



**QQI**

Quality and Qualifications Ireland  
Dearbhú Cáilíochta agus Cáilíochtaí Éireann

## **Provider Access to Initial Validation of Programmes leading to QQI Awards**

### **Report of the Quality and Capacity Evaluation Panel**

#### **Stage 1**

#### **Assessment of Capacity and Approval of QA Procedures**

### **Part 1 Details of applicant provider and its proposed education and training provision**

#### **1.1 Applicant Provider**

Registered Business/Trading Name:	Steer Training Academy
Address:	Santry Business Park, Unit D2, Block D, Swords Road, Dublin, D09 T3V5
Date of Application:	6 February 2020
Date of resubmission of application:	26 March 2021
Date of evaluation:	12 June 2020
Date of site visit (if applicable):	N/a
Date of reconvene meeting (if applicable):	19 April 2021
Date of recommendation to the Approvals and Reviews Committee:	27 August 2020 and 20 May 2021



## 1.2 Profile of applicant provider

Steer Training Academy (referred to as Steer Training within this report) is one of several organisations established under Tarasis Enterprises, which is based in Armagh. Tarasis Enterprises describes its focus as being on holistic solutions to social issues (Application Form, p.3). It has developed companies involved in care and housing solutions, renewables, and construction.

Steer Training was formed as a company in 2017. It is a provider of specialised training solutions to individuals and employers in the Health and Social Care sector. It offers online courses from entry to leadership levels, from centres in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. These courses are accredited by City and Guilds. Since 2017 it reports to having typically certified 50 learners per year for (UK) Levels 2 and 3 Diplomas. It also offers induction and refresher training to approximately 800 learners per year (Application Form, p. 4).

Steer Training is financially supported by Homecare Independent Living (HCIL), which is the longest standing of the Tarasis Enterprises companies, having been established 25 years ago. HCIL is a domiciliary care, support services and housing business, which operates across Ireland. It provides an important market for the courses offered by Steer Training, and, as a result, has also provided the work placement location for Steer Training learners, to date.

## 1.3 Proposed education and training provision

NFQ Level	Award Class	QQI Award / Proposed Programme Title
5	Minor	Care Skills (5N2770)
5	Minor	Care of the Older Person (5N2706)
5	Major	Healthcare Support (5M4339)

Steer Training proposes to offer these courses on a full-time basis using a blended learning approach.



## Part 2 The Quality and Capacity Panel Membership

Name	Role of panel member	Organisation
Mr Jack O’Herlihy	Chairperson	Formerly Head of Development, Letterkenny Institute of Technology
Mr Pat Flynn	Subject Matter Expert	Academic Standards Quality Officer, NCU Ltd
Mr Alan Hogan	Quality Assurance Expert	Quality Assurance Officer, Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board
Dr Trish O’Brien	Independent Report Writer	O’BRIEN / Governance Design

Ms Marie Cotter, QQI, attended the evaluation meeting as an observer.

Dr Deirdre Stritch and Ms Marie Cotter, QQI, attended the reconvened evaluation meeting as observers.

## Part 3 Findings of the Panel

### 3.1 Summary Findings

Having met twice with representatives of Steer Training, and reviewed its original and resubmitted documentation, the Panel is satisfied that it is a dedicated, professional, and committed provider of courses in health and social care. The Chairperson also commended Steer Training for the open way it engaged with the Quality and Capacity Panel, during the original and reconvened event.

Courses currently offered by Steer Training lead to awards of City and Guilds and it is subject to the associated quality assurance processes and practices. These experiences heavily influenced the original Quality Assurance System document submitted to the Quality and Capacity Panel for review and approval. Steer Training subsequently demonstrated to the satisfaction of the Panel that it has significantly progressed its quality assurance documentation to reflect the transition that it wishes to make to providing programmes that lead to QQI awards. As a result, the Panel wishes to make a positive recommendation to the Approvals and Review Committee that it approve Steer Training’s QA Manual, subject to two accompanying conditions identified in section 6.1.



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### 3.2 Recommendation of the panel to Approvals and Review Committee of QQI

	Tick <u>one</u> as appropriate
<b>Approve</b> Steer Training's draft QA procedures	X
<b>Refuse approval</b> of [the provider's – insert name] draft QA procedures <b>pending mandatory changes</b> 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)	
<b>Refuse to approve</b> [the provider's – insert name] draft QA procedures	



## Part 4 Evaluation of the capacity of the applicant to provide quality education and training to learners

### 4.1 Legal and compliance requirements:

	<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Yes/No/Partially</b>	<b>Comments</b>
4.1.1(a)	<b>Criterion:</b> <i>Is the applicant an established Legal Entity who has Education and/or Training as a Principal Function?</i>	Yes	Steer Training provided a copy of its Certificate of Incorporation. Education and training is its principal function.
4.1.2(a)	<b>Criterion:</b> <i>Is the legal entity established in the European Union and does it have a substantial presence in Ireland?</i>	Yes	Steer Training is incorporated in Ireland. It offers courses from centres in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.
4.1.3(a)	<b>Criterion:</b> <i>Are any dependencies, collaborations, obligations, parent organisations, and subsidiaries clearly specified?</i>	Yes	The parent company of Steer Training is Tarasis Enterprises, which is based in Armagh. Tarasis Enterprises describes its focus as being on holistic solutions to social issues.
4.1.4(a)	<b>Criterion:</b> <i>Are any third-party relationships and partnerships compatible with the scope of access sought?</i>	N/A	
4.1.5(a)	<b>Criterion:</b> <i>Are the applicable regulations and legislation complied with in all jurisdictions where it operates?</i>	Yes	Steer Training has confirmed that it follows regulations and legislation in the jurisdictions in which it operates.
4.1.6(a)	<b>Criterion:</b> <i>Is the applicant in good standing in the qualifications systems and education and training systems in any countries</i>	Yes	Steer Training has confirmed that it is in good standing in the qualifications systems and education and training systems in the jurisdictions in which it operates.



	<i>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>		
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### Findings

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

#### 4.2 Resource, governance, and structural requirements:

	<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Yes/No/Partially</b>	<b>Comments</b>
4.2.1(a)	<b>Criterion:</b> <i>Does the applicant have a sufficient resource base and is it stable and in good financial standing?</i>	Yes	As things stand, Steer Training appears to have sufficient resources to run its business. It benefits from the financial backing of HCIL and statements are provided in that regard. The adequacy of resources in the context of delivering a proposed QQI programme will need to be confirmed at Stage 2, when Steer Training is applying for validation of its programmes.
4.2.2(a)	<b>Criterion:</b> <i>Does the applicant have a reasonable business case for sustainable provision?</i>	Yes	It is initially anticipated that HCIL will provide a market for the courses offered by Steer Training. It is intended that this market will be expanded through subsequent marketing by its in-house team.



4.2.3(a)	<b>Criterion:</b> <i>Are fit-for-purpose governance, management and decision making structures in place?</i>	Yes	Steer Training has substantially reviewed its governance arrangements in accordance with the Mandatory Change that was required by the Panel after its first evaluation meeting. The Panel is now satisfied that the re-configured system of governance meets this criterion.
4.2.4(a)	<b>Criterion:</b> <i>Are there arrangements in place for providing required information to QQI?</i>	Yes	Steer Training operates a Learner Management System (LMS) capable of providing information to QQI.

## Findings

The Panel is now satisfied that this application meets the applicable criteria specified under *Resource, Governance and Structural* requirements.

### 4.3 Programme development and provision requirements:

	<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Yes/No/Partially</b>	<b>Comments</b>
4.3.1(a)	<b>Criterion:</b> <i>Does the applicant have experience and a track record in providing education and training programmes?</i>	Yes	Steer Training currently provides courses that lead to City and Guilds awards.
4.3.2(a)	<b>Criterion:</b> <i>Does the applicant have a fit-for-purpose and stable complement of education and training staff?</i>	Yes	As things stand, Steer Training appears to have sufficient education and training staff operating on a full and part-time basis. The adequacy of these resources in the context of the delivery of programmes leading to QQI awards will need to be examined further at Stage 2, when Steer Training is applying for validation of its programmes.
4.3.3(a)	<b>Criterion:</b> <i>Does the applicant have the capacity to comply with the standard conditions for validation specified in</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 functions; the



	<i>Section 45(3) of the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act (2012) (the Act)?</i>		establishment of procedures for the fair and consistent assessment of learners; and provisions for the protection of enrolled learners. The Panel is satisfied that Steer Training has the capacity to comply with these standard conditions.
4.3.4(a)	<b>Criterion:</b> <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	Steer Training intends delivering its proposed programmes through a blended learning approach. It has a dedicated computer-centre in Dublin. It also outlined how it secures additional IT facilities for access by learners without these resources.
4.3.5(a)	<b>Criterion:</b> <i>Are there access, transfer and progression arrangements that meet QQI's criteria for approval in place?</i>	Yes	Steer Training's access, transfer and progression procedures and arrangements have been revised to address QQI requirements. The Panel has included the continued development of these, specifically regarding arrangements for the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), as a condition accompanying its positive recommendation.
4.3.6(a)	<b>Criterion:</b> <i>Are structures and resources to underpin fair and consistent assessment of learners in place?</i>	Yes	Steer Training's assessment procedures and arrangements have been revised to address QQI requirements. The Panel has included the continued development of these, specifically regarding the more explicit reflection of current assessment standardisation practices, as a condition accompanying its positive recommendation to QQI.
4.3.7(a)	<b>Criterion:</b> <i>Are arrangements for the protection of enrolled learners to meet the statutory obligations in place (where applicable)?</i>	No	In its application, Steer Training confirms that it will meet protection for enrolled learner requirements, when needed, by securing appropriate insurance.





## Findings

The Panel is now satisfied that this application meets the *Programme Development and Provision requirements*, apart from criterion 4.3.7 (a). Steer Training has confirmed that it will secure insurance to satisfy its protection for enrolled learner (PEL) requirements when it is appropriate to do so. The Quality and Capacity Panel has therefore not made the satisfaction of PEL a condition of its positive recommendation to the Approvals and Review Committee of QQI.

### **4.4 Evaluation of capacity to provide the proposed education and training provision - Overall finding:**

The Panel is satisfied that Steer Training has the capacity to provide sustainable education and training that leads to QQI awards. It appears to be financially stable; it has an experienced core staff group; it has a track record of providing programmes that lead to City and Guilds awards; and it has developed a quality assurance system to support that provision. Following the Panel's specific advice and mandatory changes, Steer Training has reviewed its quality assurance system and had regard to the Core, Sector, and Topic-Specific QA Guidelines that apply to the programmes it wishes to deliver and lead to QQI awards. In its discussion with Steer Training during its reconvened meeting, the Panel and Steer Training recognised the progress made by the provider since its first evaluation meeting. It was also recognised that quality assurance, its documentation, and its implementation, entails ongoing learning, review, and improvement. The Quality and Capacity Panel has therefore accompanied its positive recommendation to the Approvals and Review Committee, with two conditions that reflect this ongoing process of development.



## Part 5 Evaluation of draft QA Procedures submitted by Steer Training Academy

*The following is the panel's findings following evaluation of Steer Training Academy's quality assurance procedures against QQI's Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines (April 2016) and Topic Specific QA Guidelines on Blended Learning. Sections 1-11 of the report follows the structure and referencing of the Core QA Guidelines.*

### 1 GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT OF QUALITY

#### **Original Panel Findings:**

To support the separation of governance duties, Steer Training's Management Board concerns itself with corporate issues (including risk) and its Training Committee puts focus on education and training matters. Specifically, the Training Committee was described as *responsible for the development, oversight, coordination and review of training policies and procedures* (Quality Assurance System, p. 8). In terms of management, the Centre Manager is largely responsible for the operational side of the organisation, rather than being an education specialist. There is a Training Manager and a Trainer as full-time individuals with extensive experience of training and a background in health and social care. They are supported by a Training Consultant who plays a significant role in the organisation. There were several points in discussion with the Panel where the representatives of Steer Training alluded to a collaborative approach to dealing with different processes, in which the group of core staff share quality assurance responsibilities. The Panel considered that the exercise of joint responsibility for the quality of its provision is an extension of the positive and collegial way Steer Training operates. It also felt, however, that there was not an evident role profile within the organisation that signalled overall responsibility for quality. Steer Training noted that in the context of City and Guilds it has a QA Co-ordinator role and suggested that something similar might be required for QQI. The Panel was clear that it did not wish to be prescriptive, but that responsibilities for quality assurance need to be evident.

This lack of clear definition and responsibility extended to Steer Training's governance structure. QQI's statutory core, and sector-specific, guidelines for the private sector emphasise the importance of separation of functions within the governance system, particularly between matters of academic quality assurance and commercial decision-making. Despite the described separation of the roles of the Management Board and the Training Committee, the Panel felt that the documentation submitted by Steer Training left them without a roadmap for how these units of governance interacted with each other and how they would work with other parts of the governance structure that were proposed, but not yet operational.



The Panel concluded that further elaboration and clarity was required regarding the formal separation of duties and the hierarchy of decision-making within the governance system and between governance and management roles. This would assist in demonstrating that Steer Training had sufficient regard to QQI's guidelines for governance and management and that it could effectively support the management and oversight of programmes leading to QQI awards.

As Steer Training is a small organisation with a limited number of people who can populate its governance structure, the Panel suggested that the organisation may wish to consider bringing at least one external member onto its Management Board; potentially someone with experience of the sector who could offer an objective and informed perspective to proceedings.

**Mandatory change:**

- Revisit the proposed governance and management structure for Steer Training and ensure that responsibility, authority, and decision-making for quality assurance is confirmed, and it is clear how any potential tensions arising between academic and commercial considerations will be resolved.

**Specific advice:**

- Consider augmenting the Management Board with one or more external members who are experienced in the sector.

***Reconvened Panel Findings:***

During the reconvened evaluation meeting, representatives of Steer Training highlighted how the intervening review of its governance system had presented a substantial learning opportunity: particularly in terms of QQI requirements on the appropriate separation of functions. The Panel was impressed with the extent to which the approach of Steer Training to the management and governance of its quality assurance had progressed since its first meeting, particularly regarding the further documentation of individual roles and responsibilities, the separation of responsibilities in the governance structure, and the hierarchy of decision-making. The Panel could identify connections within the governance system and where overarching responsibilities for quality assurance reside within the organisation. Steer Training has also taken the initiative to identify and engage an individual with substantial experience of QQI's requirements. This person has now been appointed as External Training Committee Chairperson.

The governance system developed by Steer Training won't become fully operational until it is providing



programmes leading to QQI awards, but the Panel is confident that Steer Training now has the infrastructure in place to build upon and to satisfy QQI's requirements in this regard.

## 2 DOCUMENTED APPROACH TO QUALITY ASSURANCE

### ***Original Panel Findings:***

The Panel discussed with Steer Training the process of self-assessment that it undertook to identify the gaps in its QA policies and procedures, and to decide the content of its Quality Assurance System. Steer Training felt that in conducting the gap analysis it had identified a lot of relevant strengths in its current systems because of the strong relationship it has developed with City and Guilds. When asked about the key differences and additional areas to be addressed in its current systems to support its development of programmes for QQI validation, Steer Training confirmed that its main task over the coming period was to build its knowledge about QQI requirements. One strategy it identified for doing so was to engage an expert in QQI quality assurance, who could assist it in verifying the outcomes of its self-assessment of its quality assurance system.

The Panel emphasised the importance of building Steer Training's knowledge of QQI's policies, criteria, and guidelines and of reflecting in its Quality Assurance System the implications of these documents and the changes and additions they represent across all its current practices. The Panel considered that the documented Quality Assurance System of Steer Training, assuming that it would be a comprehensive document that would integrate requirements for City and Guilds and QQI, should indicate where differences apply in satisfying the respective quality assurance regulations. The Panel also urged Steer Training to ensure that its Quality Assurance System is designed to meet its own business needs as well as the external regulatory requirements of its awarding bodies.

### **Mandatory changes:**

- Review and revise the documented Quality Assurance System to reflect the quality assurance requirements for a provider offering programmes leading to QQI awards. In doing so, connect the content of the Quality Assurance System with specific reference to the requirements of QQI documentation, including to the relevant Core, Sector-Specific and Topic-Specific quality assurance guidelines; to QQI validation policies and criteria; and to QQI assessment conventions.

### ***Reconvened Panel Findings:***

The Panel commended Steer Training for the progress it has made in developing its quality assurance documentation in the period since its original evaluation meeting. It was also clear to the Panel in its discussion with Steer Training representatives that substantial effort has been made to meet QQI's



requirements. In doing so, and as noted above, Steer Training secured the support of external expertise in addressing QQI's core, sector-specific, and topic-specific guidelines.

Steer Training and the Panel recognise that the development of Steer Training's quality assurance documentation will be an ongoing process of review and improvement. The Panel has identified some specific areas in which more detail would improve its quality assurance procedures. The Panel has referenced these throughout this report and requires that Steer Training develops this documentation over time, as one of the conditions accompanying its positive recommendation to the Approvals and Review Committee (section 6.1).

### **3 PROGRAMMES OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING**

#### ***Original Panel Findings:***

Steer Training offers blended learning programmes in which learners undertake online learning that is combined with classroom work and work placement. Steer Training considers that this combination suits the practical nature of its programmes, which are currently awarded by City and Guilds, and offers a flexible learning approach.

The market for its proposed programmes for validation by QQI are those wishing to enter the health and social care sector and those already working in the sector. Learners could first complete Minor Awards and then, as part of their career development, progress to the Major Award. In the first year, Steer Training anticipates having approximately 30 enrolled learners derived from its connection with HCIL. It is also undertaking a marketing strategy to broaden its reach to further care facilities in Ireland. It has access to an internal marketing team to advance that strategy and to focus on its ambitions to grow.

The Panel discussed with Steer Training its perception of the differences between offering programmes leading to City and Guilds awards and having to develop programmes for validation by QQI. Steer Training pointed out that whilst learning outcomes are provided by City and Guilds, it is responsible for developing a programme to meet those outcomes, including by developing curriculum, providing reading lists, developing online materials, and formulating assessments. It believed that some of this material could be adapted and utilised as part of its programme development for QQI validation. Whilst acknowledging the experience of Steer Training and the suitability of its current quality assurance mechanisms to its City and Guilds provision, the Panel emphasised the need for Steer Training to document a system of programme development that has regard to the requirements set out in the Core, Sector-Specific and Topic-Specific guidelines of QQI, and that recognises the role and requirements of



the QQI validation process.

Access, transfer, and progression is a further dimension of QQI's QA guidelines for programmes of education and training. Steer Training currently accommodates some recognition of prior experiential and accredited learning. The Panel suggested that if Steer Training wished to present learners for certification based on RPL it would need to develop detailed processes for doing so. The Panel also identified that whilst the admission process for applicants is managed well by Steer Training, and it could see that the organisation spends time engaging with and advising applicants prior to their enrolment, it was another area in which a more systematic approach could be secured, which identifies individual responsibilities.

The Panel's requirement for Steer Training to address the different and additional requirements of QQI's quality assurance requirements for Programmes of Education and Training, was incorporated into the overarching Mandatory Change identified under part 2, Documented Approach to Quality Assurance.

***Reconvened Panel Findings:***

As in other areas, the Panel was impressed with the development of Steer Training's documentation and understanding of QQI's requirements with regards to programme development. Connecting this with its governance systems, Steer Training was able to articulate for the Panel how it has incorporated programme development and approval processes into its revised documentation, and how and when commercial and academic issues relating to programmes will be considered.

In discussion around RPL, the Panel and Steer Training considered that the arrangements for the recognition of prior learning, which Steer Training could describe, need to be elaborated in its quality assurance documentation; particularly as expectations regarding the accommodation of RPL are increasing amongst prospective learners. The need for this elaboration is reflected in the condition identified by the Panel in section 6.1.

## **4 STAFF RECRUITMENT, MANAGEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT**

***Original Panel Findings:***

The Management Board of Steer Training is responsible for assessing and approving resources to ensure the effectiveness and sustainability of the organisation. The Managing Director of Tarasis confirmed that resources are continuously reviewed in support of delivering quality provision to learners. It was



explained that if additional staff are recruited it will be based on an identified gap and on qualities required, which will be captured in individual job descriptions.

The Panel was informed that Steer Training has 2 full-time trainers and assessors and 2 other staff members who are candidates currently pursuing the Training, Assessment and Quality Assurance (TAQA) award of City and Guilds. The organisation also works with several 'banking' staff, who are essentially individuals contracted to provide education and training supports for Steer Training, as required. The virtual learning capacity of the organisation is increased through its relationship with Learning Pool as the provider of its Learning Management System (LMS).

The Panel encouraged Steer Training to consider how it could extend professional development supports that would increase staff capacity in the context of the development and delivery of programmes leading to QQI awards. For example, staff may benefit from support in writing learning outcomes and assessment criteria.

Specific advice:

- Consider how professional development supports could be extended to build the capacity of staff to develop and deliver programmes leading to QQI awards.

### ***Reconvened Panel Findings:***

The Panel noted Steer Training's resubmitted *Staff Recruitment, Management and Development* quality assurance process and its commitment to ongoing monitoring of the continuous supports it provides to its staff. It also noted the opportunity identified by Steer Training to share the learning now available to it through the external consultant it has secured.

## **5 TEACHING AND LEARNING**

### ***Original Panel Findings:***

Steer Training emphasised the careful consideration that it has given to which aspects of its programmes are suited to online delivery, as part of its overall blended learning approach to teaching and learning. In building up the online aspects of its programme, it spoke to the Panel about its focus on ensuring its online delivery, through its Learning Management System (LMS), is engaging for learners, and that it has employed games and other tools to make the experience both enjoyable and effective. The use of its



LMS also assists Steer Training in monitoring its learners, as it can see how long they are on the system, attempts made at assessments etc.

Steer Training informed the Panel that it dedicates time on a weekly basis to the review and further development of its teaching and learning materials. It uses this time to consider improvements required to its delivery, whether online or in-person. These changes would be influenced by, for instance, staff and learner feedback, and assessment outcomes; in addition to changes in the health and social care environment that may need to be incorporated into its programmes.

In terms of teaching and learning in a professional setting, Steer Training explained that it works with managers who are contributing to the quality assurance of the practical side of its programmes. It has made connections for managers on how standards link to Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) minimum requirements and has explained Health Service Executive (HSE) expectations that need to be considered when managers are observing practice. Learners who are new to the profession are placed in a setting that can provide them with experience of an area they have a particular interest in pursuing within the sector. In this context, these learners shadow other experienced learners who help to make sure their practice is up to scrutiny before assessment takes place. Steer Training feels that this supported practical experience marries well for learners when combined and reinforced with classroom and online learning.

As with other providers, Steer Training has had to adapt to the circumstances of COVID-19. It has turned its programmes into fully online programmes with the class element being delivered via Microsoft Teams and Zoom. It has also used Zoom to support work placement activities, where appropriate, and has uploaded recorded interviews to learners' individual e-portfolios.

The Panel was impressed with the account provided by Steer Training of its approach to delivering blended learning programmes that incorporate work placement. To do justice to its work in this area, and to meet QQI's quality assurance expectations, the Panel considered that the quality of its approach to teaching and learning could be much better reflected in its revised quality assurance documentation.

***Reconvened Panel Findings:***

The Panel considers that Steer Training has made substantial progress in reflecting its approach to teaching and learning in its quality assurance documentation. The Panel continues to recognise the value of Steer Training's approach to teaching and learning, and it encourages Steer Training to continue to reflect on and share this good practice through its quality assurance documentation.



**6 ASSESSMENT OF LEARNERS*****Original Panel Findings:***

Steer Training's assessment of learners is supported by its LMS as it allows it to monitor the assessments taken by learners on a formative basis and to make individual interventions, or to make broader changes to materials, based on that information.

As noted under Teaching and Learning, the programmes offered by Steer Training in health and social care are practical in nature and are supported by placements within the sector. This requires a manager assessor in addition to a training assessor, who provides observations and confirms the practical competence of learners. Manager assessor reports inform the training assessor, who makes the final decision on the assessment outcome. Physical skills demonstrations are also recorded for external examination / authentication, where appropriate. Internal quality assurance assessors are then used to sample assessment outcomes.

In terms of the differences identified in the gap analysis between Steer Training's quality assurance system under City and Guilds and the requirements of QQI, Steer Training identified the grading bands used within the QQI FET system and the need to adjust its assessment criteria accordingly. It was noted by the Panel that the role of IQA (internal quality assessor) as used by Steer Training for City and Guilds and the External Authenticator role in FET under QQI are also quite different, including in terms of the scope and purpose of the roles. The Panel requested that these and other identified differences and additional requirements under QQI quality assurance for the assessment of learners, be reflected in its Quality Assurance System when meeting the mandatory change identified under section 2 above.

***Reconvened Panel Findings:***

The Panel is satisfied that Steer Training's documentation now much better reflects the assessment processes and terminology associated with programmes leading to QQI awards. The Panel did, however, identify two areas that it would like Steer Training to consider further. The first relates to terminology and is the subject of a specific advice. Steer Training is using the term 'internal verifier' in different contexts (Internal Verifier, Lead Investigating Internal Verifier, Quality Internal Verifier), which may create confusion internally and/or externally. The Panel suggests that Steer Training may wish to demarcate these roles through more distinct language.

In addition, the Panel was satisfied in its discussion with Steer Training, that it has evolved processes for ensuring that there is a consistent and coordinated approach to the selection and review of assessment methods, as part of a strategic approach to assessment. This is another area in which the Panel wishes



to see Steer Training further develop its quality assurance documentation. It has therefore identified this in the condition that accompanies the positive recommendation made to the Approvals and Review Committee (section 6.1).

**Specific advice:**

- That Steer Training reviews the different contexts in which it is using the language ‘internal verifier’ and considers whether more distinct terms are required for these roles.

**7 SUPPORT FOR LEARNERS*****Original Panel Findings:***

The Management Board of Steer Training has overall responsibility for ensuring that adequate supports for learners are in place as part of its resource planning. The Training Committee and the Training Manager also have responsibilities in this area.

As a provider of blended learning programmes, Steer Training is conscious of the varying degrees of comfort amongst its learner cohort with online teaching and learning tools and spends time working to increase their capacity in this area. An LMS is used that supports the teaching and learning experience and time is spent ensuring that learners are familiar with this resource. In terms of accessibility, the LMS can be used across all platforms and devices. As part of its support for learners, Steer Training also hires computer suites to further increase accessibility to its services.

Training on the LMS forms part of a detailed induction that was described to the Panel, and includes information on, for instance, complaints and appeals policies and procedures, confidentiality, and GDPR. This information is then included in the e-portfolio for each learner. Induction is currently being delivered via Zoom.

In a more general sense, Steer Training described a learner-centred environment in which focus is placed on building the confidence of learners who may not have engaged in formal education and training in some time. Steer Training also considered that the background of its staff in health and social care provides a naturally supportive environment for learners, as staff can relate to their learning experiences, and provide them with advice on career pathways.

***Reconvened Panel Findings:***

In reviewing Steer Training's revised quality assurance documentation and its Learner Handbook, it noted that Steer Training referred in its Learner Handbook to its intention to put in place reasonable accommodations for learners. The Panel considered that only developed and existing supports for learners should be included in a Learner Handbook, which in turn should be derived from its confirmed quality assurance procedures. As part of the condition accompanying the Panel's positive recommendation to the Approvals and Review Committee in section 6.1, the Panel requires that Steer Training further develop and document its arrangements for the reasonable accommodation of learners.

**8 INFORMATION AND DATA MANAGEMENT*****Original Panel Findings:***

Steer Training's LMS is supported by a company called Learning Pool. In addition to managing learner data, the LMS is a virtual learning zone, as described under the teaching, learning, and assessment, sections above. Steer Training has full control of the design of the LMS, and content can be added and amended in-house.

The LMS is used to house an e-portfolio for each learner which is password protected and accessible by the learner, the training assessor, and the IQA only. Workplace assessors do not have access to learner e-portfolios. Steer Training is satisfied that all information is protected in a manner that is compliant with GDPR. When learners complete their programme, their access to the e-portfolio ends. Steer Training retains the information contained in the e-portfolio for 3 years.

***Reconvened Panel Findings:***

The Panel is satisfied with its original findings and did not revisit *Information and Data Management* during its reconvened meeting.

**9 PUBLIC INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION*****Original Panel Findings:***

Steer Training confirmed that it is committed to providing clear, accurate, objective, up to date and easily accessible information on its programmes and associated services (Quality Assurance System,



p.37). The organisation's website ([www.steertraining.com](http://www.steertraining.com)) is the primary platform on which information is published. The Management Board has overall responsibility for the quality and accuracy of information being published, with input from staff and committees as appropriate.

In its Quality Assurance System document, Steer Training outlined the types of information regarding its programmes that will be required by QQI and undertook to publish quality assurance reports.

***Reconvened Panel Findings:***

The Panel is satisfied with its original findings and did not revisit *Public Information and Communication* during its reconvened meeting.

## **10 OTHER PARTIES INVOLVED IN EDUCATION AND TRAINING**

***Original Panel Findings:***

Steer Training described itself as a small organisation, but one that has built links with other providers. It also encourages networking as a means of staff development.

In terms of benchmarking, it informed the Panel that it looks at learner entry and successful completion rates in other providers and that it keeps under review innovations in e-learning. Its feedback from employers on the quality of its graduates is also considered to be an effective means for Steer Training to benchmark itself against providers offering similar programmes.

Steer Training also said that it has reviewed comparable provision in the Republic of Ireland; has started to engage with other providers who are working with QQI; and has reviewed quality assurance reports on the QQI website.

***Reconvened Panel Findings:***

The Panel is satisfied with its original findings and did not revisit *Other Parties Involved in Education and Training* during its reconvened meeting.



## 11 SELF-EVALUATION, MONITORING AND REVIEW

### ***Original Panel Findings:***

Steer Training emphasised the importance it places on gathering learner and staff feedback. It explained to the Panel that it seeks to continuously improve itself through self-evaluation based on this information and to adjust its teaching and learning materials and methods accordingly. There is collective responsibility for developing detailed action plans and timeframes based on feedback and these are monitored at Training Committee meetings.

The organisation also undergoes regular external reviews by City and Guilds to ensure its operations, its quality assurance and its services provided meet required standards. Steer Training is aware that this form of external monitoring is not a feature of quality assurance under QQI. When asked how it would address this, Steer Training referred to its intention to engage someone with a QQI background to help it to amend its quality assurance system appropriately. The outcomes of this analysis against QQI's requirements would be reflected in its resubmitted Quality Assurance System.

### ***Reconvened Panel Findings:***

As noted previously, Steer Training has now engaged external expertise who has supported it in developing its quality assurance system to meet QQI's requirements and will continue to do so. The Panel is satisfied that significant progress has been made in this regard. Apart from this, the Panel is satisfied with its original findings and did not revisit *Self-Evaluation, Monitoring and Review* during its reconvened meeting.

## 12 TOPIC-SPECIFIC QA GUIDELINES: BLENDED LEARNING

### ***Original Panel Findings:***

The Panel noted that should Steer Training be approved to submit a programme to QQI for validation, it would be delivered using a blended learning approach. During its discussion with Steer Training, the Panel was impressed with how it approached blended learning, however, it did not feel that this approach was adequately detailed in its Quality Assurance System.

Steer Training confirmed to the Panel that it had reviewed QQI's *Topic-Specific QA Guidelines on Blended Learning* but that it anticipated further representation and elaboration in its Quality Assurance System would be required. The Panel reinforced the need for Steer Training to reference these guidelines



specifically in its revised quality assurance documentation and to address the three sections detailed in the guidelines: blended learning in the context of the organisation, the programme, and the learning experience.

***Reconvened Panel Findings:***

The Panel recognises that Steer Training has strengthened the description of its blended learning activities in its revised quality assurance documentation. However, it considers that this representation should more comprehensively reflect the progressive approach that it considers that Steer Training takes to its blended learning delivery. As a result, and as part of the condition accompanying the Panel's positive recommendation to the Approvals and Review Committee in section 6.1, the Panel requires that Steer Training further develop and document its arrangements for blended learning.

**Evaluation of draft QA Procedures - Overall panel findings**

Having met twice with representatives of Steer Training, and reviewed its original and resubmitted documentation, the Panel is satisfied that it is a dedicated, professional, and committed provider of courses in health and social care. The Chairperson also commended Steer Training for the open way it engaged with the Quality and Capacity Panel, during the original and reconvened event.

Courses currently offered by Steer Training lead to awards of City and Guilds and it is subject to the associated quality assurance processes and practices. These experiences heavily influenced the original Quality Assurance System document submitted to the Quality and Capacity Panel for review and approval. Steer Training subsequently demonstrated to the satisfaction of the Panel that it has significantly progressed its quality assurance documentation to reflect the transition that it wishes to make to providing programmes that lead to QQI awards. As a result, the Panel wishes to make a positive recommendation to the Approvals and Review Committee that it approve Steer Training's QA Manual, subject to two accompanying conditions identified in section 6.1.



## **Part 6 Conditions of QA Approval**

### **6.1 Conditions of QA Approval**

- 6.1.1 That Steer Training conducts a thorough review of the effectiveness of its QA Manual in 24 months' time to ensure that it is fit for purpose following its implementation.
- 6.1.2 That, in advance of this review and as part of its continuous improvement of its quality assurance system, Steer Training augments its QA Manual with the additional detail identified during the reconvened evaluation meeting, regarding:
- Reasonable accommodations for students
  - Arrangements for the recognition of prior learning
  - Arrangements for assuring consistency in the development and review of assessment methods
  - Its approach to blended learning.

## **Part 7 Mandatory Changes to QA Procedures and Specific Advice**

### **7.1 Mandatory Changes**

1. Revisit the proposed governance and management structure for Steer Training and ensure that:
  - a) responsibility, authority, and decision-making for quality assurance is confirmed, and
  - b) it is clear how any potential tensions arising between academic and commercial matters will be resolved.
2. Review and revise the documented Quality Assurance System to reflect the quality assurance requirements for a provider offering programmes leading to QQI awards. In doing so, connect the content of the Quality Assurance System with specific reference to the requirements of QQI documentation, including to the relevant Core, Sector-Specific and Topic-Specific quality assurance guidelines; to QQI validation policies and criteria; and to QQI assessment conventions.

### **7.2 Specific advice:**

- Consider augmenting the Steer Training Management Board with one or more external members who are experienced in the sector.



- Consider how professional development supports could be extended to build the capacity of staff to develop and deliver programmes leading to QQI awards.

Following its reconvened evaluation meeting with Steer Training in April 2021, the Quality and Capacity Panel offers one specific advice:

- That Steer Training reviews the different contexts in which it is using the language ‘internal verifier’ and considers whether more distinct terms are required for these roles.

## Part 8 Proposed Approved Scope of Provision for this provider

NFQ Level(s) – min and max	Award Class(es)	Discipline areas
5	Minor	Care Skills (5N2770)
5	Minor	Care of the Older Person (5N2706)
5	Major	Healthcare Support (5M4339)





**QQI**

Quality and Qualifications Ireland  
Dearbhú Cáilíochta agus Cáilíochtaí Éireann

## **Part 9      Approval by Chair of the Panel**

This report of the Quality and Capacity Panel is approved and submitted to QQI for its decision on the recommendation to approve Steer Training Academy's draft QA procedures, subject to two conditions, identified in Section 6.1.

23 April 2021



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

### **In advance of initial panel evaluation meeting**

- Initial Access to Validation application details, including:
  - The completed application form
  - Company information
  - Financial information
- The Steer Training Quality Assurance System document and appendices
- Additional information was provided by Steer Training in response to questions posed by the Panel in advance of the event, these related to:
  - Steer Training’s perception of the changes and challenges involved in working with a new awarding body (QQI) and how it would be managed
  - Clarification on accountability within the staffing structure, including responsibility for QA
  - Membership of governance committees, and
  - Implications for QA of programme delivery and assessment arising from the COVID-19 emergency and how this has been managed.

### **In advance of reconvened panel evaluation meeting:**

- Quality Improvement Action Plan
- Steer Training revised Organisation Chart
- Revised Steer Training Quality Assurance System document and appendices
- Several examples of supporting QA implementation documentation, including templates, reports, and meeting minutes.

**Annexe 2: Provider staff met in the Evaluation**

Name	Role/Position	Original evaluation meeting / reconvened evaluation meeting/ both
Kimberley Neill-McCready	Centre Manager	Both
Caroline Rafferty	Managing Director	Original evaluation meeting
Arlene McCrum	Programme Leader	Original evaluation meeting
Victoria Smiton	Training Manager	Both
Susan Boyce	Training Consultant	Both
Joan Boylan	Centre Manager	Reconvened evaluation meeting

***Appendix:*** Provider response to the Initial Access to Validation Panel Report



7 May 2021

Ms Marie Cotter  
Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI)  
26/27 Denzille Lane  
Dublin 2

Dear Marie

Thank you for forwarding the Initial Access to Validation Report in respect of Steer Training.

We found the report to be very comprehensive and we are in agreement that it fully captures the discussions held at the Reconvene Meeting on 19 April 2021.

As noted in the report, we will continue to update our Quality Assurance Processes in the areas highlighted.

Yours sincerely

*Joan Boylan*

Joan Boylan  
Centre Manager