

**QQI**Quality and Qualifications Ireland
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Reengagement Panel Interim Report

Assessment of Capacity and Approval of QA Procedures

Part 1 Details of provider

1.1 Applicant Provider

Registered Business/Trading Name:	Optima Training and Consulting Limited
Address:	Munster GAA Council Building, Newcastle, Castletroy, Limerick
Date of application:	29 June 2021
Date of resubmission of application:	N/A
Date of site visit (if applicable):	06 October 2021 (online meeting)
Date of reconvene meeting (if applicable)	14 December 2021
Date of recommendation to the Programmes and Awards Executive Committee:	10 February 2022

1.2 Profile of provider

Optima Training and Consulting Ltd (referred to as Optima in this report) was formed in late 2015 as the result of an amalgamation between TrainingPoint - the registered trading name of Procad Technology Ltd - and Life First Safety Ltd. In 2016, there was a further amalgamation between Optima Training and Consulting Ltd and the training division of HealthCare Direct. Optima currently offers the following programmes leading to QQI awards: Care of the Older Person, Care Skills, Safety & Health at Work (all at Level 5) and Instructing Manual Handling and Instructing People Handling (all at Level 6). Some of its programmes lead to certification from the Irish Heart Foundation (IHF) and the Pre-Hospital Emergency Care Council (PHECC). It also offers a substantial amount of self-certified programmes in areas including healthcare, IT, leadership and management, and energy management.

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Part 2 Panel Membership

Name	Role of panel member	Organisation
David Denieffe	Chair	Vice-President for Academic Affairs and Registrar, Institute of Technology Carlow
Michael Kelly	QA Expert (and report writer for reconvene)	Independent quality consultant, Wildgeese Training and Quality Solutions
Ann Dunne	QA Expert	Former Development Officer, City of Dublin Education and Training Board (CDETБ)
Trish O'Brien	Independent report writer (for original evaluation)	Director, O'BRIEN / Governance Design

Part 3 Findings of the Panel

3.1 Summary Findings

The panel was impressed with the open discussion it had with Optima and saw much of merit in its application for re-engagement with QQI. Nonetheless, at the conclusion of the site visit, the panel had concerns around some aspects of the documentation supporting its governance systems; the level of clarity in its quality assurance (QA) handbook regarding the QA responsibilities specifically of those responsible for QQI programmes; the effectiveness of the design of some of its QA procedures; and the extent to which its learner-centred approach is fully reflected in its quality assurance procedures. These were identified as proposed mandatory changes and are outlined in detail in Section 7.1 of this report. Additional items of specific advice are included in Section 7.2. However, given that these issues were discrete, and in the panel's view could be addressed quickly by the provider, the panel availed of the option to defer its overall decision for a period of six weeks and allowed Optima this time to submit evidence to the panel that the changes identified had been satisfactorily addressed.

Following submission of revised documentation by Optima the panel reconvened on 14 December 2021 to review the evidence of these changes and was satisfied that the quality assurance requirements had now been met.

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

Quality Assurance – Core Guidelines

	Tick <u>one</u> as appropriate
Approve Optima Training and Consulting Limited's draft QA procedures	X
Refuse approval of Optima Training and Consulting Limited's QA procedures pending mandatory changes set out in Section 7.1 <small>(If this recommendation is accepted by QQI, the provider may make a revised application within six months of the decision)</small>	
Refuse to approve Optima Training and Consulting Limited'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: <i>Is the applicant an established Legal Entity who has Education and/or Training as a Principal Function?</i>	Yes	Optima is a private limited company. It provided a copy of its Certificate of Incorporation with its application. Education and training is a principal function.
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	Optima is incorporated in Ireland and offers programmes in premises in Ireland.
4.1.3(a)	Criterion: <i>Are any dependencies, collaborations, obligations, parent organisations, and subsidiaries clearly specified?</i>	N/A	Optima has emerged through a series of amalgamations. It does not have a parent organisation or a subsidiary.
4.1.4(a)	Criterion: <i>Are any third-party relationships and partnerships compatible with the scope of access sought?</i>	N/A	Optima has confirmed that this criterion does not apply.



4.1.5(a)	Criterion: <i>Are the applicable regulations and legislation complied with in all jurisdictions where it operates?</i>	Yes	Optima has confirmed that it follows regulations and legislation in the jurisdiction in which it operates.
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 education and training, professional bodies and regulators.</i>	Yes	Optima has confirmed that it is in good standing in the qualifications and education and training systems in the jurisdiction in which it operates.

Findings

The panel is satisfied that this application meets the applicable criteria specified under *Legal and Compliance* requirements.

4.2 Resource, governance, and structural requirements:

	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	As things stand, the panel is satisfied that Optima has sufficient resources to support a quality assured environment for programmes leading to QQI awards.
4.2.2(a)	Criterion: <i>Does the applicant have a reasonable business case for sustainable provision?</i>	Yes	Optima has been offering training in its current form since 2015. It has proven itself capable of successfully offering a wide variety of provision and has a reasonable case for sustainable provision.
4.2.3(a)	Criterion: <i>Are fit-for-purpose governance, management and</i>	Yes	The panel is satisfied overall with the governance structures put in



	<i>decision making structures in place?</i>		place by Optima. However, the panel identified mandatory changes relating to terms of reference. The panel is satisfied that these have been addressed following resubmission of documentation by the provider.
4.2.4(a)	Criterion: <i>Are there arrangements in place for providing required information to QQI?</i>	Yes	Optima has systems in place to continue providing information to QQI.

Findings

Apart from criterion 4.2.3 (a) the panel is satisfied that this application meets the applicable criteria specified under *Resource, Governance and Structural* requirements.

Following submission of revised documentation by Optima the panel reconvened on 14 December 2021 to review the evidence of these changes and was satisfied that the requirements had now been met.

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	Optima has been providing training in its current form since 2015.
4.3.2(a)	Criterion: <i>Does the applicant have a fit-for-purpose and stable complement of education and training staff?</i>	Yes	Optima has an experienced, long-standing, and stable staff base.
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</i>	Yes	The standard conditions for validation specified in the 2012 Act include co-operation with and assistance to QQI in the performances of its



	<i>Assurance (Education and Training) Act (2012) (the Act)?</i>		functions; the establishment of procedures for the fair and consistent assessment of learners; and provisions for the protection of enrolled learners (PEL). Overall, the panel is satisfied that Optima has the capacity to comply with the standard conditions. As Optima provides programmes of no longer than 3 months, it is not required to put PEL arrangements in place.
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	Optima carries out training from its premises and in external venues that it inspects and approves in advance. The panel is satisfied that Optima has access to fit-for-purpose premises, facilities, and resources.
4.3.5(a)	Criterion: <i>Are there access, transfer and progression arrangements that meet QQI's criteria for approval in place?</i>	Yes	Optima has processes and procedures in place for the admission of its learners.
4.3.6(a)	Criterion: <i>Are structures and resources to underpin fair and consistent assessment of learners in place?</i>	Yes	Optima has assessment procedures and arrangements in place. The panel requested that these be augmented with additional information to underline its learner-centred approach to the



			delivery of its programmes and the fair and consistent assessment of learners. The panel is now satisfied that these matters have been addressed following the provider's resubmission of documentation in relation to the assessment process.
4.3.7(a)	Criterion: <i>Are arrangements for the protection of enrolled learners to meet the statutory obligations in place (where applicable)?</i>	N/A	Programmes offered by Optima are less than three months and are therefore exempt from the need to put PEL in place.

Findings

The panel is satisfied that this application fully meets the criteria 4.3.1(a), 4.3.2(a), 4.3.3(a), 4.3.4(a), 4.3.5 (a).

Criterion 4.3.6 (a) was revisited in the Mandatory Changes required following the panel's virtual site visit.

Criterion 4.3.7 (a) is not applicable. Due to its intended scope of provision Optima is not required to put PEL arrangements in place.

Following submission of revised documentation by Optima the panel reconvened on 14 December 2021 to review the evidence of these changes and was satisfied that the requirements had now been met.



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

The panel is satisfied that Optima has the capacity to provide sustainable education and training that leads to QQI awards. It is financially stable; it has a highly experienced and consistent core staff group; and it has a track record of providing programmes that lead to QQI awards to date. The Mandatory Changes and Specific Advice identified by the panel are intended to strengthen Optima's quality assurance systems.

Following submission of revised documentation by Optima the panel reconvened on 14 December 2021 to review the evidence of these changes and was satisfied that the requirements had now been met.



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Part 5 Evaluation of draft QA Procedures submitted by Optima Training and Consulting Limited

The following is the panel's findings following evaluation of Optima Training and Consulting Limited'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:

Optima has secured the separation of commercial and academic interests in its governance structure by removing two of its Directors from its QA Committee. It has also introduced externality by including a member of staff from the Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board (LCETB). The QA Committee is informed by the work of three sub-committees. It makes recommendations to senior management on decisions with commercial or financial impact.

The roles of the QA Committee and its sub-committees have been clarified through terms of reference. The panel positively noted that a learner is included in the membership of the QA Committee. However, as the QA Committee has a decision-making authority on External Authenticator (EA) Reports, learner appeals, and assessment malpractice appeals, the panel requested that terms of reference of the QA Committee state that learner representation be qualified 'as appropriate'.

The panel is satisfied that this requirement has been met within the resubmitted documentation reviewed by the panel at its reconvened meeting on 14 December 2021.

The panel noted that the remit of the Results Approval Panel (RAP) currently includes the management of complaints and considered that as the RAP normally looks at the end of the learning experience, this is not an appropriate area for the RAP to have responsibility. It also identified that the RAP's terms of reference should include the benchmarking of Optima's assessment outcomes against national outcomes for comparable programmes: data that is available from QQI. This area was revisited under Assessment of Learners (section 6).

Mandatory changes:

- That the terms of reference for the Results Approval Panel (RAP) are amended: specifically, that its current remit in managing complaints is taken out, and that the role of the RAP in reviewing and benchmarking assessment outcomes in relation to national standards is included. Following the panel's review of the resubmitted documentation at its meeting on 14 December 2021, the panel is now satisfied with the role of the RAP in relation to assessment matters, and



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that the complaints process falls outside the remit of the RAP, being subject to separate and distinct procedures within the provider's quality assurance.

- That it is noted in the QA Committee terms of reference, that there will be occasions where the learner representative will have to absent themselves from committee meetings for certain agenda items (e.g., the review of assessment outcomes).

The revised documentation submitted to the panel has dealt with this point, as noted by the panel at its reconvened meeting on 14 December 2021.

2 DOCUMENTED APPROACH TO QUALITY ASSURANCE

Panel Findings:

Optima described the methodical way in which it has approached the alignment of its quality assurance policies, procedures, and processes with QQI's statutory quality assurance guidelines. This included the utilisation of a gap analysis tool to identify where further work was required. It also conducted a SWOT analysis as part of a cycle of analysis, development, planning, execution, and review. All this material informs an action plan identifying areas to be addressed.

Additional procedures were identified by Optima as one area in which quality improvements are required, and it has been building the content of its QA handbook in preparation for re-engagement. In its review of the QA handbook, as noted also under Supports for Learners, the panel identified that the procedure that is currently addressing complaints and appeals needs to be separated to delineate the purpose, context, and function of each. The panel requested that the revised procedures would be more precise on the parameters of complaints, and the grounds for appeal, and that externality would be included in how the stages of complaints and appeals are managed to avoid any perception of partiality. It was further suggested that Optima should look at the appeals process of LCETB, which would apply to learners appealing where Optima is acting in the capacity of a contracted trainer under the ETB.

Optima needs to meet the regulations of the Pre-Hospital Emergency Care Council (PHECC) and the Irish Heart Foundation (IHF) as well as having regard to the statutory quality assurance guidelines of QQI. The panel was supportive of the comprehensive approach that it tried to take to addressing all requirements in its QA Handbook. However, the panel was not convinced that the execution had resulted in clear signposting of the policies, procedures, and processes applicable to ensuring the quality assurance of programmes leading to QQI awards. As a result, it has asked Optima to review the document and to ensure that it provides this clarity. In doing so, it should consider the merit of utilising workflow charts.

The panel also noted that a document control system is good practice and will enable Optima to keep track of changes to policies and procedures that arise through review processes. Furthermore, the panel considered that the QA handbook would benefit from proofreading prior to resubmission for approval.



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Mandatory changes:

- That the quality assurance responsibilities that are relevant to ‘faculty’ members who are responsible for the delivery of QQI programmes is clearly signposted in the QA handbook, including through workflow charts where appropriate.

The revised QA handbook submitted to the panel includes a quality assurance workflow chart. This was reviewed by the panel at their reconvened meeting on 14 December 2021 and was deemed to be satisfactory.

- That separate and distinct procedures for complaints and appeals are developed.

The revised QA handbook submitted to the panel now separates the complaints and appeals processes as distinct procedures in their own right, with greater clarity within these processes. These revised procedures were reviewed by the panel at their reconvened meeting on 14 December 2021 and were found to be satisfactory.

- That a document control system is introduced to manage versions of the QA handbook and that the document is fully proofed prior to its resubmission.

The revised documentation submitted to the panel demonstrated evidence of improvement in this area, including version controls. This is an incremental process and the panel expects the provider to maintain its progress in document controls moving ahead. This was reviewed by the panel at the reconvened meeting on 14 December 2021 and is now deemed to be satisfactory.

3 PROGRAMMES OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Panel Findings:

Optima has put in place documented processes to assist it in deciding whether to offer new programmes. These include analysis of rationale and costings. It explained to the panel that new programme development is often instigated through client requests. This is followed by market research as Optima needs to assure itself that where similar programmes are delivered by competitors in the region, it can offer something sufficiently different to attract clients and learners. The panel encouraged Optima to focus on establishing a programme development and approval strategy to proactively explore training skills gaps and identify these market opportunities. This could also provide further progression pathways for its learners.

The panel discussed with Optima the process of validation of programmes that, pending approval of its QA procedures, would apply to any new programmes that Optima wishes to deliver that lead to QQI awards. Optima informed the panel that it has been attending briefings on the difference between Common Awards System (CAS) awards and programmes leading to other awards included in the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). It explained that it is beginning to think more strategically



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about developing programmes for QQI validation leading to major awards that contain component awards.

Optima informed the panel that often applicants are in the role of health and safety representative and are bringing that background understanding to their participation in programmes. Optima receives applications from individuals for its programmes, but also works with clients who are presenting employees for training. In the former, email correspondence is usually received by Optima indicating that the individual has an interest in a programme. The individual is then contacted to further explain the programme and to gauge their interest and its suitability to their needs. If learners have been presented by an employer for training, Optima ensures that the responsibilities of being a graduate instructor are explained to them.

While recognition of prior learning (RPL) is in place for entry to a programme, exemption from any part of the programme for reasons of prior learning is not relevant as programmes are short and intensive. The panel also noted that programme access/entry requirements should be identified during the new programme development process. Access/entry requirements should also be clearly stated on the Optima Training and Consulting website and on promotional materials.

Specific advice:

- That a programme development strategy is developed by the provider, that proactively identifies market opportunities, and provides progression opportunities for learners.

4 STAFF RECRUITMENT, MANAGEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

Panel Findings:

The panel met a variety of the management and staff of Optima during the review. Optima explained that it has a core group of longstanding trainers. They deliver public programmes run in Optima's premises and on-site training. Training offered to the public is scheduled 12 months ahead of time and Optima has the security of a stable staff complement to deliver this training. There is a standard process in place for recruiting new staff. An induction process has been developed that includes a briefing on staff quality assurance responsibilities.

As noted under section 2, Documented Approach to QA, Optima has tried to develop a QA handbook that addresses responsibilities for programmes leading to QQI awards, and programmes leading to PHECC certification. It uses the word 'affiliate' for those delivering programmes leading to PHECC certification, whilst 'faculty' members are dedicated to the delivery of programmes leading to QQI awards. Optima explained to the panel that faculty members are paid by Optima, whilst affiliates are largely external trainers, operating under Optima's rules and procedures, and paying Optima a percentage of course fees. Whilst the panel supported Optima's approach to a coherent quality



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assurance handbook, it requested, under section 2 above, that Optima distinguishes a clearer definition of the QA responsibilities and roles of faculty members.

Optima provides an induction process for new faculty members/trainers and staff to keep all staff informed of QA systems. Every faculty member/trainer working with Optima is provided with a folder that includes a presentation on the programme, learning outcomes, lesson plans, and assessment marking sheets. The comprehensiveness of this folder proved particularly important when Optima had to transition to online learning in response to COVID-19. The content of the folder was updated as part of a programme review process (referenced under Section 11, Self-Evaluation, Monitoring and Review). Optima informed the panel that it assesses with trainers what their professional development requirements are; this takes into consideration what skills they have and the context in which they are training. Optima described an increasingly proactive approach to the provision of workshops and webinars in addressing trainer professional development needs. It has developed a newsletter to keep trainers updated on these opportunities.

Optima appointed an Accreditation and Quality Manager in the recent past, who has evidently made an important contribution to Optima's preparation for re-engagement. The panel emphasised to Optima that the requirements to be met under QQI's validation policies and criteria are substantial, and it advised that it should keep its resources under review to ensure that it can address these expectations in the future.

Specific advice:

- That the resourcing of quality assurance responsibilities is kept under review; particularly in the context of resource-intensive programme development processes.

5 TEACHING AND LEARNING

Panel Findings:

Optima uses a wide range of media in face-to-face programme delivery as well as instructional, group, and practical teaching and learning methodologies. Independent/self-directed learning encourages reflective practice with formative and summative feedback supporting the learners at all stages of their learning. Some programmes are delivered in its own premises and Optima also uses external venues for delivery. It has a system in place whereby the Accreditation and Quality Manager visits potential venues to confirm their suitability by applying an agreed checklist. This includes ensuring that there is adequate space for the delivery of the programme, checking facilities available, and ensuring disabled access. Optima explained to the panel that prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, almost all its delivery was classroom based. The requirement to deliver online led to its investment in an e-learning platform and



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software. Teaching staff had to learn how to engage students in an online format. There were also privacy concerns in terms of General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) that had to be managed.

6 ASSESSMENT OF LEARNERS

Panel Findings:

Optima assured the panel that it monitors assessments to ensure that they are valid in terms of achieving the relevant learning outcomes: this is considered on a continuous basis and as part of programme review processes. It is particularly mindful of ensuring that assessment is practical and relevant to how learners will use the skills acquired in the workplace. This leads to a lot of practice time being made available before assessment. Learners are provided with briefs on assignments and marking sheets. Where required, skills demonstrations are recorded as evidence of the opportunity for learners to achieve learning outcomes.

Optima explained that it is alert to issues of plagiarism and has provided guidance to learners in this respect. It is particularly aware of the possibilities of learners coming from the same organisation seeking to repeat material previously submitted by colleagues; it counters this by monitoring documented assessment submissions and balancing them with practical assessment tasks. As a further quality assurance measure, different versions of examinations are rotated and split up amongst a group of learners. Optima informed the panel that it has one director overseeing its manual handling and another its healthcare / skills programmes. One of the directors acts as Internal Verifier for both programmes.

The panel noted that the outcomes of Optima assessment, when compared with the national average gradings for comparable programmes, shows a high incidence of distinctions. Optima explained that many of its learners are practitioners working in Health Service Executive (HSE) locations. He posited that this experience could be influencing grades as students are bringing a high standard of practice into the formal learning and assessment context. Optima also confirmed that External Authenticator feedback has been an excellent evaluation mechanism. The panel acknowledged the likelihood of these circumstances positively impacting assessment outcomes. As noted under section 1 above, Governance and Management, it has requested that the Results Approval Panel (RAP) includes benchmarking of Optima's assessment outcomes against the national average grading for comparable programmes, as part of its governance remit. The development of systematic oversight of assessment outcomes and trends will provide assurances on the grade distribution of final results.

Finally, whilst the panel got a strong sense that Optima is a learner-focused organisation, it felt that its assessment procedures could be strengthened in their description of possibilities for repeat assessment, including in compassionate circumstances. This finding is included in the mandatory change made under section 7, Support for Learners.



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Revised documentation submitted to the panel was reviewed at the reconvened meeting on 14 December 2021 and compassionate circumstances are now extensively detailed in both the QA handbook and learner handbook. Therefore, the panel is now satisfied that this requirement has been met.

7 SUPPORT FOR LEARNERS

Panel Findings:

The learner induction process was explained to the panel. Instead of one induction event, Optima is currently testing the delivery of smaller induction events. This includes the use of webinars and workshops.

Learners are given a learner pack and handbook on the day they arrive. This includes details on contacts and requests information from learners on any learning difficulties. Optima was able to provide the panel with examples of how it has responded to learner needs. This can happen when they are informed of learning or other disabilities at the outset – for instance closed captioning supports were recently provided for a learner – otherwise, they are reliant on the experience of their trainers to see when learners are struggling.

Whilst the panel could see that Optima has a learner-centred focus, it considered that the learner handbook could better reflect this perspective. It has recommended that Optima review the learner handbook and ensure that it includes all the information in the QA Handbook that is relevant to learners such as repeats policy, appeals application form, compassionate consideration for extenuating circumstances, and progression routes. It also requested that Optima augments information on learner supports in its learner handbook: for example, the supports it provides for learners with disabilities and without English as a first language. The panel advised Optima to ensure that the content of its revised learner handbook processes is aligned with the information that it includes in its learner induction sessions.

As noted under section 2 above, the panel has requested that Optima separate its complaints and appeals procedures to ensure that the purpose and function of each is clearly understood by learners and by those addressing complaints or appeals lodged. Optima also emphasised its focus on improving its communication with learners. It expressed the concern that if communication is not strong and regular, it may prevent learners from providing valuable feedback on their experiences. The panel met a previous learner during the review who confirmed that he had a high-quality experience during his course at Optima. He particularly praised the high level of attention he received in a relatively small class group.

Mandatory changes:



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- That the learner-centred approach of the provider is reinforced through the provider's quality assurance procedures, specifically, that:
 - repeat assessment opportunities, for instance in compassionate circumstances, are documented
 - that supports for learners without English as a first language are documented
 - that information included in the learner handbook is confirmed as being comprehensive and aligned with the QA handbook.

Revised documentation including the process for repeat assessment in compassionate circumstances and supports for learners without English as a first language was submitted to the panel. Documentation had also been improved so that the learner handbook was better aligned with the provisions of the QA handbook. These were reviewed by the panel at its reconvened meeting on 14 December 2021 and were found to be satisfactory.

Specific advice:

- That the provider ensures that the learner handbook informs its learner induction processes.

8 INFORMATION AND DATA MANAGEMENT

Panel Findings:

Optima has reviewed its information management systems, including its learner database, to ensure that they can provide reports relevant to programme review and evaluation, in addition to the data that it is currently providing to QQI for certification purposes. It has set out in its application for re-engagement the types of qualitative and quantitative data that are referenced in its quality assurance procedures as important indicators of quality and as information contributing to decision-making.

Optima uses cloud-based software to manage its operations. Data is stored on a shared drive and backed up daily. Access to data is restricted to relevant administration and management staff. Optima provided assurances to the panel that it is fully compliant with the Data Protection Act 2018, the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) 2016, and related legislation.

Optima also informed the panel that it is exploring a new learner platform through which learners will have access to all procedures and can submit their work. It is currently investigating the best software for its needs.



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9 PUBLIC INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION

Panel Findings:

Optima has a procedure in place for quality assuring the programme information it makes available on its website. It confirms in its communication to learners and employers where its programmes lead to QQI awards or to certification by PHECC or the IHF.

Optima has committed to publishing its QA procedures on its website, once approved, and to publishing the outcomes of periodic quality reviews.

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

Panel Findings:

Optima confirmed that it receives feedback from the employers that it works with and that this influences its approach to its business and its planning for future programme provision. It also keeps information received from its External Authenticator at the centre of its review of the quality of its provision.

The panel acknowledged that Optima is influenced by external perspectives, but in reviewing its QA handbook, it considered that Optima's management and governance of the effectiveness of its quality assurance policies and procedures could be informed by more externality. In the context of where Optima wants to go next, with new programme provision as part of a programme development strategy, the panel advised Optima that it should consider further how external views can inform its strategy, its planning, and its decisions on programme development and review. It was also noted that the involvement of additional external supports may be one means of increasing resources available to Optima as it progresses beyond re-engagement.

Specific advice:

- That the provider ensures that it is continuously benefitting from external perspectives on the quality of its strategy and planning, programme development and provision, and review processes, and that it consistently feeds the outputs of these opinions into its management and governance systems



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11 SELF-EVALUATION, MONITORING AND REVIEW

Panel Findings:

Optima has policies and procedures for self-evaluation, monitoring and review included in its QA Handbook. A summary table of evaluation methods that are used to inform practice and ensure continuous improvement is also included. The outcomes of these processes are incorporated into an Improvement Log of agreed actions.

Optima articulated the emphasis it places on feedback from learners in particular. Feedback is sought through online survey formats that are circulated to students after sessions. It is planned that the website will include a further feedback opportunity when it is redeveloped. Lower evaluations received from students are focused upon as a means of improving practice.

At a programme level, Optima informed the panel that it undertook a review of its programmes leading to QQI awards in the last month and, as part of that process, it reviewed learning outcomes, lesson plans and assessment briefs. As noted in section 10, Other Parties Involved in Education and Training, the panel has encouraged Optima to ensure that there is sufficient externality informing these and other review processes.



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Evaluation of draft QA Procedures - Overall panel findings

The panel was impressed with the open discussion it had with Optima and saw much of merit in its application for re-engagement with QQI. Nonetheless, at the conclusion of the site visit, the panel had concerns around some aspects of the documentation supporting its governance systems; the level of clarity in its QA handbook regarding the QA responsibilities specifically of those responsible for QQI programmes; the effectiveness of the design of some of its QA procedures; and the extent to which its learner-centred approach is fully reflected in those quality assurance procedures. These were identified as proposed mandatory changes and are outlined in detail in Section 7.1 of this report. Additional items of specific advice are included in Section 7.2. However, given that these issues were discrete, and in the panel's view could be addressed quickly by the provider, the panel availed of the option to defer its overall decision for a period of six weeks and allowed Optima this time to submit evidence to the panel that the changes identified had been satisfactorily addressed.

The panel reconvened on 14 December 2021 to consider the resubmitted documentation which addressed these mandatory changes. The panel concluded that it was satisfied that the revised quality assurance arrangements are fit-for-purpose and so the panel can recommend approval by the Programme & Awards Executive Committee (PAEC).



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Part 6 Conditions of QA Approval

6.1 Conditions of QA Approval

N/A

Part 7 Mandatory Changes to QA Procedures and Specific Advice

The following proposed mandatory changes were identified at the conclusion of the site visit on 06 October 2021 by the panel. The panel availed of the option to defer its decision to allow Optima Training and Consulting Limited an opportunity to address these issues within a six-week period.

The provider subsequently submitted revised documentation to QQI in respect of these changes. The panel reconvened on 14 December 2021 to consider this revised documentation and the panel is now satisfied that the provider has addressed the proposed mandatory changes referred to below.

7.1 Mandatory Changes

- That the terms of reference for the Results Approval Panel (RAP) are amended: specifically, that its current remit in managing complaints is taken out, and that the role of the RAP in reviewing and benchmarking assessment outcomes in relation to national standards is included. The terms of reference for the RAP have been amended in the revised documentation submitted to QQI, removing the complaints procedure from the scope of the RAP and adding the requirement to benchmark assessment outcomes against national standards. The panel reviewed these changes at its reconvened meeting on 14 December 2021 and is now satisfied that these requirements have been met.
- That it is noted in the QA Committee terms of reference, that there will be occasions where the learner representative will have to absent themselves from committee meetings for certain agenda items (e.g., the review of assessment outcomes). This matter was addressed by the provider in its revised documentation which was reviewed by the panel at its reconvened meeting on 14 December 2021 and found to be satisfactory, so this requirement has now been met.
- That the quality assurance responsibilities that are relevant to ‘faculty’ members who are responsible for the delivery of QQI programmes is clearly signposted in the QA Handbook, including through workflow charts where appropriate. The revised documentation submitted by the provider clarifies ‘faculty’ members’ quality assurance responsibilities, including workflow



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charts. This was reviewed by the panel at its reconvened meeting on 14 December 2021 and deemed to be satisfactory, so this requirement has now been met.

- That separate and distinct procedures for complaints and appeals are developed. The revised documentation submitted by the provider has separated complaints and appeals into two distinct procedures within the QA Handbook. These changes were reviewed by the panel at its reconvened meeting on 14 December 2021 and found to be satisfactory, so this requirement has now been met
- That a document control system is introduced to manage versions of the QA handbook and that the document is fully proofed prior to its resubmission. The revised documentation includes version controls of the QA Handbook and Learner Handbook and evidence of better proof-reading, spelling corrections, etc. These changes were reviewed by the panel at its reconvened meeting on 14 December 2021 and the panel was of the view that this requirement has been met. The panel noted that document control is an incremental process and would encourage the provider in further developing its quality assurance in this important area.
- That the learner-centred approach of the provider is reinforced through the provider's quality assurance procedures, specifically, that:
 - repeat assessment opportunities, for instance in compassionate circumstances, are documented
 - that supports for learners without English as a first language are documented
 - that information included in the learner handbook is confirmed as being comprehensive and aligned with the QA handbook.

Additional learner information and supports were set out in the resubmitted documentation provided to the panel. The panel reviewed this new documentation at its meeting on 14 December 2021, noting that content in the Learner Handbook is now aligned with the QA Handbook, details of repeat assessment opportunities (including extenuating circumstances) are included within these documents, together with information on supports for learners for whom English is a second language. Based on this review, the panel was of the view that this requirement has now been met.

7.2 Specific Advice

The panel also offered the following specific advice:

- That a programme development strategy is developed by the provider, that proactively identifies market opportunities, and provides progression opportunities for learners



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- That the resourcing of quality assurance responsibilities is kept under review; particularly in the context of resource-intensive programme development processes
- That the provider ensures that it is continuously benefitting from external perspectives on the quality of its strategy and planning, programme development and provision, and review processes, and that it consistently feeds the outputs of these opinions into its management and governance systems
- That the provider ensures that the learner handbook informs its learner induction processes.

Part 8 Proposed Approved Scope of Provision for this provider

NFQ Level(s) – min and max	Award Class(es)	Discipline areas
Level 5 - Level 6	Minor and Special Purpose	Healthcare, Health and Safety
Face to face, part time delivery only		

Part 9 Approval by Chair of the Panel

This report of the panel is approved and submitted to QQI for its decision on the approval of the draft Quality Assurance Procedures of Optima Training and Consulting Limited.

Name:

DAVID DENIEFFE

Date:

12/1/2022

Appendix: Provider response to the Reengagement Panel Report



Optima Training & Consulting Ltd,
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Ireland

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Marie Mattimoe
Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI)
26-27 Denzille Lane
Dublin 2
D02 P266
12th January 2022

Dear Marie,

Re: Provider Response to Reengagement Panel Report

Thank you for the re-engagement panel report.

We are very pleased that the panel have recommended the approval of our Quality Assurance Policies and Procedures at the next PAEC Committee Meeting.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank our Reengagement Panel for their time, expertise, and advice and to QQI for their support throughout this process.

We have reviewed the mandatory changes in section 7.1 identified by our Panel and have addressed these. We have also reviewed the additional specific advice in section 7.2 and have added them to our quality improvement plan and commenced actions to follow up on them.

If you have any questions or need any further clarifications, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A Broderick', written over a light blue horizontal line.

Áine Broderick

Accreditation & Quality Manager

a.broderick@optimatraining.ie

061 514 744