



Reengagement Panel Report

Assessment of Capacity and Approval of QA Procedures

Part 1 Details of provider

1.1 Applicant Provider

Registered Business/Trading Name:	Professional Development Limited
Address:	Suite 11, Plaza 256, Blanchardstown Corporate Park 2, Ballycoolin, Dublin 15
Date of Application:	29 th July 2020
Date of resubmission of application:	15 th April 2021
Date of evaluation:	
Date of (virtual) site visit (if applicable):	19 th of August, 2020
Date of Reconvened Meeting of Panel	19 th of May, 2021
Date of recommendation to the Programmes and Awards Executive Committee:	15 th of October 2020 and 24 th June 2021

1.2 Profile of provider

Professional Development Limited (PDL) is a private provider of short, intensive training courses specialising in management, project management and process improvement (including Lean Six Sigma). The QQI programmes offered are minor awards leading to QQI Certification at NFQ levels 5 and 6.

PDL has been a quality assured provider with QQI (formerly FETAC) since March 2006. The provider delivers in-company courses via employers, which make up approximately 60% of its training activities. The remaining 40% is comprised of advertised courses, open to the public. In 2018, of 2,400 learners who attended courses delivered by Professional Development Limited, over 680 were enrolled on QQI validated programmes. In addition to its NFQ Level 5 and 6 QQI programmes, PDL is an approved training provider with a number of international accreditation bodies such as the Project Management Institute, the International Association for Lean Six Sigma Certification and the VMEdU Inc. PDL was incorporated as a private limited company in 1989 and was acquired by the current owner in 2013.



Part 2 Panel Membership

Name	Role of panel member	Organisation
Danny Brennan	Chair	Former Registrar, Letterkenny Institute of Technology; DNB Consulting
Catherine Peck	Report Writer	Independent Education Consultant
Michael Kelly	Blended Learning Expert	Chevron Training and Recruitment
Janet Tumulty	QA Expert	New Links Training Solutions
Pam Skerritt	QA Expert	Independent Education Consultant
Thomas O’Toole	QA Expert	Waterford Institute of Technology

Part 3 Findings of the Panel

3.1 Summary Findings

The panel commend Professional Development Limited (PDL) for bringing forward its submission for reengagement with QQI. The motivation and commitment among the team at PDL was evident to the panel during the discussions with provider representatives that were conducted in the course of the evaluation. The panel also notes that due to the restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the site visit was facilitated virtually by PDL.

During the course of the evaluation, the panel had the opportunity to engage in discussions with management, support and training staff at the provider. These discussions were positive and constructive in tone, and provided the panel with valuable insights into the multifunctional roles key staff held within the organisation, and how the QA of PDL has been developed.

Nonetheless, the panel found that the draft QA procedures presented for evaluation did not reflect sufficient alignment with QQI’s Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines (2016). The panel was confident that the team at PDL would be able, with sufficient time, to address the issues identified. The panel noted that several of these issues were acknowledged or self-identified as areas of ongoing development by the provider during the virtual site visit. The panel therefore recommended that QQI refuse approval of PDL’s draft QA procedures pending mandatory changes. Those mandatory changes are outlined in Section 7.1 of this report, and are discussed where relevant in subsections 5.1 – 5.12.

The panel reconvened on May 19th 2021 to undertake a desk review of the revised documentation submitted. The panel noted that PDL had engaged constructively with the process and undertaken significant work to comprehensively address the panel’s initial concerns. Following this review, the panel were sufficiently satisfied to make a recommendation to QQI to approve the QA procedures of PDL with some discrete Conditions of Approval (see Section 6). The panel has also identified additional items of Specific Advice, listed in Section 7.3 of this report.



QQI

Quality and Qualifications Ireland
Dearbhú Cáilíochta agus Cáilíochtaí Éireann

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

	Tick <u>one</u> as appropriate
Approve PDL's draft QA procedures	X
Refuse approval of PDL's draft 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 PDL'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	The provider has submitted a Certificate of Incorporation for Professional Development Limited (established 1989).
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	The application identifies the applicant's parent company, Anorien Investments Limited, operating from the same premises. Professional Development has a track record of certification in Ireland.
4.1.3(a)	Criterion: <i>Are any dependencies, collaborations, obligations, parent organisations, and subsidiaries clearly specified?</i>	Yes	PDL does not operate any partnerships or collaborative provision arrangements. PDL has listed the non QQI awards it offers that are accredited by other awarding bodies or self-certified within its application form.
4.1.4(a)	Criterion: <i>Are any third-party relationships and partnerships compatible with the scope of access sought?</i>	Yes	There is no impact on the scope of access sought.
4.1.5(a)	Criterion: <i>Are the applicable regulations and legislation complied with in all jurisdictions where it operates?</i>	Yes	The evidence submitted by PDL is indicative of compliance with all applicable regulations and legislation within the jurisdictions where 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</i>	Yes	PDL is an established provider, delivering programmes leading to QQI (and formerly FETAC) certification since 2006.



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

Findings

The panel is of the view that the evidence submitted by PDL is wholly consistent with the provider meeting the Criteria in Section 4.1 full.

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	The provider has submitted abridged accounts for the years 2017 and 2018, and details of the provider’s insurance policy. An eTax Clearance Confirmation has also been submitted.
4.2.2(a)	Criterion: <i>Does the applicant have a reasonable business case for sustainable provision?</i>	Yes	PDL offers programmes of education and training for which there is an ongoing demand, and the panel is of the view that there is a business case for sustainable provision within the provider’s domain.
4.2.3(a)	Criterion: <i>Are fit-for-purpose governance, management and decision making structures in place?</i>	Yes	At the time of the virtual site visit in 2020, the panel was not confident that fit-for-purpose governance, management and decision making structures were in place that would enable PDL to demonstrate alignment with QQI’s Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines. When the panel reconvened on May 19 th , 2021 to undertake a desk review of the revised QA procedures submitted by PDL, the panel was satisfied that development had occurred. The panel identified two conditions of approval pertaining to this aspect of PDL’s QA in Section 6 of this report.
4.2.4(a)	Criterion: <i>Are there arrangements in place for providing required information to QQI?</i>	Yes	PDL has a track record of certification with QQI, and has a QA Officer and QA Documents Manager in place within the organisation.



Findings

The panel was initially of the view that further development of this aspect of PDL's draft QA procedures was required in order to reflect a clear alignment to QQI's Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines and meet the criteria within Section 4.2.

The panel's concerns and mandatory changes, as well as items of specific advice, in relation to this are discussed in Section 5.1 of this report. When the panel reconvened on May 19th, 2021 to undertake a desk review of the revised QA procedures submitted by PDL, the panel identified two conditions of approval pertaining to criterion 4.2.3(a).

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	PDL has a track record of certification with QQI, and formerly with FETAC.
4.3.2(a)	Criterion: <i>Does the applicant have a fit-for-purpose and stable complement of education and training staff?</i>	Yes	The provider works with a pool of appropriately qualified trainers, supported by a core of fulltime multifunctional staff working in management, administrative and support roles. However, documentation pertaining to this area initially required review and expansion. When the panel reconvened on May 19 th , 2021 to undertake a desk review of the revised QA procedures submitted by PDL, the panel was satisfied that this had occurred to a satisfactory standard.
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 panel is satisfied that the provider's track record of certification, and its approach to the re-engagement process reflects its capacity to co-operate with and assist QQI and provide QQI with



	<i>Assurance (Education and Training) Act (2012) (the Act)?</i>		information as specified in Section 45(3) of the 2012 Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act.
4.3.4(a)	Criterion: <i>Does the applicant have the fit-for-purpose premises, facilities and resources to meet the requirements of the provision proposed in place?</i>	Yes	Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the site visit for this evaluation was conducted virtually, and the panel members did not undertake a site visit to the Institute's premises. However, public courses are delivered at hotel venues, and service level agreements are established with venue providers.
4.3.5(a)	Criterion: <i>Are there access, transfer and progression arrangements that meet QQI's criteria for approval in place?</i>	Yes	The panel is satisfied that the arrangements presented are in line with QQI's criteria.
4.3.6(a)	Criterion: <i>Are structures and resources to underpin fair and consistent assessment of learners in place?</i>	Yes	The panel was satisfied that the arrangements presented were generally in line with QQI's criteria. However, documentation pertaining to this area required review and expansion. When the panel reconvened on May 19 th , 2021 to undertake a desk review of the revised QA procedures submitted by PDL, the panel was satisfied that this had occurred to a satisfactory standard.
4.3.7(a)	Criterion: <i>Are arrangements for the protection of enrolled learners to meet the statutory obligations in place (where applicable)?</i>	Yes	As a provider of short, intensive programmes of less than three months duration, the provider is exempt from any obligations pertaining to the protection of enrolled learners.

Findings

The panel was initially of the view that further development of this aspect of PDL's draft QA procedures was required in order to reflect a clear alignment to QQI's Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines and meet the criteria within Section 4.3.



The panel required PDL to undertake a comprehensive review of its QA documentation prior to resubmission of the draft QA procedures. Within this process, areas of the documentation including staff recruitment, management and development and the assessment of learners with regard to reasonable accommodations needed to be duly considered. This comprehensive review was intended to ensure the panel could clearly evaluate and benchmark PDL's QA procedures in these areas against good practice and standards within the sector.

When the panel reconvened on May 19th, 2021 to undertake a desk review of the revised QA procedures submitted by PDL, the panel noted that significant work had been undertaken by PDL and that this was sufficient to demonstrate the provider's achievement of the criteria in Section 4.3.

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

The panel was initially of the view that PDL's draft QA procedures met the majority of the Criteria in Section 4, which relate to the provider's capacity to deliver sustainable education and training. A specific area of concern identified by the panel fell under Governance and Management of QA. This and other areas that need to be addressed by PDL prior to resubmission are discussed as relevant in Sections 5.1 – 5.12 of this report. When the panel reconvened on May 19th, 2021 to undertake a desk review of the revised QA procedures submitted by PDL, the panel noted that significant work had been undertaken by PDL to enhance its QA procedures. The panel was sufficiently satisfied to proceed with a recommendation to QQI to approve PDL's QA procedures with conditions.



Part 5 Evaluation of draft QA Procedures submitted by Professional Development Ltd.

The following is the panel's findings following evaluation of Professional Development Limited's quality assurance procedures against QQI's Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines (April 2016) and Topic Specific Guidelines for Blended Learning. This section of the report follows the structure and referencing of the guidelines.

1 GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT OF QUALITY

Panel Findings:

At the time of the virtual site visit, the panel was of the view that further development of this aspect of PDL's draft QA procedures was required in order to reflect a clear alignment to QQI's Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines.

QQI's guidelines in this area require providers to have a governance structure in place that enforces the separation of academic and corporate decision-making. The panel acknowledge that for small providers, establishing a structure that reflects QQI's guidelines vis-à-vis a separation of commercial and academic functions within the organisation is a challenge. Within the draft QA procedures submitted by PDL, both the Managing Director and the Director of Training sat on the Board of Directors, the Quality Review Board and the Results Approval Panel. Responsibility for ensuring that decisions relating to the provision of quality training services to clients that were independent of commercial priorities also rested with the Managing Director. During the site visit, the panel explored how PDL perceived that the separation of academic and commercial decision-making could be assured within that structure. Although the panel noted the affirmation by PDL representatives that in practice there is no undue influence and that maintaining integrity and quality is important for viability of the business, the panel was of the view that the structure presented in PDL's draft QA procedures did not sufficiently demonstrate how this is enforced. The panel therefore identified a mandatory change that required PDL to address this (see 7.1.1). To facilitate transparency and clarity, the panel also identified that the graphic representation of the structure within the QAM needed to be simplified (see 7.1.4).

QQI's guidelines also require providers to present documentation that identifies where responsibility lies within the organisation for the implementation of quality assurance policies and procedures, and reflects systematic and formal decision-making processes. The panel noted that the terms of reference for units of governance within PDL did not consistently include details such as frequency of meetings, quorum or detailed remit. The panel noted that PDL representatives outlined how much communication is facilitated internally through a relatively flat structure and open, informal channels between key staff members. Although the panel recognized the value and efficacy of this open organisational culture within the day-to-day operations of PDL, a further mandatory change was identified that required PDL to document in greater detail the formal elements of its governance and management structures (see 7.1.2 and 7.1.3).

A significant aspect of this dimension of QA is that providers have procedures in place for the identification, assessment and management of risk. PDL undertook a gap analysis exercise in preparation for reengagement, and identified that formal risk management processes needed to be written and a risk register completed. The risk management system subsequently developed by PDL was overviewed within the draft QA procedures presented for evaluation, and discussed with the panel. The panel were of the view that PDL's focused development in this area was reflective of the positive disposition within the organisation toward continual enhancement.

When the panel reconvened on May 19th, 2021 to undertake a desk review of the revised QA procedures submitted by PDL, the panel noted that this aspect of PDL's QA procedures had been enhanced. The panel held some ongoing concerns regarding the membership of the Director of Training in the programme development subcommittee in addition to the



Quality Review Board. The panel has included a condition of approval related to this in Section 6.1 of this report. The panel was also of the view that the frequency of the regular meetings of the Quality Review Board needed to be increased to a minimum of two per year. The panel has included a condition of approval related to this in Section 6.2 of this report.

2 DOCUMENTED APPROACH TO QUALITY ASSURANCE

Panel Findings:

At the time of the virtual site visit, the panel was of the view that further development of this aspect of PDL's draft QA procedures was required in order to reflect a clear alignment to QQI's Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines.

QQI's guidelines under this dimension of QA require providers to ensure that QA procedures are fully documented and available publicly (published), and that necessary information is available to staff and the public as required in usable formats. The panel was of the view that a lack of detail within PDL's documented processes, and gaps in the overall documentation (where procedures were followed in practice but not formalised within the QA) needed to be addressed. This was identified as a mandatory change (see 7.1.5). In addition to further developing the QA documentation, which could usefully be benchmarked against the published QA of providers that have successfully reengaged with QQI, the panel identified the need for PDL to publish its QA procedures and associated QA evaluation reports, pursuant to approval (see 7.1.6). The panel acknowledges the commercial sensitivities associated with publication of QA documentation for private providers. However, this is a legal requirement within QQI's guidelines that is widely recognized within the sector.

During the evaluation, the panel also explored how QA documentation was managed within PDL, given that PDL engages with awarding bodies apart from QQI. PDL stated in its application that although elements of commonality existed across the QA processes required by the different awarding bodies it engages with, PDL did not see benefit from integrating all certified courses under the umbrella of one QA system due to the different methodologies used for assessment and audit purposes. Within PDL, responsibility for managing and maintaining the quality management system rests with the Office Manager/QA Officer who reports directly to the Managing Director. The QMS is made available to staff within a shared folder, and to learners within the learner handbook. An archive system is in place and only current, live documents are available for use at any one time. Live documents have a record within the document footer indicating the date of the version. This practice negates the risk of using outdated documents. The panel noted that this system appeared to be well-managed overall, but advised that the approval of policies and procedures could usefully be included in the document tracking (see 7.2.5).

When the panel reconvened on May 19th, 2021 to undertake a desk review of the revised QA procedures submitted by PDL, the panel noted that PDL's documentation had been significantly expanded and enhanced. The panel held some ongoing concerns regarding the consistency of information across different sources. The panel has included a condition of approval related to this in Section 6.3 of this report.



3 PROGRAMMES OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Panel Findings:

At the time of the virtual site visit, the panel was of the view that further development of this aspect of PDL's draft QA procedures was required in order to reflect a clear alignment to QQI's Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines.

QQI's guidelines under this dimension of QA encompass programme development, approval and monitoring processes, as well as the provider's access, transfer and progression procedures. PDL's application stated that learner requirements and RPL were considered during the consultation process between the training consultant and the learner during the booking process. The provider's gap analysis stated that prior learning and experience was discussed with the learner during a call with a training consultant in order to determine suitability. This area of PDL's access procedures was discussed further with the panel during the virtual site visit.

With regard to programme development, the panel noted that the QA System graphic submitted within PDL's application form did not make clear how a new programme would be subject to academic review and approval. During the virtual site visit, the panel explored the processes surrounding development and approval of new programmes in some depth, as this area of a provider's processes can usefully demonstrate a provider's alignment to the principles stated within QQI's guidelines in relation to approval and decision-making processes. The panel acknowledged that the provider does not have an immediate requirement for the programme development process, although a new QQI NFQ level 6 programme was stated to be under consideration. The panel also noted that PDL representatives indicated an intention to develop processes and templates in this area that would reflect the requirements of QQI's guidelines. However, the reengagement process requires providers to draft and submit key processes such as programme development and approval for evaluation, regardless of the immediacy or frequency of their use. PDL representatives outlined appropriate steps to be contained within the proposed process to the panel during the discussion. The panel concluded that this area was one of several processes that required further documentation, as discussed in Section 5.2 of this report.

When the panel reconvened on May 19th, 2021 to undertake a desk review of the revised QA procedures submitted by PDL, the panel noted that this section of the documentation has been significantly expanded. The panel held some ongoing concerns regarding the demonstrated separation between those who develop and those who approve material within PDL's processes for the development and approval of new programmes. The panel has included a condition of approval related to this in Section 6.1 of this report.

4 STAFF RECRUITMENT, MANAGEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

Panel Findings:

At the time of the virtual site visit, the panel was of the view that further development of this aspect of PDL's draft QA procedures was required in order to reflect a clear alignment to QQI's Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines.

PDL has made a strategic decision to ensure that staff with the core competencies required for the organisation in areas including finance, training development, marketing and information technology are in-house employees. In addition, PDL works with a pool of qualified contact trainers. The provider recruits tutors based on subject specific qualifications, training qualifications, practical real work experience, communication and facilitation skills, as well the ability to impart



information in a supportive and inclusive manner. The Director of Training attends modules with new trainers and provides constructive feedback.

PDL states that tutor development is discussed with trainers in the light of feedback from clients, staff and market needs. The panel explored this aspect of practice with PDL representatives during the virtual site visit. At the conclusion of these discussions, the panel identified that documentation reflecting a systematic approach to this needed to be included within the QAM, as discussed in Section 5.2.

When the panel reconvened on May 19th, 2021 to undertake a desk review of the revised QA procedures submitted by PDL, the panel noted that this section of the documentation has been significantly expanded and presented a more transparent and systematic overview of PDL's processes in this area.

5 TEACHING AND LEARNING

Panel Findings:

At the time of the virtual site visit, the panel was of the view that further development of this aspect of PDL's draft QA procedures was required in order to reflect a clear alignment to QQI's Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines.

QQI's guidelines under this dimension of QA require providers to have processes in place to ensure that pedagogy is flexible, varied and incorporates national and international effective practice. Teaching and learning must also reflect and attend to the diversity of learners and their needs. During the site visit the panel sought to understand the principles that underpinned teaching and learning within PDL, and which informed the practice of trainers. PDL representatives emphasized the learner centred and practical nature of the training programmes. Learners are encouraged to apply learning within a programme to their own context of work or practice. The panel also explored how formative and summative feedback was provided to learners on PDL programmes. PDL representatives described how formative feedback is provided by tutors in dialogue with learners during training sessions, and how peer feedback was facilitated. Summative feedback is provided in the form of a rationale for grades. Following these discussions, the panel noted that although a dedication to learners and a focus on customer service was evident, a clear or principled overarching approach to teaching and learning was not documented or articulated (see 7.1.7). The panel was of the view that this needed to be considered and documented. The panel noted that clear articulation of a provider's approach to teaching and learning is crucial to informing learners and stakeholders, and also supports other processes within the organisation, such as new trainer induction and the continuing professional development of training staff. The panel noted that articulating a mission statement focused on the learner might usefully reflect the learner centred culture of PDL, and serve to orient further development in this area.

When the panel reconvened on May 19th, 2021 to undertake a desk review of the revised QA procedures submitted by PDL, the panel noted that this section of the documentation has been significantly expanded. The panel has included one item of additional specific advice pertaining to this in this report (see 7.3.1).



6 ASSESSMENT OF LEARNERS

Panel Findings:

At the time of the virtual site visit, the panel was of the view that further development of this aspect of PDL's draft QA procedures was required in order to reflect a clear alignment to QQI's Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines.

During the virtual site visit, the panel explored the processes surrounding assessment at PDL, as well as the approach taken to assessment of learners' knowledge, skills and competences. PDL representatives outlined a process that enables all communication with learners pertaining to assessment to be tracked within a delegate record in the information management system. As far as possible, all communication pertaining to assessment is written, as this facilitates an audit trail for each enrolled learner. Processes for internal verification are established, and within the provider's information management system facilitates real-time oversight of trends for analysis by the results approval panel.

The panel explored how reasonable accommodations were made within the assessment process for learners with learning differences or disabilities, and how information about accommodations was made available to learners. Although a supportive environment exists at PDL, accommodations were made on a case by case and relatively informal basis. Following these discussions, the panel was of the view that this area of assessment policy and procedure needed to be further documented (see Section 5.2). The panel also noted that the approach to assessment from a pedagogic perspective should be articulated within the provider's documented approach to teaching and learning (see Section 5.5).

When the panel reconvened on May 19th, 2021 to undertake a desk review of the revised QA procedures submitted by PDL, the panel noted that PDL had expanded its documented QA in relation to reasonable accommodations.

7 SUPPORT FOR LEARNERS

Panel Findings:

At the time of the virtual site visit, the panel was of the view that further development of this aspect of PDL's draft QA procedures was required in order to reflect a clear alignment to QQI's Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines.

It was evident to the panel that staff at PDL are focused on the learner experience and that a learner centred culture is well established within the organisation. All learners have an assigned training consultant who engages with them directly for non-grade related customer service issues. Training takes place in 4-star hotels that offer business and conference facilities. The current learner profile is predominantly learners in employment. Almost all hold second level qualifications, and most hold third level qualifications. PDL's representatives

A learner handbook is made available to learners in an electronic format, and learners receive a folder that includes information about data protection as well as course materials and an assessment schedule. This is not made available publicly for reasons of commercial sensitivity. Following these discussions, the panel was of the view that although a high level of learner support is provided by PDL, detail of this was lacking in the QA documentation and the learner handbook. The panel noted discussion in Section 5.2 pertaining to documentation and Section 5.6 pertaining to support processes for learners with specific learning differences or disabilities in relation to this. The panel identified an item of specific



advice for PDL in relation to the learner handbook, which could usefully provide further detail of the available supports in Section 7.2.4.

When the panel reconvened on May 19th, 2021 to undertake a desk review of the revised QA procedures submitted by PDL, the panel noted that this section of PDL's QA documentation had been expanded, and included substantially greater detail in relation to supports available for learners with disabilities and specific learning differences.

8 INFORMATION AND DATA MANAGEMENT

Panel Findings:

The panel is of the view that this aspect of PDL's draft QA procedures has satisfied the requirements of QQI's Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines.

QQI's guidelines require providers to have reliable information and data systems in place to inform decision-making. During the virtual site visit, the panel explored how data was managed by PDL, and how compliance with data processing obligations was upheld. PDL has moved from legacy systems to the use of a fully integrated and cloud-based customer relations management system, utilising a customised Training Management System (TMS) on the Sales Force platform. The system facilitates tracking of completion rates overall and by course or trainer, with grade distributions documented. Responsibility for data protection is delegated within the organisation, and the privacy policy is presented on the website as well as linked to within the learner handbook. Additionally, an FAQ section is provided for learners to give them information about the purposes of data processing and their rights. Sensitive data is not visible to all members of the organisation, and managed on a permissions basis according to the roles in the organisation.

9 PUBLIC INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION

Panel Findings:

The panel is of the view that this aspect of PDL's draft QA procedures has satisfied the requirements of QQI's Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines.

QQI's guidelines require providers to have policies and procedures in place that ensure the information published is clear, accurate, objective, up to date and easily accessible. Information published in respect of programmes of education and training must comply with the spirit and requirements of the 2012 Act. During the virtual site visit the panel explored how this aspect of PDL's operations was managed. PDL representatives confirmed that responsibility for information on the website is carefully managed within the organisation. In addition to full and appropriate programme information, prospective learners are encouraged to engage in direct conversation with PDL representatives. The publication of quality assurance reports is also a requirement of this dimension of QA, and the need to fulfil this requirement in future was discussed with PDL during the virtual site visit. This has been addressed within the panel's commentary in Section 5.2 of this report.

**10 OTHER PARTIES INVOLVED IN EDUCATION AND TRAINING (incl. Apprenticeships)****Panel Findings:**

The panel is of the view that this aspect of PDL's draft QA procedures has satisfied the requirements of QQI's Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines.

QQI's guidelines require providers to ensure the nature of all arrangements in place with the broader national and international education and training community are made clear. PDL has included information on its relationship with the Project Management Institute, Enterprise Ireland, the International Association of Six Sigma Certification, AXELOS and SCRUMStudy within its documentation. PDL does not engage with external partners or second providers in its provision of QQI programmes.

11 SELF-EVALUATION, MONITORING AND REVIEW**Panel Findings:**

The panel is of the view that this aspect of PDL's draft QA procedures has satisfied the requirements of QQI's Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines.

QQI's guidelines require providers to have a system of appropriate measures in place for internal self-monitoring, and for provider-owned QA evaluation outcomes to be used to inform internal QA improvement plans. PDL's gap analysis, undertaken in preparation for reengagement, identified three self-monitoring projects to be undertaken. These included the collation and review of course evaluation forms, the generation of reports from Salesforce and a customer complaints log. The panel was satisfied from its discussions with PDL representatives during the site visit that this dimension of QA is a priority within the organisation.

12 BLENDED LEARNING**Panel Findings:**

At the time of the virtual site visit, the panel was of the view that further development of this aspect of PDL's draft QA procedures was required in order to reflect a clear alignment to QQI's Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines.

QQI's Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Blended Learning Programmes require providers to demonstrate that they have taken account of the organisational context, programme context and learner context. During the site visit, the panel explored how blended learning was understood and implemented at PDL beyond the scope of the provider's recent response to the COVID-19 pandemic (noting that there is a distinction between the activation of contingency procedures for emergency teaching and a planned and strategic approach to blended learning). PDL representatives acknowledged that they did not view QQI's guidelines for this area as being fully applicable given that training is usually delivered face to face. However, the panel noted that if PDL chooses to proceed with an application for programme delivery in blended learning mode within its Scope of Provision then the provider will need to demonstrate alignment to these guidelines. The panel was of the view that this area of PDL's draft QA procedures was over reliant on the experience of managing programme delivery through the pandemic, and that the documentation presented and subsequent dialogue with the provider representatives did not reflect the level of detail approval for this area of practice requires. The panel identified a mandatory change pertaining to this (see 7.1.8).



When the panel reconvened on May 19th, 2021 to undertake a desk review of the revised QA procedures submitted by PDL, the panel noted that PDL had withdrawn its application for approval of its Blended Learning procedures at this time.

Evaluation of draft QA Procedures - Overall panel findings

Following a review of the documentation and discussions with the PDL representatives at the virtual site visit, the panel was initially of the view that PDL needed to undertake further work on its draft QA procedures to ensure it demonstrates an appropriate alignment to QQI's guidelines.

The panel acknowledged PDL's stated commitment to ensuring a balance between the viability and profitability of the business and the integrity of academic provision. The panel were confident that the team at PDL had the capability to implement the required changes within the allocated period of six months.

When the panel reconvened on May 19th, 2021 to undertake a desk review of the revised QA procedures submitted by PDL, the panel was of the view that PDL had engaged constructively with the process and made significant enhancements and expansions to its QA documentation. The panel was pleased to be in a position to make a recommendation to QQI to approve PDL's QA procedures conditional to PDL addressing three discrete conditions of approval listed in Section 6 of this report.



Part 6 Conditions of Approval

The panel requires that PDL address the conditions listed below by June 20th:

- 6.1 PDL must adjust its current procedure for programme development and approval to demonstrate a clear separation between those who develop and those who approve material, as per QQI's guidelines. The panel advises that this could be achieved by implementing the following measures:
- Removing the voting rights of members of the PDS who also sit on the QRB at programme approval meetings;
 - Ensuring the above is captured in the minutes at those meetings;
 - Expanding the membership of the QRB to include a minimum of two tutor representatives and two assessor representatives and increasing the quorum to 4 members, 2 of whom must be external.
- 6.2 PDL must ensure that the QRB meets a minimum of twice per year for regular meetings. This must occur in addition to meetings of an extraordinary nature held for the specific purpose of evaluating and approving a new programme.
- 6.3 PDL must align the representation of its procedures in the Tutor Handbook and Learner Handbook with how those same procedures are represented in the QA Manual. For example, the current representation of how programme learning materials are developed within the programme development process in the tutor handbook does not reflect how this is represented in the programme development procedure within the QA Manual. To achieve this, PDL is advised to consider implementing a system of hyperlinks across the documents where QA procedures are presented (i.e., the QA Manual, Tutor handbook & Learner handbook). This will ensure that if a QA procedure is updated it will be consistent across all sources of information.

Part 7 Mandatory Changes to QA Procedures and Specific Advice

7.1 Mandatory Changes

- 7.1.1 Revise the current overlapping membership of the Board of Directors and the Quality Review Board within the organisation to ensure that the governance structure clearly demonstrates that an appropriate separation of academic and commercial decision-making is enforced by that structure.
- 7.1.2 Develop clear and detailed terms of reference for all units of governance. These must include, at a minimum, the membership, frequency of meetings, quorum and remit of each. The revised terms of reference for the Board of Directors and the Quality Review Board should include the distinct responsibilities of these bodies in relation to key areas including, but not limited to, risk management and new programme development.



- 7.1.3 Include a description of roles and responsibilities for management personnel within the organisation in the QAM. This section of the QAM must make reporting lines transparent.
- 7.1.4 Simplify the diagrammatic representation of the governance structure to clearly represent the relationships between the units of governance within the organisation. The responsibility for organisational processes of those units can be presented diagrammatically separately if desired.
- 7.1.5 Further develop the QA Manual, to ensure that within the policies and procedures essential processes in key areas are appropriately documented. This must ensure that systematic processes are in place that can be benchmarked against QQI's guidelines and standards in the sector. This development should include, but not be limited to, development of clear policy and procedure documentation in areas including:
- New programme development and approval
 - Staff recruitment, development and management
 - Reasonable accommodations and availability of learner supports
- 7.1.6 Pursuant to approval of the draft QA, ensure that the QA policies and procedures and associated QA evaluation reports are made available to the public, learners and other stakeholders. This is necessary to fulfil the requirement of QQI's Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines that a provider's QA procedures are fully documented and available publicly (published).
- 7.1.7 Further develop a strategic, organisation-wide documented approach to teaching, learning and assessment, inclusive of the provider's practices in relation to formative feedback. Link this to a documented approach to continuous professional development for training staff.
- 7.1.8 If applying for blended learning to be included within the approved scope of provision beyond the implementation of contingency procedures for teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic, further develop the documentation in this area. Specifically, give consideration to and document:
- The strategic alignment of BL to the overall provider strategy
 - The pedagogic implications of BL, and the integration of learning design principles to design and delivery of the curriculum and learning materials
 - Resourcing and capacity implications of BL in relation to learner supports (including technical supports), staff training and development, and investment in appropriate learning platforms, software and hardware.



7.2 Specific Advice

- 7.2.1 Within the revision of the governance and management structure, consider how the documentation can more effectively capture and reflect various dimensions of good practice within the organisation that provider representatives shared with the panel during the virtual site visit.
- 7.2.2 Give consideration to how the effectiveness of the Quality Review Board could be enhanced through the establishment of subgroups/subcommittees and the engagement of appropriately informed external expertise as and when required.
- 7.2.3 Consider reformatting the tutor handbook to align to QQI’s Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines to ensure that the dimensions of QA and key processes are clear to all tutoring staff and the QA is embedded within teaching and learning practices across the organisation.
- 7.2.4 Review the learner handbook to include more specific guidance for learners in relation to access to available supports.
- 7.2.5 Within the documented QA, integrate a record of the approving body/bodies for the policy or procedure into the currently existing document tracking system.

Additional Specific Advice

- 7.2.6 PDL is encouraged to continue to develop its documentation in relation to teaching and learning, with a view to articulating the principles and approaches underpinning the provider’s programme delivery.
- 7.2.7 PDL is encouraged to include QQI’s Statutory guidelines and GDPR legislation with the scope of responsibility of the documents manager listed within the QA Manual.

Part 7 Proposed Approved Scope of Provision for this provider

NFQ Level(s) – min and max	Award Class(es)	Discipline areas
5 - 6	Minor, SPA	Multi-sectoral
Face to Face and Part-time Only		



QQI

Quality and Qualifications Ireland
Dearbhú Cáilíochta agus Cáilíochtaí Éireann

Part 8 Approval by Chair of the Panel

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

Name:

Date: 4 September 2020



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

Document	Related to
No further documentation was provided to the panel in the course of the review.	

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

Name	Role/Position
Patrick Hogan	Managing Director
Paula Higgins	Director of Training and Business Development
Aoife Kavanagh	QA Officer and Digital Marketing Manager
Mark George	Assessments Coordinator & Digital Marketing Executive
Jana Hladikova	Training Consultant & Course Co-ordinator
Mary Larkin	Trainer & Assessor

Appendix: Provider response to the Reengagement Panel Report

QQI Reengagement – Reengagement Panel Report: May 19th 2021

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

Friday, 4 June 2021

Dear Deirdre,

We would like to extend our thanks to the panel for their time and guidance provided via their reconvened panel meeting and subsequent Reengagement Panel Report dated 19th of May 2021.

We confirm that we have identified no factual inaccuracies in the report, and have implemented the mandatory changes and specific advice as requested.

Please refer to the table on the following pages. It outlines the mandatory changes and specific advice provided by the panel, notes our action, and directs the reader to relevant sections in the QAM and Tutor Handbook.

If you require further information, I will be pleased to assist. You can reach me by phone at 01 861 0700, or via email at aoife@professionaldevelopment.ie.

Yours sincerely,
Aoife Kavanagh
QA Officer, Professional Development

Mandatory Changes

Ref:	Mandatory Change	QAM Section(s)	Notes
6.1	<p>PDL must adjust its current procedure for programme development and approval to demonstrate a clear separation between those who develop and those who approve material, as per QQI's guidelines. The panel advises that this could be achieved by implementing the following measures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Removing the voting rights of members of the PDS who also sit on the QRB at programme approval meetings. • Ensuring the above is captured in the minutes at those meetings. • Expanding the membership of the QRB to include a minimum of two tutor representatives and two assessor representatives and increasing the quorum to 4 members, 2 of whom must be external. 	<p>1.1.1.2 - Quality Review Board</p> <p>1.1.1.3 - Voting Rights of PDC Members</p> <p>3.1.3 - Programme Approval Prior to submission to QQI for Validation</p>	<p>Implemented and noted in the appropriate locations of the QAM.</p>

Ref:	Mandatory Change	QAM Section(s)	Notes
6.2	PDL must ensure that the QRB meets a minimum of twice per year for regular meetings. This must occur in addition to meetings of an extraordinary nature held for the specific purpose of evaluating and approving a new programme.	1.1.1.2 - Quality Review Board	Implemented and noted in the appropriate locations of the QAM.

Ref:	Mandatory Change	Tutor Handbook Locations	Notes
6.3	<p>PDL must align the representation of its procedures in the Tutor Handbook and Learner Handbook with how those same procedures are represented in the QA Manual.</p> <p>For example, the current representation of how programme learning materials are developed within the programme development process in the tutor handbook does not reflect how this is represented in the programme development procedure within the QA Manual.</p> <p>To achieve this, PDL is advised to consider implementing a system of hyperlinks across the documents where QA procedures are presented (i.e., the QA Manual, Tutor handbook & Learner handbook). This will ensure that if a QA procedure is updated it will be consistent across all sources of information.</p>	<p>3.1 - Quality Assurance System and Quality Assurance Manual</p> <p>3.3 - Governing Bodies and Sub-Committees</p> <p>3.3.1 - Programme Development Committee</p> <p>3.3.2 - Tutor Membership of the Governing Bodies and Sub-Committees</p> <p>6.2 - Training Materials</p>	<p>We have reviewed and inserted a hyperlink within the tutor manual to the QAM.</p> <p>We have also updated the section referenced in the example given by the panel.</p> <p>This will be reviewed in its entirety with a series of individual hyperlinks following our next meeting of the QRB scheduled for September 14th 2021.</p>

Specific Advice

Ref:	Specific Advice	QAM Section(s)	Notes
7.2.6	PDL is encouraged to continue to develop its documentation in relation to teaching and learning, with a view to articulating the principles and approaches underpinning the provider’s programme delivery.	<p>1.1.3 – Mission Statement</p> <p>4.2.4 – Tutor feedback and Email</p> <p>4.3 – Staff & Tutor Development</p> <p>5.0 – Teaching & Learning (entire section to 5.2.2 Trainer Performance)</p> <p>6.1.8 - Feedback to Learners (Formative & Summative)</p>	<p>PDL appreciates this advice from the Panel, and will continue to develop supporting documentation in relation to teaching and learning.</p> <p>Areas for development will be addressed as an agenda item during the next QRB meeting.</p>
7.2.7	PDL is encouraged to include QQI’s Statutory guidelines and GDPR legislation with the scope of responsibility of the documents manager listed within the QA Manual.	1.1.2.7 - Documents Manager (DM)	PD agrees with this advice and has updated the responsibilities of the documents manager accordingly.