in Chapter 2.3.5 of its draft QA. Procedures related to these are included in Chapter 3.6, and include admissions procedures for direct applications, RPL and transfer or progression to further studies. During the site visit, the panel explored how learners identifying special needs would be dealt with if this was disclosed at point of admission. The provider emphasized that programme design at PI embeds opportunities for learners to progress to further studies in higher education. Additionally, PI endeavours to make learners aware of the full range of options available to them, and manage expectations in relation to the competitiveness of particular areas.

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4 STAFF RECRUITMENT, MANAGEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

Panel Findings:

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

QQI's 2016 Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines require that the provider assures itself as to the competence of its staff, and that both recruitment and further professional development of persons engaged in programme and service delivery.

PI employs more than thirty core staff. Additionally, approximately eighty tutors are engaged by PI to deliver programmes across different disciplines, although this number is fluid in accordance with demand and the programme calendars. Although some tutors are full-time, PI noted that the majority were part-time and on employment contracts. PI has an induction process for new tutors, and mentoring is available. Tutors typically sit in on classes prior to commencing to enable them to gain an understanding of how the programmes are delivered at the provider. A range of approaches to the professional development of staff at PI is evident. During annual performance reviews, staff development and support needs are identified on an individual basis. Team needs may be addressed at scheduled teaching and learning days, some of which have been facilitated for PI by LMU. PI staff had additionally been funded to attend training at LMU. Peer observation is in place in some areas. The provider promotes an information and knowledge sharing culture, facilitating internal workshops as needed and encouraging the development of teaching portfolios.

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5 TEACHING AND LEARNING

Panel Findings:

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

QQI's 2016 Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines require that the quality of the learning experience is monitored on an on-going basis and that pedagogic styles incorporate national and international effective practice.

During the site visit, the panel met with programme managers from a range of disciplines, and discussed the broad range of teaching and learning approaches implemented in the delivery of programmes at PI. The discussions indicated a high awareness of learner needs and a willingness to innovate and adapt new technologies and approaches. However, during these discussions the panel identified that practices in relation to the provision of formative feedback were highly variable across programmes. The panel identified the need to establish a documented set of minimum expectations or guidelines for the provision of formative feedback that is communicated to all tutors and observed across all programmes as a *mandatory change*. When the panel reconvened in April 2020 to undertake a desk review of PI's enhancements in this area, the panel were satisfied that PI had addressed this concern. In the interim period, PI had formulated policy in this area and created a standardised feedback template which was submitted to the panel for review.

The guidelines also require that learning environments, including off-campus learning, are appropriate. PI has a procedure in place for the monitoring and review of venues for teaching and assessment purposes, in line with QQI's Assessment and Standards, revised 2013. The panel is satisfied that the provider's QA with regard to the physical premises is appropriately managed. However, the concept of the learning environment also encompasses off-campus learning while on practice/work placements. During the site visit, the panel discussed the role and function of work placements with PI, and explored the management of these and the role of workplace supervisors. PI outlined the relationships that programme managers establish with employers/network sites, an induction for workplace supervisors and the management of associated processes (for example, garda vetting and first aid training). The panel noted that while many good practices were evident in relation to the management of work placements, there was a need to formalise expectations of students and supervisors in this area. Therefore, a *mandatory change* for the provider was to establish a placement working group to facilitate this. When the panel reconvened in April 2020, it noted that substantial work had been undertaken in this area, and offer a commendation to PI in relation to this. A work placement committee had been established, and additional learner and supervisor explanatory packs produced. Additional documentation was also submitted to the panel for review.

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6 ASSESSMENT OF LEARNERS

Panel Findings:

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

QQI's 2016 Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines require that a provider's assessment framework incorporates procedures and systems for the security and integrity of the assessment process. These are outlined in Chapter 6 of the provider's QA manual, and include information regarding reasonable accommodation for learners with disabilities or specific learning needs (see Chapter 6.5). During the site visit, the panel discussed aspects of assessment, including appeals, with PI representatives. The panel is satisfied that good practices are evident in the provider's approach to assessment in a number of areas.

However, the panel discussed feedback practices with PI representatives during the site visit, and noted that while in many instances good practices were being observed, these practices were highly variable and were not regulated by a stated provider policy.

QQI's *Assessment and Standards, Revised 2013* states that programmes and their constituent modules should include assessment tasks that inform individualised feedback and support (Section 2.2.5). The document further states that a provider's continuous assessment regulations should address issues such as the provision of effective and timely feedback to learners (Section 4.6.1) and that the communication of feedback to learners should be regular, timely, beneficial and matched to their assessed learning needs (Section 5).

The panel therefore identified a *mandatory change* for PI, in that the provider needed to clarify adherence to the QQI QA Assessment Guidelines for Providers with regard to the provision of formative feedback to learners. As noted in the previous section, when the panel reconvened in April 2020 to undertake a desk review of PI's enhancements in this area, the panel were satisfied that PI had addressed this concern. In the interim period, PI had formulated policy in this area and created a standardised feedback template which was submitted to the panel for review. The panel was of the view that while greater clarity around assessment processes could be captured in the documentation through reference to QQI's relevant guidelines and requirements, enhancements were evident and the work undertaken was indicative of the positive disposition at PI toward continual improvement.

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7 SUPPORT FOR LEARNERS

Panel Findings:

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

QQI's 2016 Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines require that the range of learning resources and learner supports offered is as coherent and integrated as possible, and that the adequacy and effectiveness of those services is regularly reviewed. During the site visit, the panel discussed learner support with PI representatives. This discussion included areas such as the access that learners at PI have to library resources, wifi, printing services and a canteen. The provider noted that all programme documentation is available in both hard copy and digital formats.

QQI's guidelines identify that guidance services must be provided to learners on programmes as appropriate. PI's representatives noted during the site visit that the provider's tutors are also available to provide individualised support to learners, and this includes discussion of options for progression and employment. Learner representation mechanisms are also required for learners to make representations to the provider about matters of general concern to the learner body. These are in place at PI (discussed in Section 5.2 of this report). Procedures for the management of students and assuring the quality of student support are outlined in Chapter 7 of PI's draft QA manual.

Within this dimension of QA, QQI's guidelines require that resources and supports be actively promoted to ensure that learners are aware of their existence, and that learners are informed about the full range of services available to them. With regard to this, the panel has included a *mandatory change* to the learner handbook, which contained very little detail on policy and procedure. The panel noted that this needed to be revised into a more comprehensive and informative document to satisfy this requirement. Also in relation to this requirement was a further *mandatory change* pertaining to work placement agreements. The panel noted that these should be documented and formalised to include expectations of learners and supervisors, and be provided to all learners who will undertake a placement within their programme of study at PI. When the panel reconvened in April 2020 to undertake a desk review of PI's enhancements in this area, the panel were satisfied that PI had addressed this concern. A sample of a new learner handbook was provided for review.

Although the panel initially identified *mandatory changes* with regard to this dimension of QA, during the site visit, it was also evident that Portobello Institute places learners at the centre. The panel therefore noted a commendation in the overall findings section of this report in relation to PI's evident efforts to appropriately support and empower learners.

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8 INFORMATION AND DATA MANAGEMENT

Panel Findings:

The panel is satisfied that QQI's guidelines under this dimension 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. This includes a requirement that information systems capture appropriate quantitative and qualitative measures of performance, that the learner management system is robust, and that the information system is designed to enable compliance with data protection legislation.

PI's presentation to the panel noted that the process of undertaking a gap analysis had revealed a need to look more closely at indicators such as completion rates. The provider acknowledged that previously data had been collected, but not necessarily utilised. PI are addressing this, and noted that their more effective use of data is empowering to the organisation, as it enables PI representatives to more clearly communicate PI's performance in the FE sector comparative to other providers.

PI's procedures for maintaining the security of data are comprehensive. These are outlined in Chapter 8 of the provider's documentation.

9 PUBLIC INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION

Panel Findings:

The panel is satisfied that QQI's guidelines under this dimension 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 guidelines also require that relevant programme information is made available to prospective and current learners. With regard to this dimension of QA, the panel has noted a *mandatory change* in relation to blended learning and the use of technology enabled pedagogies. At the time of the site visit, inconsistencies were noted in relation to the terminology used to communicate these (for example, e-learning, blended learning, distance learning). The panel required PI to identify a set of terms that it would use to describe its practices in this area, and identify precisely what it means by these terms. These terms would then need to be used consistently throughout the organisation's internal and external communications, including its marketing or promotional materials. When the panel reconvened in April 2020 to undertake a desk review of PI's enhancements in this area, the panel were satisfied that PI had undertaken steps to address this concern.

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

Panel Findings:

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

QQI's 2016 Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines require that QA procedures include provision for external partnerships and second providers. Collaboration with LMU and accreditation by bodies other than QQI has been clearly identified in PI's application documentation.

11 SELF-EVALUATION, MONITORING AND REVIEW

Panel Findings:

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

QQI's 2016 Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines require a provider to review, evaluate and report on the education and training services it provides and the QAs systems and procedures that underpin these. Providers will undertake on-going internal self-monitoring activities as well as broadly-focused, systemic self-evaluations carried out at specified intervals. Procedures for self-evaluation, monitoring and review are included in Chapter 3 of the provider's draft QA manual.

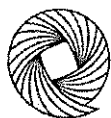
12 TOPIC-SPECIFIC QA PROCEDURES: BLENDED LEARNING

Panel Findings:

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

QQI's 2016 Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Blended Learning Programmes require delivery of blended learning to take account of the organisational context (Section 3), the programme context (Section 4) and the learner experience context (Section 5). This was not clear to the panel during the site visit, and was not explicit in the documentation submitted.

The panel noted that all QQI programmes at Portobello Institute integrate some elements of technology into either the facilitation of learning or the provision of content and learning materials. Therefore, an overarching strategy for blended learning (5.12) needed to be explicit at Portobello Institute. Within this,

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accountable key roles with clearly defined responsibilities needed to be made explicit. In addition, PI needed to take a systematic approach to training of tutors and appointment of staff specific to blended learning provision. As noted in Section 5.9, when the panel reconvened in April 2020 to undertake a desk review of PI's enhancements in this area, the panel were satisfied that PI had undertaken steps to address this concern. The panel were also of the view that PI's appointment of an e-learning development manager was a welcome addition to its application in this area. The panel views this as an area where PI can continue to develop and enhance its QA, and offers some Specific Advice in relation to this within this report.

Evaluation of draft QA Procedures - Overall panel findings

The panel makes a number of commendations to Portobello Institute as an outcome of the reengagement process.

Firstly, Portobello Institute leadership and staff are to be commended on their commitment to developing QA and to the reengagement process. The panel saw substantial evidence of the provider's progression toward building a QA culture within the organisation. This progression is aided by the provider's positive attitude toward the reengagement process.

Additionally, Portobello Institute is to be commended on fostering a positive culture of informal support and communication within the organisation. This was evident to the panel during interactions with the provider's staff and leadership during the site visit.

During the site visit, it was also evident that Portobello Institute places learners at the centre, and a commendable concern for appropriately supporting and empowering learners informs many of the practices that were outlined by provider staff to the panel.

The panel commends Portobello Institute on the willingness to learn and develop new practices that the provider's staff and representatives display. This was particularly evident in relation to teaching and learning as well as blended learning.

In relation to Portobello Institute's work to implement the panel's identified *Mandatory Changes*, the panel is of the view that the significant work undertaken by the provider in the interim period was a positive reflection on the team's orientation toward quality and continuous improvement. The panel noted for a specific commendation the development of the Institute's QA surrounding work placements.

In this report, the panel offers some further items of Specific Advice, which it advises Portobello Institute should integrate into its continuous quality improvement plan. This advice is intended to assist the Institute in areas where ongoing development is appropriate.

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Part 6 Mandatory Changes to QA Procedures and Specific Advice

Following the 21st June, 2019 site visit, the panel identified a number of mandatory changes for PI. These are listed in Section 6.1 below. When the panel reconvened on the 15th April, 2020 to evaluate the evidence submitted that PI had implemented the required changes, the panel was satisfied that these had been adequately addressed in the interim six month period. At that time, the panel issued three further items of Specific Advice for PI's consideration moving forward. These are listed in Section 6.2 below.

6.1 Mandatory Changes

The panel identified mandatory changes in relation to Portobello Institute's governance and management structure (see Section 5.1), and the documentation of QA (see Section 5.2) within the organisation. These required Portobello Institute to review the current governance and management structure, and revise how this was presented in the documentation. Specifically:

1. Move forward with appointment of an external non-executive director to the current Board of Directors to ensure appropriate levels of externality can be seen to consistently inform decision making at the institute
2. Clarify the membership and functions of various committees and roles; ensure how these are understood is clear at all levels of the organisation
3. Revise or formalise current practices, which may be overly reliant on informal relationships, to ensure that separation of academic and commercial decision making is evidenced in the formal processes of the organisation, for example the interaction between different committees

Further changes were identified in relation to learner support (see Section 5.7) and communication to learners (see Section 5.9). It was evident that a culture of supportive and informal communications with learners underpins practices within Portobello Institute. However, there was a need to address some inconsistencies in how information was presented, and insufficient provision of information to learners in some areas. Specifically:

4. Expand the learner handbook, which currently contains very little detail on policy and procedure, and needs to become a more comprehensive and informative document. The panel additionally suggests (but does not require) that programme specific learner handbooks may be considered by Portobello Institute as an option when addressing this mandatory change.



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5. Document and formalise work placement agreements, including expectations of learners and supervisors, and ensure this is provided to learners.
6. Clarify terminology used at the provider in relation to blended learning and associated practices, as this is currently inconsistent. The panel notes that this requires Portobello Institute to identify a set of terms that it will use to describe its practices in this area, and identify what it means by these terms. These need to be used consistently throughout the organisation's internal and external communications.

The panel identified three mandatory changes in relation to teaching and learning (see Section 5.5) and assessment (see Section 5.6). Specifically:

7. Establish a placement working group to facilitate the work needed in relation to documenting and formalising expectations of students and supervisors.
8. Establish a documented set of minimum expectations or guidelines for the provision of formative feedback that is communicated to all tutors and observed across all programmes.
9. Clarify adherence to the 2013 QQI QA Assessment Guidelines for Providers to ensure the fair and consistent assessment of all learners, with specific regard to provider policy on the provision of feedback to learners.

All QQI programmes at Portobello Institute integrate some elements of technology into either the facilitation of learning or the provision of content and learning materials. Therefore, an overarching strategy for blended learning (5.12) needed to be explicit at Portobello Institute, and the panel identified three mandatory changes pertaining to this. Specifically:

10. Establish accountable key roles with clearly defined responsibilities within the organisation.
11. Formulate a strategic plan for blended learning, which clearly links to the provider's overall teaching and learning strategy.
12. Establish strategies and processes for the appointment and training of tutors and staff that are appropriate and specific to blended learning provision.

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6.2 Specific Advice

The panel offers 3 items of Specific Advice, which could valuably be integrated to Portobello Institute's quality improvement plan.

1. With regard to Governance and Management, PI is advised to keep its committee structure under review. PI may benefit from ongoing review in this area to distinguish teams engaged in carrying out functional processes from committees engaged in forms of deliberation and decision-making.
2. With regard to Assessment of Learners, PI is encouraged to continue its work to ensure there is appropriate clarity surrounding its processes, and that these are explicitly mapped to and make reference to QQI's guidelines in this area.
3. With regard to Blended Learning, PI is advised to continue to develop its strategy and documentation in this area, as this will be an important consideration at future validation events. Within this PI could usefully undertake the following:
 - Clarify exactly what is considered to be 'blended learning' including synchronous and asynchronous learning opportunities.
 - Ensure there is a standardised Instructional Design methodology employed to develop content for online delivery.
 - Further develop the BL model to ensure it is presented robustly, and articulates more clearly defined expectations around:
 - Learner suitability including access to required equipment/broadband etc.
 - Live online classroom sessions, activity types, recordings, mandatory attendance etc.
 - Provision of materials through a Virtual Learning Environment.
 - Access to discussion forums/ chat groups.
 - Tutor and Peer support opportunities.
 - Assessment strategy suitable for a blended environment.
 - Ensure there is financial and infrastructural capacity in place to continue to enhance blended and distance learning models.
 - Ensure there is a policy of innovation and development to maintain models of best practice in a blended environment.
 - Ensure there are appropriate contingency plans in place in the event of disaster.

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NFQ Level(s) – min and max	Award Class(es)	Discipline areas
5 - 6	Major & Minor	Healthcare; Management and Administration; Law; Business Administration and Law; Travel, Tourism & Leisure; Childcare & Youth Services; Sports; Wholesale & Retail Sales

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 Portobello Institute.

Name:

Date:

14/5/2020

**QQI**Quality and Qualifications Ireland
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Document

Related to

No additional documentation was provided to the panel during the site visit.	
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Annexe 2: Provider staff met in the course of the Evaluation

Rebekah Lyons	Managing Director
Denise Flood	College Director
Joey Boland	RBK
Darren Devereaux	Validations and Strategic Development Manager
Catherine Green	Quality Manager
Patrick Haughigan	Digital Learning Manager
Lynda O'Neill	Head of Admissions
Dr Susan Giblin	Head of Sports and Health Department
Dr Iryna Fox	LMU Early Years Degree Programme Manager
Sarah Reardan	Early Years, Beauty and Make Up Programme Manager
Mairead Roche	Facilities Management Department Programme Manager
Anne Marie McAuley	Creative and Fashion Development and Programme Manager
Joanne Power	Business, Travel and Tourism Programme Manager

Appendix: Provider response to the Reengagement Panel Report



Date: 07/05/2020

Dear QQI and reengagement panel,

We are formally responding to the feedback of the QQI reengagement process. We are delighted with the outcome and process that took place. We have learned a lot from the process and would encourage anyone undertaking the process to take the steps outlined by QQI. The learning for our team throughout the reengagement process took place through our journey in developing the QA draft guidelines, conducting the gap analysis, panel preparations, preparing and responding to panel advice and feedback.

We felt the whole reengagement process was informative, collaborative and conducted in a time frame that was manageable alongside normal day to day operations. We thank the panel for their feedback and feel our capacity has grown as a result of this process,

With sincerest thanks,

Denise Flood

Denise Flood

College Director