QA procedures

OPTIMA TRAINING AND CONSULTING LTD | ARAS MUMHAN (MUNSTER GAA COUNCIL BUILDING), DUBLIN ROAD, LIMERICK

Contents

1.0 Governance and management of Quality

Optima Training and Consulting governance system has been established to ensure that it is governed and managed effectively, with clear and appropriate lines of accountability for each area of responsibility. A governance structure (Figure 01) is in place to ensure that there is adequate oversight of the financial and operational activities of the organisation and that all legal, policy and ethical requirements are complied with. Through the application of its governance structure, Optima Training and Consulting ensures that Quality Assurance and standards of academic oversight are in place and that decisions regarding admission, assessment and progression of any individual learner are maintained separate from those regarding financial and other commercial considerations.

Figure 1.1 Governance structure of Optima Training and Consulting Ltd

1.1 Job descriptions and responsibilities

All staff roles and responsibilities are designed to delegate authority to individuals to promote a culture of customer focus, personal responsibility, and process improvement. Each staff member has clearly designated tasks, with role objectives and KPIs, allowing managers to track performance at both individual and organisational levels though management reviews, stakeholder feedback, plus staff evaluation and appraisals. Figure 02 outlines the roles and structures in the delivery of training services. This service delivery structure provides clear reporting lines, with the Accreditation and Quality Manager playing a key role in overseeing relationships with learners and accreditation bodies, such as QQI.

Figure 1.2 Optima Training and Consulting Ltd Commercial Organisational Structure

1.1.1 Managing Director:

The Managing Director is responsible for controlling and directing Optima Training and Consulting and has overall responsibility for the management of Optima Training and Consulting ltd.

1.1.1.1 Responsibilities

- Provide leadership to Optima Training and Consulting,
- Ensure the effective implementation of policies and procedures,
- Implementing financial planning and financial management of the organisation to ensure that Optima Training and Consulting operates effectively and efficiently,
- Manage administrative staff,
- Provide oversight of Faculty member in collaboration with the Director of Health & Safety,
- Manage external relations and establish and maintain relations to maintain Optima Training and Consulting goals and objectives,
- Provide oversight of the sales, marketing, and public relations functions,
- Provide oversight for Optima Training and Consulting IT system

1.1.2 Director of Health & Safety:

The Director of Health & Safety is a Senior PHECC Instructor and has overall responsibility for the quality assurance of PHECC approved courses.

1.1.2.1 Responsibilities

- Content/course development and course leader for our PHECC courses
- PHECC course presentation development
- Policy development in relation to PHECC criteria
- Responsible for Site audits of programmes
- Recruitment of Faculty members
- Responsible for venue approval
- Faculty member approval

1.1.3 Quality & Accreditations Manager:

The Accreditation and Quality Manager performs the key administration function relating the quality assurance system.

1.1.3.1 Responsibilities

- Review and maintain quality assurance system.
- Engage with certification bodies to develop quality policies and procedures,
- Oversee quality assurance of process and procedures,
- Ensure all certification requirements are complied with,
- Conduct QA internal audits on procedures and paperwork relating to all training programmes,
- Assist with the completion of relevant tender documents as they arise to support portfolio managers,

- Responsible for venue approval
- Responsible for Site audits of programmes

1.1.4 PHECC Portfolio Co-Ordinator:

The PHECC Portfolio Co-Ordinator is a primary contact for learners and is responsible for the administration of PHECC programmes.

1.1.4.1 Responsibilities

- Ensure all PHECC related paperwork is processed correctly and in a timely manner,
- Ensures all Faculty member files are up to date with relevant certificates and up to date insurance,
- Processes certificates,
- Update of PHECC files on the system,
- Checks all assessments,
- Deals with any learner queries or complaints relating to certificates,

1.1.5 RESUS and IHF Co Ordinator:

The RESUS and IHF Coordinator is a primary contact for learners and is responsible for the administration of Heart Saver programmes.

1.1.5.1 Responsibilities

- Ensure all IHF related paperwork is processed correctly and in a timely manner,
- Ensures all Faculty member files are up to date with relevant certificates and up to date insurance,
- Processes certificates
- Update of IHF files on the system,
- Cross checks all assessments

1.1.6 Programme Director:

The Programme Director is a primary contact for learners and faculty member and is responsible for the administration of programmes under their remit.

1.1.1.1 Responsibilities

- Reviews main faculty member courses,
- Assists in document development and reviews,
- Assists on Internal verification of results,
- Assists on programme content development,
- Internal verification of programmes.

1.1.9 Health & Safety Representative:

Safety representative does not have any duties but do have an important function relating to the improvement of Optima Training and Consultation safety management system.

1.1.9.1 Responsibilities

- Consult and make representations to management on health and welfare matters relating to employees in Optima Training and Consulting

1.1.10 Office Manager:

The Office Manager is responsible for ensuring the smooth running of the office on a day-to-day basis by organising administrative duties and maintaining resources.

1.1.10.1 Responsibilities

- Supports company operations by maintaining office systems,
- Maintains office services by organizing office operations and procedures, controlling correspondence, designing filing systems, reviewing, approving supply requisitions, and assigning and monitoring clerical functions.
- Maintains office efficiency by planning and implementing office systems, layouts, and equipment procurement.
- Keeps management informed by reviewing and analysing special reports; summarizing information; identifying trends.
- Contributes to team effort by accomplishing related results as needed.

1.1.11 Accounts Manager:

The Accounts Manager oversees the preparation and examination of financial records.

1.1.11.1 Responsibilities

- Risk analysis and financial forecasting.
- Administering the company's payroll.
- Preparing business plans, financial statements, budgets, and reports.
- Controlling an organisation's income and expenditure.
- Liaising with colleagues, clients, and managerial staff.
- Analysis and investigation of monthly and annual financial reports.
- Development and management of financial systems and policies.

1.1.12 Administration Support:

Administrative support aids in the day-to-day running of the business by assisting with clerical and administrative processes.

1.1.12.1 Responsibilities

- Ensure contacts details and course details up to date.
- Ensure database is up to date,
- Assist with general administrative work, including organising course notes for healthcare trainers and preparing certificates, KPIs, etc. where needed.

1.1.13 Recruitment Manager:

Recruitment Manager is responsible for sourcing potential new hires.

1.1.13.1 Responsibilities

- Update current and design new recruiting procedures,
- Report on recruitment performance and metrics,
- Implement new sourcing methods,
- Research and choose job advertising options,
- Advise hiring managers on interviewing techniques,
- Recommend ways to improve Optima Training and Consulting brand,

- Coordinate with department managers to forecast future hiring needs,
- Stay up to date on relevant legislation and inform recruiters and managers about changes in regulations,
- Participate in job fairs and career events,
- Build the company's professional network through relationships with HR professionals, colleges, and other partners,
- Ensure faculty members meet the minimum education requirements.

1.1.14 Internal Verifier
Internal verifiers are responsible for ensuring that Optima and Training and Consulting assessment procedures were adhered to.

1.1.14.1 Responsibilities
- Confirm that Optima Training and Consulting assessment procedures were adhered to across the range of assessment activities from planning to finalising results,
- Ensure learning has been assessed using the techniques and instruments as indicated in the validated programme,
- Check the accuracy of assessment results to ensure learner evidence exists, and that results, and grades are correctly computed and recorded,
- Monitor assessment results,
- Produce an internal verification report (F018) outlining the outcome of the internal verification process.

1.1.15 External Authenticators
External Authenticators are responsible for confirming Optima and Training and Consulting assessment procedures are fair and consistent.

1.1.15.1 Responsibilities
- Confirm the fair and consistent assessment of learners consistent with the provider's procedures and with accrediting body's policy,
- Review internal verification report(s) and authenticate the findings/outcomes,
- Apply a sampling strategy to moderate assessment results,
- Visit Optima Training and Consulting with appropriate staff,
- Identify any issues/irregularities in relation to the Assessment Process,
- Recommend results for approval,
- Produce an external authentication report using the template provided by Optima Training and Consulting.

1.1.16 Faculty member
Faculty members are responsible for delivering programme content, coaching, tutoring, and assessing learners on all Optima Training and Consulting programmes in accordance with stated learning outcomes for individual modules and the overall programme outcomes.

1.1.16.1 Responsibilities
- Delivering teaching with a key focus on a learner-centred approach,
- Assessment of learners to ensure learning objectives have been fulfilled,
- Contribute to the development, planning, and implementation of programme,

- Grading of assessments,
- Provide support to learners,
- Liaise with administration, management and other staff involved in the programme,
- Participate in programme reviews and meetings as needed by Optima Training and Consulting,
- Ensure Quality Assurance during the delivery of a programme.
- Ensure assignments and results are accurately reported and submitted in a timely manner.
- Adhere to Optima Training and Consulting quality standards and procedure,
- Ensure insurance certification is up to date,
- Ensure CPD record is up to date,

1.1.16.2 Faculty QA Workflow

Notified
- Adhere to Optima Training and Consulting quality standards and procedure
- Participate in programme reviews and other meetings as needed by Optima Training and Consulting

Pre Programme checks
- Check training pack to ensure all paperwork/documents required to complete the programme is available

Delivering Programme
- Deliver teaching with a key focus on a student-centred approach
- Delivery training with programme outline
- Always appear professional in dress and manner
- Provide support to learners
- ensure learning objectives have be fulfilled
- Liaise with administration, management and other staff involved in the programme if there are any issues

Assessment of learners
- Communicate assessment requirements to learners as per learner and programme brochures and handbooks
- Assess learners to ensure learning objectives have be fulfilled
- Note and report possible cases of plagiarism or breach of assessment regulations with respect to assessment

Feedback to Learners
- Provide mentoring and guidance to learners completing assessments and provide on-going feedback in a timely and formative manner
- Track, monitor and record learner progress

Grade Assessments
- Grade learner assessment in accordance with agreed marking schemes and regulations

Complete paperwork
- Ensure accurate recording and completion of paperwork including learner feedback sheets, and end of programme reports
- Ensure paperwork is secure at all times inline with GDPR requirements

Submit Results
- Ensure assignments and results are accurately reported and submitted in a timely manner

1.2 Quality Assurance:

1.2.1 Quality assurance committee

Optima Training and Consulting have developed a Quality Assurance Committee system that ensures that procedures implemented are consistent, fair, and clear. The Optima Training and Consulting Quality Assurance Committee ensures Optima Training and consulting commitment to quality assurance.
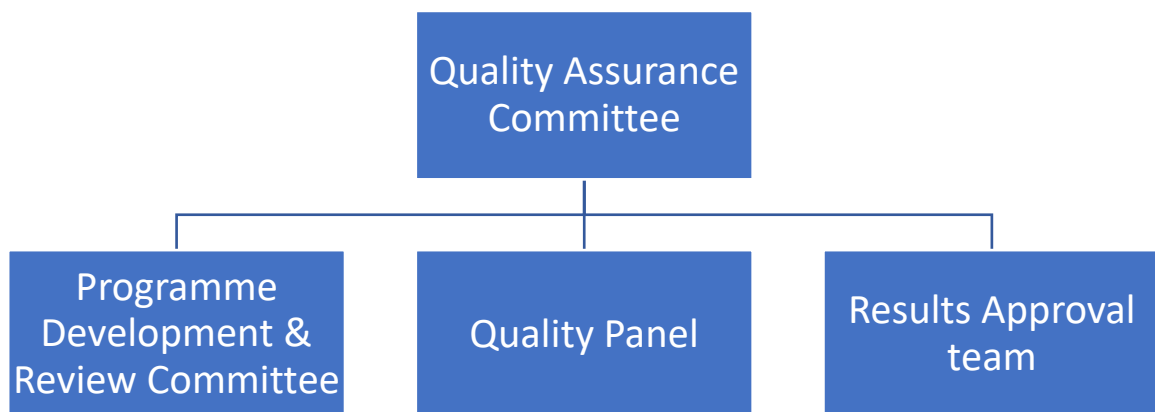
Figure 1.3 Optima Training and Consulting Quality Assurance structure

1.2.1.1 Role and terms of reference of Quality Assurance Committee

- Contribute to policy development and implementation,
- Provide Subject Matter expertise,
- New programme proposal approval,
- Review report documents such as self-evaluation, monitoring, external authentication reports etc,
- Review reports/recommendations from any sub committees,
- Review and approve Quality Assurance Guidelines,
- Review annual programme reviews and feedback from awarding bodies and make recommendations,
- Review cases of any academic misconduct/plagiarism,
- Review relevant reports from external bodies and authenticators,
- Review appeals of examination and assessment grades,
- Review and approve decisions relating to learner appeals, assessment malpractice, complaints etc,
- Review complaints
- Review statistics/trends in relation to KPIs
- Approve validation applications before submission to QQI,

- Monitoring and review of operational activities.

1.2.1.2 Membership of Quality Assurance Committee

External Education expert

Internal authenticator

External authenticator

Accreditation and Quality Manager

Faculty members from each area of training.

Learner representative (past participant) (there may be occasions where the learner representative will have to absent themselves from committee meetings for certain agenda items).

Secretary (take minutes)

Recruitment Manager

1.2.1.3 Structure of Meetings

Meetings will be scheduled twice a year or more frequently as required. An agenda will be sent out to all committee members 2 weeks in advance accompanied by previous meetings minutes and any other documents relevant to the meeting. A quorum of 5 is needed to make any decisions.

Sub-committees or visitors may be invited for that period relevant to them only. Minutes of the meeting will be given to the Chairperson within one week of the meeting. Once approved by the chairperson they will be circulated to all committee members. The Accreditation and Quality Manager will report back to the relevant committees or employees.

 All recommendations will be recorded, with actions assigned accompanied by timelines.

1.2.2 Programme Development & Review Committee

 The Programme Review Committee is concerned with the quality, standards, and monitoring of QQI and PHECC courses delivered by Optima Training and Consulting. They are responsible for the oversight of all QQI and PHECC programmes. The Programme development & review Committee will periodically review programmes to maintain standards and ensure compliance and make recommendations to enhance and improve the programmes to ensure they are fit for purpose. The Programme development & review Committee will assist in the development of new programmes. This committee is a sub-committee for the Quality Assurance Committee.

1.2.2.1 Role and terms of reference of Programme Development & Review Committee

- Provide advice, support, and guidance to management and faculty member on the development and delivery of programmes,
- To ensure all programmes are being delivered in line with QQI Core Guidelines and PHECC guidelines,
- To ensure all programmes are being delivered within scope of Optima Training and Consulting QQI Certificate of Validation and PHECC guidelines,
- To report back and advise the Quality Assurance Committee on the delivery of existing programmes,

- To make recommendations for programme continuous improvement and to ensure they are fit for purpose,
- Provide expert advice to the Quality Assurance Committee,
- Participate in scheduled self-assessments and programme review cycles,
- Review recommendations from the Quality Assurance Committee and ensure that responses from programme evaluations are being implemented,
- Review and report/make recommendations on thematic programme policy papers received from QQI and PHECC as they arise,
- Review the programme development in the context of updated requirements from clients, industry, and professional bodies,
- Evaluate feedback mechanisms for faculty member and learners and the processes for acting on this feedback,
- Evaluate the physical facilities and resources provided for the delivery of training programmes,
- Review any research activities and their impact on teaching and learning.
- Assist in the development of new programmes

1.2.2.2 Membership of Programme Development & Review Committee

Accreditation and Quality Manager

Programme Director

Programme administrator

Faculty member Representatives (when required)

Client Representatives (when required)

Learner Representatives (when required)

1.2.2.3 Structure of Meetings

The committee will meet twice a year or more frequently as required. An agenda will be sent out to all committee members 2 weeks in advance accompanied by previous meetings and any other documents needed for review or discussion at the meeting. Members of the committee can make amendments to the agenda at this point (min 1 week in advance of meeting). Minutes of the meeting will be given to the Chairperson within one week of the meeting. Once approved by the chairperson they will be circulated to all committee members.

The chair of the Programme Review Committee will prepare a report for the Quality Assurance Committee. Items for review or items that require further consideration will be flagged as agenda items for the next Quality Assurance Committee meeting.

1.2.3 Quality Panel

The role of the Quality Panel is to ensure all quality standards are adhered to in relation to QQI and PHECC programmes. They panel ensure that all procedures in relation to certifying body validation are adhered to and meet the required specifications.

1.2.3.1 Role and terms of reference of Quality Panel

They are responsible for:

- Updating all relevant stakeholders in relation to programme development, delivery, and assessment,
- Updating and following the agreed Quality Assurance Manual,
- Providing advice, support, guidance, and training to Optima Training and Consulting, management, and faculty members in quality assurance practices,
- Confirming that all quality assurance guidelines in relation to QQI and PHECC are being applied and implemented in practice,
- Ensuring compliance and monitoring effectiveness at all stages of the learner journey with Optima Training and Consulting,
- Monitoring statistics on learner enrolments, retention, completion, and progression, and capturing on the information management system,
- Reviewing and approving suggestions or amendments by the QAC and programme management committee,
- Reviewing (at regular intervals) compliance on active courses and programmes,
- Approving any minor updates to the QA or QA process.

The panel will ensure that any changes or decisions on Quality are within the scope of their remit. Any large or significant changes are brought forward by the Quality Assurance Manager to the Quality Assurance Committee for approval.

1.2.3.2 Membership of Quality Panel
The Quality Panel will consist of the

- Accreditation and Quality Manager
- Programme Director and
- any other relevant administrative staff.

1.2.3.3 Structure of Quality Panel Meetings
The panel will meet at least once every two months. Additional meetings can be held if required. The chairperson will document minutes from each meeting and distribute to all participants. The Quality Manager is responsible for documenting and presenting any items that need to be brought to the Quality Assurance Committee for guidance, support, or approval.

1.2.4 Results approval Panel
The purpose of the results approval panel is to confirm that assessment of learner evidence and authentication of assessment results has been carried out in line with the Optima Training and consulting quality assurance process. This panel is a sub-committee of the Quality Assurance Committee. The results approval panel shall meet prior to each submission period for QQI and every two months for PHECC programmes.

1.2.4.1 Role and terms of reference of Results Approval Panel
- To meet and review and approve assessment results,
- To ensure that the results approval process has been followed and all the required documentation is in place,
- Review all relevant internal verifications reports and external authentication reports,
- Sign off on approved results,

- Identify any issues arising in relation to the results and make recommendations for corrective action,
- Meet with Quality Assurance Committee if requested as a sub panel,
- Complete report which can be use as part of self-evaluation process and internal monitoring process.
- Assessment procedures are observed.
- To ensure there is consistency amongst Faculty members,
- To ensure correct application of administrative procedures,
- To check all applicable evidence is available,
- To note any irregularities and report to the Accreditation and Quality Manager,
- To review all relevant reports and make recommendations to Accreditation and Quality Manager,
- Review benchmarking of Optima Training & Consulting Ltd assessment outcomes in relation to national standards.

1.2.4.2 Membership of Results Approval Panel

The panel will be comprised of the following:

- Accreditation and Quality Manager
- Relevant programme Director
- Relevant programme Administration

All panel members will be instructed to carry out their duties without bias. Their decision is to be based on the evidence presented to them only. A note taker to be assigned and a report to be prepared and signed off by all members of the panel. If the panel does not agree, it will be brought to the Quality Assurance Committee. However, panel members are advised that every reasonable attempt to agree should be sought. All evidence/documentation should be returned to the chair at the end of the meeting and securely disposed of.

1.2.4.3 Structure of Results Approval Panel

Accreditation and Quality Manager as chair calls a meeting. The panel discusses each module's results and focusses on areas of concern and areas of good practice. The panel will consider the evidence and approve/sign off on the results. All decision to be recorded in RAP minutes which are to be distributed to all panel members within 1 week. The Chair is responsible for ensuring any issues are recorded in Non-Conformance Log and for bringing to the attention of the Quality Assurance Committee.

1.2.5 Management of Quality Assurance

1.2.5.1 Embedding a quality culture

Optima Training and Consulting is committed to the development of a quality culture that embraces the importance of continuous improvement and quality assurance. Optima Training and Consulting recognises our obligations to provide a quality service to meet the needs of all our stakeholders. To achieve this, Optima Training and Consulting is committed to the following:

- Comply with all legal and statutory requirements and awarding body guidelines,
- Establish and follow a comprehensive Quality Assurance System,

- Monitor and review Quality to ensure its relevance and effectiveness,
- Identifying areas for improvement and enact change,
- Communicate the importance of quality throughout the organisation and provide guidance and supports where required,
- Provide training to ensure we can operate our quality policies and procedures for best practice,
- Recruit and develop staff so as they have the skills required to provide the highest quality service.

Key stages in quality analysis and improvement planning:

- Collect, analyse, and utilise feedback from learners for evaluation purposes
- Collect, analyse, and utilise feedback from tutors for programme evaluation and needs requirements
- Collect, analyse, and utilise feedback from industry to ensure that learning outcomes are meeting industry requirements
- Collect and analyse information on learner participation, success rates and progression, non-completion rates for learner benchmarking
- Monitor and review tutor performance by way of observations, feedback and CPD
- Review all learning resources as required and enhance access to online systems
- Conduct quality reviews of policies and procedures in line with organisational needs and accreditation bodies
- Internal verification and external authentication
- External audits, including Educational Standards
- Self-evaluation and quality improvement planning

1.2.6 Monitoring the effectiveness of the QA system

1.2.6.1 Internal audits

Internal audits are carried out across each operational area at least once a year but may be carried out at a greater frequency depending on requirements and possible gaps identified. Where gaps are noted in the audit, improvement plans will be constructed and circulated to the relevant staff.

An internal audit schedule will be agreed at the start of each year and will specify the areas and or processes to be audited, the auditor, the audit criteria, and scope of the audit.

All Evaluation tools will be utilised during audits, these will include but not limited to:

- Learner evaluation forms and other communications.
- Faculty member evaluations
- End of programme reports
- Programme reviews
- IV/ EA/RAP reports
- Previous audit results.
- Improvement plans
- Awarding body criteria and correspondence

The Accreditation and Quality Manager will ensure that all those involved in the audit are independent of the area/process being audited. Where a gap or issue is identified it will be noted on the non-conformance logs. Information gathered on the non-conformance log will include:

- Details of the issue,
- How the non-conformance was found,
- The root cause of the non-conformance,
- The corrective actions to be put in place,
- The person responsible for the corrective action,
- A completion date is assigned to the corrective action,
- The name of person that has verified that the corrective action has been completed.

A summary internal audit report will be completed by the internal auditor outlining any strengths and areas for improvement. Copies of internal audit reports together with any checklists and/or notes used by the auditor during the audit will be retained and used for reference in next audits. A record will be retained to show that an audit has been carried out, even there are no non-conformances. Internal audit reports are to be maintained for a period of three years.

1.2.7 Management of risk

Optima Training and Consulting have put in place a risk management system to support the operational governance of Optima Training and Consulting. Risk management provides a methodology for identifying, assessing, and mitigation potential risks. It also provides a methodology for ensuring risks are assessed and managed correctly.

1.2.7.1 Risk analysis

Optima Training and Consulting have completed a full risk assessment of the business taking into consideration the context (internal and external factors and conditions) of the organisation, along with the relevant requirements of their interested parties and how this may impact on the company's Quality Management System. The results of the risk assessments have been documented within the company business Risk Register (F022). The Risk Register is a live document that outlines the potential threats to the ongoing operation of the organisation, and what mitigation measures are in place to minimise the likely occurrence of these threats.

1.2.7.2 Risk assessment and risk matrix

Each risk identified shall be place into a category. A risk owner is assigned to each category to manage the current controls and implement any addition mitigation actions that may be required. The categories include:

QMS plan/change,   QMS support,

Clients,   Opportunities,

External Providers,   Interested parties,

Operations plan,   Weather,

QMS process,   Maintenance,

Regulatory,	Training design,

Brexit,   Human Resources.

Covid-19,

Each category risk rating is assessed based on the probability/likelihood of the risk occurring and the severity that the risk would have on Optima Training and Consulting if the risk were to happen.

The probability/likelihood of the event occurring is on a scale from 1 to 5, with one being the event is rare and five being the event is almost certain to happen.

Probability/likelihood	Rating	Definition
Rare	1	Extremely rare to happen
Unlikely	2	Unlikely to happen
Possible	3	Likely to happen
Probable	4	Will happen
Almost certain	5	Expected to happen

The severity of risk is the impact the event would have if it occurred. The severity of risk is on a scale from 1 to 5, with one having no impact on the business and five having a catastrophic impact on the business.

Severity of risk	Rating	Definition
Negligible	1	No impact on business
Minor	2	Minor impact on the business
Moderate	3	Recoverable impact on the business
Critical	4	Serious impact on the business
Catastrophic	5	Serious impact- system lost, damage to building

The risk rating is calculated by multiplying the probability of the event occurring by the severity of the event would have on the business if the event occurred.

The risk rating is calculated below using the risk matrix. The risk matrix is coloured coded to enable employees a quick method of prioritising risks. A hazard that has a risk rating that is red (15 to 25), should be prioritised and mitigation factors should be implemented to lower the risk rating. A hazard that has a risk rating that is yellow (5 to 12), should be prioritised next and mitigation factors should be implemented to lower the risk rating. A hazard that has a green risk rating, is a hazard with the lowest risk associated with it. The hazard may still require mitigation to be implemented.

	Negligible	Minor	Moderate	Critical	Catastrophic
Rare	1	2	3	4	5
Unlikely	2	4	6	8	10

Possible	3	6	9	12	15
Probable	4	8	12	16	20
Almost certain	5	10	15	20	25

1.2.7.3 Risk mitigation and management

Risk mitigation is the introduction of controls, policies, and procedures that will reduce the risk rating of a hazard. All risks shall be tracked and maintained using the live risk register. The Risk owner shall manage the current controls and implement any addition mitigation actions that may be required. The risk register shall be reviewed during the annually or where there has been a change in policies, procedures, and controls.

1.3 Dignity at work policy

Optima Training and Consulting recognises the right of all employees to be treated with dignity and respect. Optima Training and Consulting is committed to ensuring that all employees, faculty member, learners have a safe working and learning environment that is free from all forms of bullying, sexual harassment, and harassment. All employees, faculty member, and learners are expected to comply with this policy, Optima Training and Consulting will take appropriate measures to ensure that any bullying and/or harassment does not occur. Any employee, faculty member, or learner that violates this policy will be subjected to appropriate disciplinary action.

1.3.1 Bullying

Bullying at work has been defined as "repeated inappropriate behaviour, direct or indirect, whether verbal, physical or otherwise, conducted by one or more persons against another or others, at the place of work and/or in the course of employment that could reasonably be regarded as undermining the individual's right to dignity at work".

Bullying does not include*:

- Expressing differences of opinion strongly,
- Offering constructive feedback, guidance, or advice about work-related behaviour, which is not of itself welcome,
- Ordinary performance management,
- Reasonable corrective action taken by an employer or supervisor relating to the management and direction of employees (for example managing a worker's performance, taking reasonable disciplinary actions, or assigning work), or
- Workplace conflict where people disagree with or disregard the others' point of view.

* This list is not exhaustive

1.3.2 Harassment

Harassment is any form of unwanted conduct, related to an individual's gender, civil or family status, sexual orientation, religion, age, disability, race, or membership of the travelling community which has the purpose or effect of violating a person's dignity and creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for the person. The unwanted conduct may consist

of acts, requests, spoken words, gestures, or the production, display or circulation of written words, pictures, or other material.

1.3.3 Sexual harassment

Sexual harassment is any form of verbal, non-verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature which has the purpose or effect of violating a person's dignity and creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for the person. The unwanted conduct may consist of acts, requests, spoken words, gestures, or the production, display or circulation of written words, pictures, or other material.

1.3.4 Preventative measures

Bullying and harassment can be prevented by using the following:

- Promotion and reinforcement of a positive workplace culture.
- Effective Anti-Bullying policies developed, used, and promoted regarding improper and proper behaviours.
- Widespread policy awareness.
- Appropriate training as required for those managing complaints and for line management.
- Contact Person/appropriate advisory support services available, where possible.
- Clear roles and goals for all

1.3.5 Contact person role

The role of the Contact Person is to act as a first step for anyone enquiring about a possible bullying case. The Contact Person role shall be a supportive one- to listen, offer guidance, and information on options in line with Optima Training and Consulting policy and procedure, all on a strictly confidential basis. The Contact Person shall have no role in the investigation of any complaints and will not be tasked with any further involvement in the details or right and wrongs of a complaint.

1.3.6 Procedure

Should an employee, faculty member, or learner experience unwanted conduct, they are encouraged to raise the issue so that it can eb resolved as quickly as possible.

1..3.1.1 Primary Informal procedure

It is often preferable for all concerned that complaints of bullying or harassment are dealt with informally whenever possible, as often the perpetrator may not be aware that their behaviour is disrespectful or unwelcome or undermining and/or causing distress. This is likely to produce solutions that are speedy, effective and minimise embarrassment and the risk of breaching confidentiality.

- In the first instance, the unacceptable behaviour/acts should be raised by the target employee (the person who feels bullied) with the person involved but only if they feel comfortable in doing so. This should be done quickly and calmly, focusing on the facts regarding acts done and their consequences.
- If it is more suitable, the individual who perceives that they are the recipient of unacceptable behaviour should put their concerns in writing, again focusing on the offending acts and their effects on them.

- Where an employee perceives that the concerns relate to an immediate manager, the employee may wish to discuss the matter informally with their manager's manager or a person at the next level of management.
- The employee may wish to avail of the support of a Contact Person, where applicable, for guidance and to get a copy of the Anti-Bullying Policy document.
- The focus of the above is to seek to resolve the matter informally by agreement without recourse to any other step. An informal discussion is often sufficient to alert the person concerned to the effects of the behaviour alleged and can lead to a greater understanding and an agreement that the behaviour will stop. It can also lead to an explanation of the original intention of the behaviour and/or an agreement to modify the behaviour. On the other hand, it may be that the behaviour is valid and reasonable, and the reaction of the offended party is at odds with the generally accepted understanding of the behaviour.

A written record of the matter shall be kept, the record shall include the agreed outcomes and dates noted by the person responsible for managing the complaint. All records shall be kept in line with relevant data protection legislation.

If the above informal process is not successful, or the complainant or Optima Training and Consulting deem it inappropriate for the seriousness of the issues, then the below secondary informal system can be put in place.

1.3.1.2 Secondary informal system

- Optima Training and Consulting may nominate a separate person who has had appropriate training and experience and who is familiar with the procedures involved to deal with the complaint on behalf of the organisation. The nominated person may be a supervisor/manager or someone in authority within the organisation. For each complaint that arises, the nominated person shall be assigned to deal with that case. Effective guidance and training shall be in place for those who are engaged at this level with the process.
- The complaint may be verbal or written. If verbal, a written note of what is being complained about shall be taken by the nominated person and a copy given to the complainant.
- This nominated person, managing the complaint, shall then establish the facts, the context and then the next course of action in dealing with the matter under the informal procedure.
- If the complaint concerns alleged bullying as defined and includes concrete examples of inappropriate behaviour, the person complained against shall be presented with the complaint and their response established.
- Thereafter a method shall be agreed to progress the issue to resolution so that both parties can return to a harmonious working environment without bullying being a factor.
- If the behaviour complained about does not concern alleged bullying as defined, an alternative approach should be put in place and a rationale recorded. If there are no concrete examples given, it must be deemed that there is no complaint to be answered by the person complained about as they have no recourse to rebutting an accusation that does not give any specifics.
- Line managers should be kept informed, as appropriate, about the process in train.
- Steps to stop the bullying behaviour, where it has been partly or fully identified, and monitoring of the situation along specified lines shall be implemented with both parties. This

- may involve a direct or indirect approach and possible resolution through a programme to change behaviour. It may also involve mediation by an agreed mediator who is practised in dealing with alleged bullying at work.
- Enough time needs to be allowed for the mediation or on-going monitoring process to be successful and behaviour change to be realistically achieved over the longer term. It may be necessary to consider if other working arrangements are required or feasible during this short-term phase. A proposal should be made, considered, and an action and time frame established, signed, and dated, preferably by both parties.
- The nominated person who was responsible for managing the complaint shall keep a nominal record of all stages; the complaint, the first meeting, action agreed and signed records of the final meeting. The purpose of the records, which do not include the detail of discussions, is to provide evidence of the complaint having been met with an organisational response and attempt at resolution. Records should be kept in accordance with relevant Data Protection Legislation (section 2(1) governing Retention), within an agreed human resources system and be available only to that legislation.
- Information disclosed during mediation must remain within the mediation process and must not be given by the mediator to anyone or to an investigator if there is a subsequent investigation at formal stage.
- Confidentiality is crucial for this stage to be effective and breaches of confidentiality, where exposed, should be met with sanctions highlighted in advance.

1.3.6.3 Formal procedure

An employee, Faculty member or learner may decide, for whatever reason, to bypass the informal procedure. It is recognised that it may not always be practical to use the informal procedure; particularly where the bullying or harassment is serious, or where the people involved are at different levels in Optima Training and Consulting. In such instances the employee, faculty member, or learner should use the formal mechanism set out below.

If the informal procedure is not appropriate, or if the issue has not been successfully resolved, the following procedure should be followed:

The complainant should make a formal complaint in writing that should be signed and dated. Where this is not possible, a written record shall be taken of the complaint by the assigned person and signed by the complainant and dated.

The complaint shall be confined to precise details of alleged incidents of bullying, including their dates, and names of witnesses, where possible.

The complainant and the respondent shall be advised of the aims and objectives of the formal process, the procedures and approximate ideal timeframe involved, and the possible outcomes. Both parties should be assured of support as required throughout the process.

An initial meeting shall be organised at which each person is met with separately, starting with the person making the allegation. The other party, when met with, shall be given a copy of the complaint in full, and both should be given any relevant documents including the company's Anti Bullying Policy. A work colleague or employee/trade union representative (provided the person has representation in line with the principles of natural justice and fair procedure) may accompany the complainant and the person complained of, if so desired.

The investigation shall be governed by terms of reference which shall include the following:

- The investigation will be conducted in accordance with the Optima Training and Consulting Anti Bullying Policy which should reflect this Code of Practice.
- An indicative timescale for its completion – this timeframe shall be proposed, and its rationale explained.
- The scope of the investigation, sets out the procedure to be adopted for findings of fact related to the complaint and a statement that the investigator will consider, based on the facts before them whether the behaviour(s) complained about, on the balance of probabilities, have occurred.
- The confidentiality of the process should be emphasised to all concerned.
- All parties to the process have a responsibility to participate without undue delay in any investigation initiated in response to an allegation of bullying.

The scope of the investigation will indicate that the investigator will decide, based on the facts before them, whether the behaviour complained about may, on the balance of probabilities, have occurred. The investigator shall not uphold or dismiss the allegations and/or suggest or impose sanctions.

Statements from all parties, including witnesses, shall be recorded in writing. Copies of the record of their statements should be given to those who make statements to the investigator. Copies should also be provided to the complainant and the person complained about and should result in findings of fact only.

If possible, all parties should continue to work normally during the investigation.

The objective of an investigation is to ascertain whether, on the balance of probabilities, the behaviours complained about occurred, it has already been established that the behaviours come within the description of workplace bullying.

Details of the complaint, responses of the person complained of, witness statements, and other relevant evidence are relied on for this purpose.

The investigation should be conducted by either a designated member(s) of management or, if necessary, an independent third party. In either case, the person nominated should have appropriate training and experience and be familiar with the procedures involved. The investigation should be conducted thoroughly, objectively, with sensitivity, utmost confidentiality, and with due respect for the rights of both the complainant and the person complained of.

The investigator should meet with the complainant, the person complained about, and any witnesses or relevant persons on an individual confidential basis with a view to establishing the facts.

The investigation will consider all material and evidence before it and a decision will be made on balance of probability, as to whether the complaint is valid. If the investigator concludes that the accused employee has a case to answer, on the balance of probability, then the investigator may recommend whether the employer should invoke the Disciplinary Procedure or not.

1.3.6.4 Conclusion of formal and informal complaint

Optima Training and Consulting shall decide, considering the investigator's report and the findings of fact therein, what action is to be taken arising from that report. Optima Training and Consulting shall then, in writing, inform both the complainant and the person complained against, of the next steps. At the end of the formal process, documentation shall be kept by Optima Training and Consulting, in line with the relevant Data Protection Legislation.

Where a complaint is upheld, the disciplinary policy will be implemented. Should a case of bullying or harassment be proven, Optima Training and Consulting will take the appropriate disciplinary action which will be in line with Optima Training and Consulting Disciplinary Policy. Such an action can include a warning, transfer, demotion, or other appropriate action up to and including dismissal or termination of contract. Records of any warnings for bullying and/or harassment will remain in the employee, faculty member or learner's file and will be used in determining disciplinary action to be taken if any further offences of the same or similar nature occur in the future.

1.3.7 Observation of bullying or harassment

If bullying and/or harassment is observed to be taking place, it shall be brought to the attention of management.

1.3.8 Malicious complaints

Where a complaint regarding bullying or harassment is found to be false and/or maliciously motivated, disciplinary action up to and including dismissal may be imposed (or termination of contract) on the person that gave the false and/or malicious complaint.

1.3.9 Confidentiality

All persons involved in the procedures described above shall be required to always maintain confidentiality.

1.3.10 Appeal procedure

Where an employee feels that action taken under this procedure is unjustified or unfair, they shall have the right of appeal. All appeals must be made, in writing, within 5 working days to the Managing Director stating the basis of the appeal. Appeal hearings will be held within 14 days of receipt of appeal. Any disciplinary action will stand until and unless the outcome of the appeal overturns the disciplinary action.

If desired, at the Appeal Hearing the employee concerned shall have the right to be accompanied by a fellow employee or other approved person of their choice.

Where it is not appropriate or possible to involve any other person named above in conducting the procedure, another person may be substituted by Optima Training and Consulting for that person, as is appropriate in the circumstances.

The result of the Appeal Hearing shall be notified to the employee/faculty member/learner within 5 working days of the hearing, in writing.

This decision will end the appeals procedure.

2.0 Quality Assurance

The Optima Training and Consulting is a learner centred organisation which recognises the importance of quality and continuous quality improvement through all our areas of practice Our delivery of high-quality learning programmes is achieved through participation from all stakeholders in quality monitoring and improvement process. We have developed policies and procedures for each area identified by awarding bodies, such as:

- Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI)
- Pre-Hospital emergency Council (PHECC)
- Irish Heart Foundation

Senior management of Optima Training and Consulting have defined, documented, and approved a quality management system that:

- Is appropriate to the needs of the organisation and of learners,
- Includes a commitment to the continual quality improvement and maintaining high standards,
- Provides a detailed description of all processes & procedures associated with educational activities - Provides a framework for reviewing quality objectives,
- Communicated quality systems across all levels of the organisation,
- Monitored and reviewed for continued suitability and application.

2.1 Quality Assurance Principles
All Tutors will be appropriately qualified and have relevant industry experience.

- Our entire team will be available to provide support to learners.
- We will seek to listen to all stakeholders and act on Evaluation.
- We are committed to honesty, openness, and transparency.
- That Quality Assurance is implemented throughout the organisation and is systematically monitored and reviewed on an annual basis, being updated where necessary, or due to changes in Educational Standards.

2.2 Purpose of Quality Management System
The quality management system is in place to provide staff, learners, faculty members, and contractors with a comprehensive quality system that guides the day-to-day activities associated of educational activities within our learning environment.

2.3 Optima Training and Consulting Quality System
Optima Training and Consulting has a documented Quality Assurance System and are committed to providing all learners with training programmes of the highest quality that comply with all legal, statutory, and awarding body requirements.

2.4 Monitoring and Review

The Accreditation and Quality Manager will provide ongoing monitoring of quality and assist in the assurance of all elements of the organisation in its educational activities. Learner Evaluation forms and Faculty member Reports will be analysed after each module/programme.

Internal audits will be conducted and reviewed at quality assurance committee meetings. Recommendations for changes to any procedures through the evaluation processes will be reviewed at the quality panel and quality assurance committee meetings. Any changes required will be reported to Accreditation and Quality Manager and quality assurance committee for approval. External evaluation of Quality by an external authenticator will be conducted on regular basis and all reports reviewed and communicated to all core staff. The Accreditation and Quality Manager will provide oversight of all documentation associated with Quality system and ensure sufficient resources are available for its effective implementation, review, and auditing.

2.5 Documenting learner entry to exit
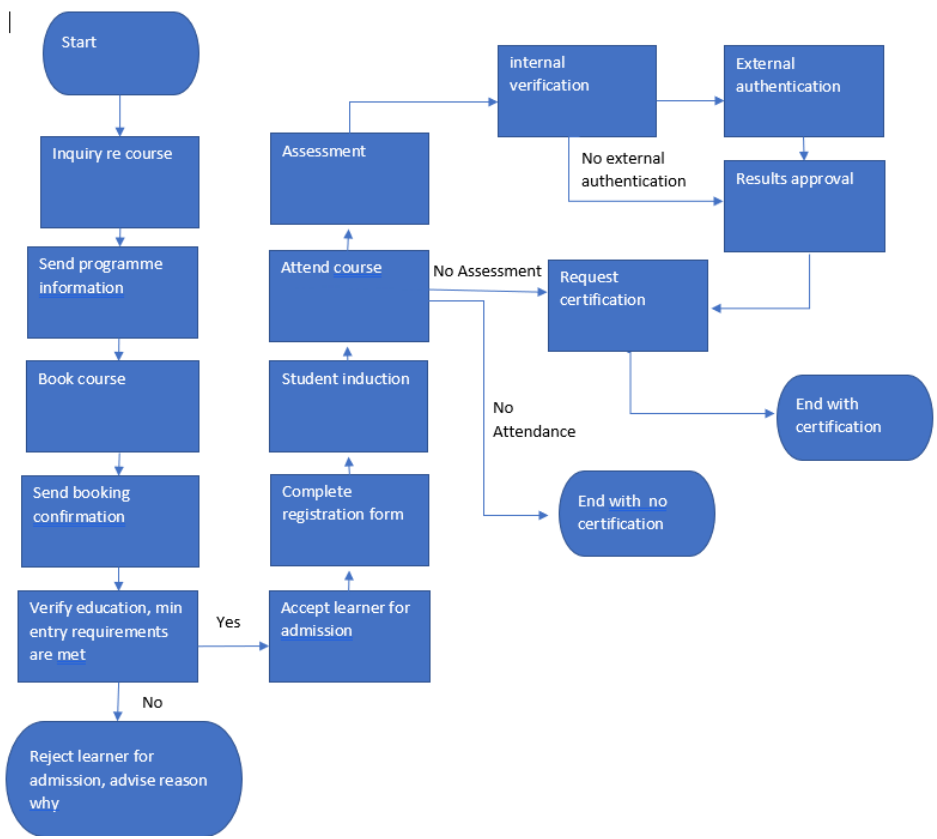
Figure 2.3 Learner entry to exit overview

3.0 Programme of Education and Training

All programmes developed shall have a balance between theory and practice, this balance shall be detailed in the delivery section of the new programme development application form. The proposed

new programme is required to be approved through all stages of the new programme procedure. This is to ensure that the proposed programme meets all quality assurance standards, is viable, fit for purpose, and in lines with Optima Training and Consulting strategic and educational goals and core beliefs.

3.1 New programme:

Figure 3.4 Overview of new programme development

3.2 Stage 1: Identification of new programme

Using learner feedback and engaging with external stakeholders allows Optima Training and Consulting the ability to identify knowledge and skills gaps and inform practice. These gaps in knowledge and skills can lead to the development of new programmes.

3.3 Stage 2: Initial review

Once a gap in knowledge and skill has been identified, a proposed programme is required to undergo a programme approval process. All new programmes require F010 (New programme development approval) to be completed. Section 1: Initial review is to be completed by the relevant programme director before it is reviewed by Programme Development & Review Committee.

A training needs analysis (TNA) (F019) should be attached to new programme development form (F010)

3.4 Stage 3: Programme development and review committee

Once the proposed programme has been reviewed by the relevant programme director, the proposed programme shall be reviewed the programme development and review committee. The programme development and review committee shall meet and complete section 2 of the new programme development form (F010). The programme development and review committee shall forward the new programme development form (F010) to the quality assurance committee for final approval. A lesson plan should be attached along with TNA to the New programme development form (F010).

3.5 Stage 4: Quality Assurance Committee (QAC)

The QAC shall review the section 1 and section 2 of the new programme development form (F010) including any additional attachments. The QAC shall complete section 3 of the new programme development form (F010). The outcome of the QAC review shall be one of the following:

- Approve (no validation required)
- Approve (validation required)
- Approve (no validation required, application form to approved body only)
- Approval with minor changes
- No approval

If a programme is approved by the Quality Assurance Committee and does not require review by an independent approval body, it can move straight to programme launch.

If a programme is approved by the QAC and requires validation e.g., QQI, an independent evaluation shall be sought.

If a programme is approved by the QAC and requires no validation but requires an application to an approval body, an application to the approval body will be completed e.g., PHECC.

If a programme is approved by the QAC with minor changes, the recommended changes shall be made. An update shall be sent to the QAC for the programme to be reviewed at the next QAC meeting.

If the programme is not approved, the QAC shall provide a reason for the programme not being approved. The reason shall be reviewed by the programme development and review committee. The

programme development and review committee shall decide to either review and resubmit to the QAC or decide to not go ahead with the programme.

3.6 Stage 5: Independent Evaluation Report

QQI- An independent evaluation is required by QQI prior to submission of an application. If the independent evaluation approves the programme for further processing, then an application to the approval body shall be made. If the independent evaluation does not approve the programme for further processing, the independent evaluation report shall be sent to the QAC for review. The QAC shall reassess the programme considering the independent evaluation report.

3.7 Stage 6: Application for approval

QQI- Once the independent evaluation has been completed and approves the programme, an application to QQI shall be made. If the application is successful, the programme shall be launched. If the application is not successful, the programme along with associated reports from QQI shall be reassessed by the QAC.

PHECC- Once the QAC approves of the programme, an application to PHECC shall be made. If the application is successful, the programme shall be launched. If the application is not successful, the programme along with associated reports from PHECC shall be reassessed by the QAC.

3.8 Stage 7: Programme launch

Once the programme has completed all relevant stages successful, it shall be launched. Marketing information will be completed, Optima Training and consulting website will be updated to include the new programme. Faculty member workshops shall be completed to ensure all that faculty members involved in the programme are aware of the requirements of the programme prior to the first run of the programme.

3.9 Review and monitoring of existing programme:

All programmes shall be reviewed annually. The programmes shall be reviewed for any updates from the regulator. The following documents will be reviewed to inform programme practice:

- Course reports
- Lesson plans
- Learner feedback
- Faculty member feedback
- Programme Evaluations
- Programme design

The output from the review shall be full approval, approval with minor changes, or no approval (major changes are required).

Minor changes can include but are not limited to:

- Changes to the content that do not have impact on the programme learning outcomes.
- A change in the assessment method provided that the assessment is still consistent with the approved programme design.
- Other minor changes that have an impact on the aims, objectives, or programme outcomes.

Major changes can include but are not limited to:

- Change in programme title.
- Change to approved learning outcomes.
- Change to aims, objectives, or programme outcomes.

If a programme is not approved and major changes are required, the programme shall be required go through the new programme development process.

3.10 Update to programme from approval body (PHECC, QQI)

If an update from an external regulator has been identified, the relevant programme shall be reviewed at the next programme development and review meeting. If the update is required to be implemented immediately, an emergency programme development and review meeting shall be called, and the review of programme procedure shall be followed.

3.11 Promotional material

Any promotional material developed for a programme shall be in line with Optima Training and Consulting strategic and educational goals and core beliefs. Promotional material shall include the following information at a minimum:

- Programme title,
- Awarding body,
- Access routes,
- Method of Delivery,
- Entry requirements,
- Programme content,
- Programme duration,
- Contact details for the programme director.

3.11 Programme resources and materials

Resources that are required for a programme shall be identified during the new programme development process. Faculty member and learners can advise on additional resources that may be required to complete the programme. This feedback will be reviewed by the programme development and review committee. Faculty members are required to use Optima material when giving an Optima Training and Consulting Ltd programme. Faculty members are requested to provide feedback on programme resources and materials on an ongoing basis.

3.12 Learner Admission, Progression, and Recognition

Below is an overview of the process from learner admission and entry to a programme to learner exit.
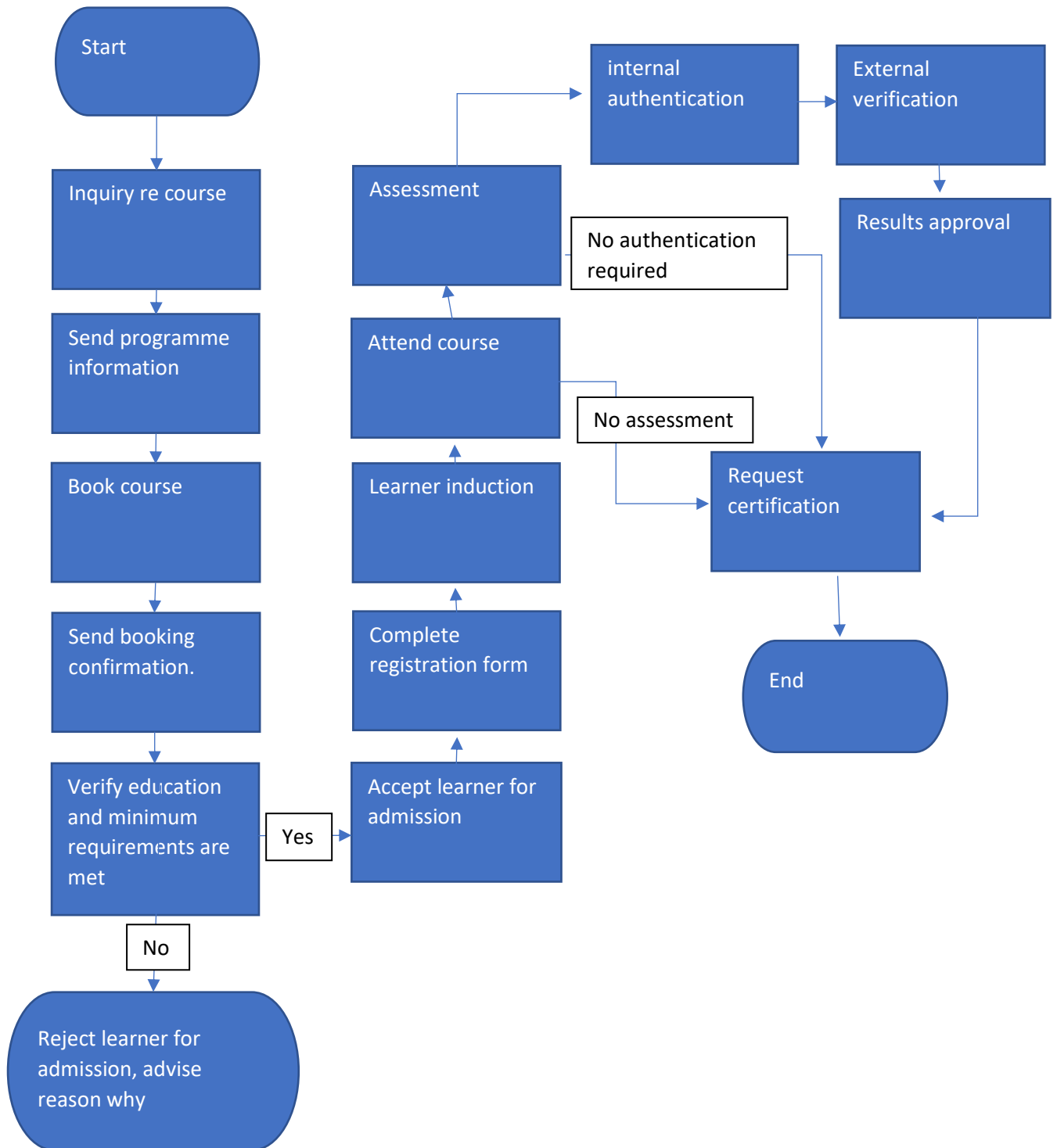
Figure 3.5 Overview of process from learner entry to exit.

3.12.1 Programme access

Programme access/entry requirements shall be identified during the new programme development process. Access/entry requirements shall be clearly stated the Optima Training and Consulting website and promotional material. It shall be the responsibility of the learner to ensure that they are fully briefed about the programme that they wish to complete. An applicant cannot be considered a learner until they have completed all stages in the registration process including meeting all the programme access/entry requirements.

3.12.2 Programme entry

Entry to the initial stage of a programme is gained through:

- Meeting the minimum educational entry requirements,
- Assessment of recognition of prior learning (RPL) which is specific to each QQI and PHECC programme
- Minimum Age
- Learners are required to be able to understand and convey the concepts contained in the programme content.

3.12.3 Criteria for Admission Previous Qualifications:

To access programmes leading to a particular award, the learner should have reached the standards of knowledge, skill and competence associated with the preceding level of the National Framework of Qualifications, i.e., in order to access a Level 6 programme, the learner must have achieved a Level 5 qualification. This may have been achieved through a formal qualification or through relevant life and work experience. Applicants must also have a strong interest in their chosen area of study.

It is the responsibility of applicants to ensure they are fully briefed about their chosen course of study. Applicants will take responsibility for ensuring that they have completed all documentation required for enrolment and paid the necessary fees if applicable. This may include, but is not limited to:

- Completed registration form
- Photocopy of personal identification
- Photocopy of any previous qualifications

Applicants will take responsibility for ensuring that they are fully registered on the programme of study. An applicant cannot be considered a learner until they have completed all stages in the registration process. Applicants will also take responsibility for the accuracy of information supplied. Submitting false or misleading information or documentation can lead to cancellation of admission or expulsion from a programme.

3.12.4 Minimum English Language Requirements:

All programmes provided by Optima Training and Consulting are delivered in English. Optima Training & Consulting Ltd recommends that the standard of English required by learners on all programmes is such that they can both understand and convey the concepts contained in the

programme content. Where a learner's first language is not English, some additional supports may be offered to the learner (please see Learner Supports section).

3.12.5 Minimum age requirements

Optima Training and Consulting have a minimum age requirement of 18 years but there are certain programmes that have their own age limits as follows

Solas safe pass- 16 years old

The following programmes all have a minimum age limit of 17 years old:

All QQI programmes

3.12.6 Protection for enrolled learners

Protection for enrolled learners is required for providers that offer programmes 3 months or longer in duration where fees are charged. Optima Training and Consulting do not currently offer programmes that are 3 months or longer.

3.12.7 Additional Requirements Specific to learners engaging in blended learning:

Applicants must be self-motivated and have the capacity to take responsibility for their own learning as they progress through a blended learning programme. Basic computer literacy is required to enrol on a blended learning programme, e.g., opening an internet page, following simple instructions, and creating a Word document. Applicants must also have the following:

- Access to a laptop with functioning camera and audio OR access to a PC with functioning camera and audio (earphones may be required when using PC) OR access to a mobile device with functioning camera and audio,
- Strong internet connection,
- Microsoft Teams or go to training app downloaded.

3.12.8 Learners with a Disability, Medical Condition or Learning Difficulty:

Under the Equal Status Acts, 2000 to 2015, Optima Training and Consulting is fully committed to providing reasonable accommodation to meet the needs of learners with a disability, a significant ongoing medical condition or learning difficulty to enable them to successfully complete their programme on an equal footing with other learners. A reasonable accommodation might be any action that helps alleviate a substantial disadvantage arising from the learner's disability, significant medical condition or learning difficulty, without changing the demands or the integrity of the examination or the programme.

3.12.9 Selection Procedure

The decision to admit a learner must be based ultimately on an informed judgement that the applicant is competent to begin the course and successfully complete the course. Optima Training and Consulting reserves the right to request an applicant to attend for interview to assess their eligibility for a programme where it deems such action appropriate. Should the numbers enrolling for a programme exceed available capacity, places will be offered to eligible applicants on agreed selection criteria. Applicants who cannot be accommodated due to capacity will be invited to place

their names on a waiting list. Incomplete applications will not be assessed until all information has been received from the applicant. Fees paid in advance will be returned if, for any reason, an applicant is not offered a place on the programme or if the programme does not run.

3.12.10 Learner Induction

The learner induction shall include:

- Admission Criteria,
- Submission Policy including deadlines (if applicable),
- Exam Policy and Code of Conduct,
- Schedule of Submission,
- Referencing,
- Appeals,
- Plagiarism,
- Assessment Process,
- Transfer & Progression,
- Learner Supports,
- RPL – Recognition of Prior Learning,
- Health and Safety,
- Learner Handbook.

Learners must sign a programme induction completion form confirming that they understand and agree to Optima Training and Consulting policies and procedures as outlined in the induction.

3.12.11 Learner Records

Records of a learner's participation and achievement is record. Records are maintained securely with securely with access restricted to authorised personnel. To view a learner's record, the authorised personnel shall verify the date the learner attended the programme on using the database. Once the date has been attained, the authorised personnel will locate that programme's folder which includes the learner's participation and achievement.

3.13 Programme transfer progression

Successful completion of a component award enables learners to progress to achieve a full major award, or to transfer from one programme of education and training to another programme where the component is a mandatory or an elective requirement.

Optima Training and Consulting commits to supporting learners who wish to transfer or progress to other Optima Training and Consulting programmes or other training providers leading to an award within the National Framework of Qualifications.

3.14 Recognised prior learning (RPL)

Learners can gain recognition for previous certified training or education programmes; this can potentially reduce the number of days that a learner may need to attend a programme based on their previous and current experience and qualifications. While there is no change to learner assessment criteria, learners can avail of RPL, by completing a RPL application form and meeting the requirements of RPL for the programme.

4.0 Human Resources Management

4.1 Recruitment and Selection Procedure of Academic and Administrative Staff

Vacancies may arise among administrative staff based on changing or additional organisational needs as identified by Optima Training and Consulting. When an administrative vacancy arises, a job specification and associated selection criteria for that role is devised by the Recruitment Manager and approved by the Managing Director prior to advertising. Posts will be advertised using a recruitment company and recruitment websites. Candidates will then be reviewed and shortlisted prior to interviews taking place.

All interview candidates are required to provide copies of relevant qualifications which are kept together with their Curriculum Vitae and other relevant documentation such as interview sheet (F016).

Selection criteria for Optima Training and Consulting **administration staff** as follows:

• Qualifications – Staff members must have a qualification in a relevant field

OR

• Experience – Staff members must have minimum 2 years work experience in a relevant field

• Reference checks – Minimum two references must be provided. References will be contacted by members of the Managing Director or Director for Health & Safety prior to appointment.

4.2 Recruitment and Selection Procedure of Faculty member

Vacancies arise among faculty member based on changing or additional organisational needs as identified by Optima Training and Consulting. When an academic vacancy arises, a job specification and associated selection criteria for that role is devised by the Recruitment Manager and approved by the Managing Director or Director for Health & Safety prior to advertising. Posts will be advertised using a recruitment company and recruitment websites. Candidates will then be reviewed and shortlisted by the Recruitment Manager prior to interviews taking place.

All interview candidates are required to provide copies of relevant qualifications which are kept together with their Curriculum Vitae and other relevant documentation such as interview sheet (F016).

Selection criteria for Optima Training and Consulting **Faculty members** as follows:

• Qualifications – Faculty member must have minimum QQI Level 6 Special Purpose Award in Training & Development/Train the Trainer or equivalent pedagogical qualification, e.g. First Aid Response Instructor, Instructing Manual Handling qualification.

This must supplement a qualification in the faculty member's specific area of expertise, minimum one level above the level of delivery.

• Experience – Faculty members must have minimum 2 years training experience prior to delivering accredited programmes for Optima Training and Consulting. This can be offered to new Faculty members in the form of non-accredited programmes.

• Faculty members delivering blended learning programmes must have demonstrated excellent IT skills.

• Reference checks – At least two referees must be contacted. References will be based on training delivery experience. In the event of new Faculty members with no previous experience, an academic and/or character references will be required.

Faculty members are not employed on a full contract of employment basis. Faculty members are advised during induction that Optima Training and Consulting cannot guarantee work, the hours are part time on an ad hoc basis as required.

A large Faculty member panel exists for each area of expertise within Optima Training and Consulting's scope which allows Optima Training and Consulting to cater for situations where a faculty member originally due to deliver training is no longer available. Emergency out of hours contact information is provided to Faculty members on induction should these situations arise. The following contingency measures are in place should the need arise:

- Faculty member contacts Optima Training and Consulting staff member to advise of inability to deliver training as scheduled,
- Staff member contacts Programme Director to advise,
- Programme Director contacts all inducted and qualified Faculty members to check availability for cover,
- Programme Director provides new Faculty member with full programme briefing via Microsoft Teams/Zoom or by phone,
- If the programme is onsite, New Faculty member is met by a member of staff prior to delivery of programme any relevant paperwork,
- If the programme is offsite, the New Faculty member shall be emailed the relevant paperwork prior to the delivery of the programme,

4.3 Induction, Training and CPD

4.3.1 Induction Process

Prior to commencement of employment, it is mandatory for faculty member and administrative staff to complete an induction process. The staff member must attend an induction workshop which includes a presentation outlining role and responsibilities, policies and procedures, and code of conduct. This is further detailed in a handbook which is part of the induction pack presented to staff members on the day. Introduction to QQI and PHECC programmes forms an integral part of the induction process. Induction for administrative staff is completed on the first day of employment by the Managing Director.

Faculty member staff inductions are scheduled once per quarter, or as required, and are facilitated by the Accreditation & Quality Manager or Managing Director. An induction checklist (F015) is

completed and maintained to safeguard compliance with all aspects of this procedure and a declaration confirming understanding and agreement must be signed following this induction.

Any updates made to the system are communicated to administrative staff by email, and to Faculty members in a similar method.

During the induction workshop, incoming faculty member will be asked to review the official programme documents together with all associated material such as learner handouts and assessment briefs. To ensure that the faculty member has a clear understanding of the assessment standards required, they may be asked to assess an assessment element (project or case study) using specific grading criteria. The grade and associated marking scheme are reviewed by the Accreditation & Quality Manager and feedback is provided. Further assessment material may be cross moderated until such time that the required grading standard is met by the faculty member.

The Managing Director, Director for Health & Safety, and Accreditation & Quality Manager will have the responsibility of verifying the authenticity of a potential Faculty member's qualifications and references.

4.3.2 Staff Training and CPD

Optima Training and Consulting will ensure that all staff are reviewed and provided with constructive feedback and encouraged to engage in Continuous Professional Development. Optima Training and Consulting will foster a culture of enthusiasm for CPD for all staff. This will be achieved by each staff member having an Annual Performance Review with an Individual Training and Development Plan (F017).

Optima Training and Consulting will also organise relevant CPD workshops, training, and networking events as it sees fit. Where necessary, specific training to support programme or organisational development is organised by Optima Training and Consulting. All Faculty members are also afforded the opportunity to attend any Optima Training and Consulting programme. Faculty members are expected to keep up to date with research and changes in legislation in their area of expertise.

A Faculty member training day in each category, e.g., hospitality, healthcare, childcare, will be organised by Optima Training and Consulting at least once a year. All staff involved in the delivery of these programmes are expected to attend and make suggestions on items to be included on the agenda. The event will include workshops, presentations, and discussions between Optima Training and Consulting staff, programme directors and Faculty members. This provides the opportunity for faculty member to provide feedback and suggestions for programme improvements, as well as to engage with others in their field of learning. This day is scheduled with plenty of advance notice to ensure availability and involvement of as many Faculty members as possible.

Statistics/trends in relation to assessment results identified by the external authenticator, results approval panel and/or QA Committee are discussed, and action taken, if required. All who attend are asked to complete an evaluation form and provide suggestions for future events. Details of attendance of such training and other relevant information is added to the faculty member's CPD log.

Faculty members receive an annual newsletter from Optima Training and Consulting which is compiled and issued by the Accreditation & Quality Manager. This includes updates on the

organisation, legislation, learner and Faculty member resources, networking events or upcoming training.

4.4 Performance Management

To ensure that Faculty member receive constructive feedback on their performance to allow them to identify key strengths and areas for improvement and agree action plans where necessary.

4.4.1 Monitoring Effectiveness of Faculty members

Several feedback mechanisms are used in the monitoring of effectiveness of Faculty members:

- Learner feedback
- Faculty member self-evaluation
- Monitoring reports from QA manager
- Audits (Competence and Compliance)
- Attendance/retention rates
- Internal verification reports
- External authenticator reports
- Performance review

In addition to the formal methods of evaluation above, Faculty members are asked to review learner course assessments during the programme and at the end of each programme. This affords the faculty member the opportunity to reflect on and review the effectiveness of his/her work and seek improvement, as well as providing ongoing review of the programme content. The Accreditation & Quality Manager will identify any adverse programme performance and any issues are logged as a nonconformance.

Competence and compliance audits will be completed twice in every three years for each type of audit. The competence audit will be completed by a peer, the competence audit is in place to ensure that the faculty member is adhering to the lesson plan. The competence audit also reviews communication, technology skills, adaptability, enthusiasm for learning, organisational skills, management, and assessment of learners. The competence audit will involve a site visit, the visit may be scheduled or unannounced.

The compliance audit is in place to ensure that Faculty members are adhering to requirements to complete programme paperwork accurately. The compliance audit shall be undertaken by the Accreditation and Quality Manager. The compliance audit can either be a site visit or completed online using a video call. The audit may be scheduled or unannounced.

4.4.2 Supports for Poorly Performing Faculty members

The Accreditation & Quality Manager will discuss the shortcomings with the faculty member and an action plan will be put in place to address any issues to include shadowing and further training. Subsequent feedback is noted to evaluate if improvements have been made. All records of interventions and supports (formal and informal) are retained by Optima Training and Consulting.

Any Faculty member who fails to meet the required standards for the position following application of formal and informal interventions will be subject to dismissal by Optima Training and Consulting.

4.5 Employee Disciplinary Procedure

The purpose of the disciplinary procedure is help and encourage all employees to achieve and maintain standards of conduct and performance by making them aware of any shortcomings and identify how the necessary improvements can be achieved. The objective of such a procedure is to give employees the opportunity to improve their behaviour/performance. The delivery of a high-quality service requires all employees to adhere to high standards of work performance, conduct and attendance. The Managing Director and Health & Safety Director are responsible for making employees aware of the standards of attendance, work and conduct expected from them and for dealing with shortcomings promptly and fairly. The Managing Director or Health & Safety Director will deal with deficiencies on an informal basis through discussion, appropriate assistance, and informal counselling rather than through the formal disciplinary procedure. If, following the informal counselling stage, the employee continues to fail to meet the required standards then the disciplinary procedure should be invoked. Depending on the severity of the complaint in any individual case, the Optima Training and Consulting reserves the right to skip a step or steps of the procedure. An employee will have the right to appeal against any disciplinary penalty.

4.5.1 Scope

This policy applies to all Optima Training and Consulting employees and aims to ensure consistent and fair treatment for all. The full disciplinary procedure applies only to those who have successfully passed their review period. This procedure is intended as a statement of current Company policy and commitment to operating a fair and consistent procedure in relation to all its employees, considering the Code of Practice on Disciplinary Procedures (SI 146 of 2000) as may be amended from time to time. The Company reserves the right to amend the procedure as necessary in line with any amendments made to the Code of Practice.

The company recognises three types of misconduct – minor misconduct, major misconduct, and gross misconduct. The penalty for gross misconduct will normally be dismissal without notice or payment in lieu of notice. Examples of conduct which may lead to disciplinary action under this procedure include:

Minor Misconduct

• Careless work / poor effort at work

• Absenteeism

• Lateness

• Failure to comply / adhere to Absence Notification and Certification procedure.

• Returning from tea breaks and lunch breaks late

• Misuse of the telephone / mobile phone / computer incl. WhatsApp messages

• Failure to wear uniform / dress code

• Excessive time away from the job

• Failure to maintain a tidy and safe working environment

Major Misconduct

• Unsatisfactory attitude to customers

• Serious neglect of safety / hygiene / security rules

• Smoking in prohibited areas

• Leaving premises during working hours without permission

• Neglect causing damage to or loss of company's customers or another employee's property

• Gossiping and / or rumour spreading about another staff member or customers

• Use of foul language

• Performance of duties below an acceptable standard

• Wilful or excessive wastage of material Gross Misconduct

• Theft

• Removal of company property whether of monetary value or not, without prior written consent

• Unauthorised discounting of stock

• Refusal to carry out duties or reasonable work instructions

• Disclosing confidential business or client information to a third party

• Intoxication induced by alcohol or drugs

• Fraud

• Falsification of company documents

• Deliberately ignoring safety / hygiene / security rules and thereby endangering one's own safety or another's physical wellbeing or safety

• Wilful damage to or gross negligence of companies, customers, or another employee's property

• Physically violent behaviour

• Undertaking work in competition with own employer

• Distribution of drugs

These lists are not exhaustive, and management reserves the right to decide how misconduct may be categorised. Each incident will be managed case by case.

4.5.2 Procedure
4.5.2.1 Pre-procedure stage – informal counselling
Counselling is an informal method of dealing with shortcomings in an employee's attendance, work or conduct without invoking the formal disciplinary procedure. The objective of the counselling is to ensure that employees understand what is expected from them and to provide an opportunity to discuss any aspects of the job which may be causing them difficulties. Counselling alerts the

employee to his/ her shortcomings and is an opportunity to decide what measures should be taken to bring about the required improvements.

1. The Managing Director, Health & Safety Director or nominee will request an informal meeting with the employee to discuss performance, attendance or conduct issues.

2. The employee shall be given precise details of the specific aspects of his/ her attendance, work or conduct that requires improvement.

3. The employee shall be given an opportunity to respond, and careful consideration shall be given to any explanations given.

4. Having made the employee aware of deficiencies in his/her attendance, work or conduct, any measures that can be taken to assist the employee will be put in place and an action plan for achieving improvements shall be agreed.

5. Details of the counselling interview and any follow up action agreed shall be documented and signed by both parties.

4.5.2.1.1 Investigation

If the necessary improvements have not been made by the employee, despite informal counselling, the Managing Director and Health & Safety Director or nominee may request an investigation meeting with the employee. Following this meeting a decision will be made as to whether the matter will be brought through the formal disciplinary procedure. This will be communicated in writing to the employee.

It is important to note the following stages will be followed for reoccurring instances, however for isolated instances management have the right to determine what stage the sanction will be issued.

An isolated incident can fall into any of the four stages.

4.5.2.2 Formal Disciplinary Procedure

4.5.2.2.1 Stage 1 – Verbal Warning

1. If the necessary improvements have not been made by the employee, despite informal counselling, the matter will be referred to stage 1 – verbal warning.

2. The Managing Director and Health & Safety Director or nominee will notify the employee in writing, that they are required to attend a disciplinary hearing.

3. The written notification will include the following information:

a) The time, date & place of the hearing.

b) The purpose of the meeting, that it is a formal disciplinary hearing under the Company disciplinary procedure.

c) The precise nature of the complaint.

d) A copy of any documentation that may be relied upon at the hearing e.g., attendance records.

e) The right to be accompanied by a work colleague.

4. The employee will be advised of the precise nature of the complaint. No decision will be made until the employee has been given a full opportunity to state their side of the matter. No decision will be made at the meeting. Any warning issued will outline the improvements required and the timescale for improvement.

5. S/he will be advised that the verbal warning constitutes the first stage of the disciplinary procedure and failure to improve may result in further disciplinary action under Stage Two of the disciplinary procedure.

6. A written record of the verbal warning will be issued to the employee and kept on the employee's personnel file.

7. The written record will be disregarded for disciplinary purposes after 6 months, subject to satisfactory improvement during this period.

8. The employee will have the right to appeal the verbal warning to a level of management higher than the original decision maker.

9. Appeals must be made in writing setting out the grounds for appeal within 5 days of the employee being notified of the decision, referenced to a five-day Monday to Friday working week.

4.5.2.2.2 Stage 2 – Written Warning

If the necessary improvements have not been made by the employee, the matter will be referred to Stage Two – Written Warning.

1. The Managing Director and Health & Safety Director or nominee will notify the employee in writing, that they are required to attend a disciplinary hearing.

2. The written notification will include the following information:

a) The time, date, and place of the hearing.

b) The purpose of the meeting, that it is a formal disciplinary hearing under the Company disciplinary procedure.

c) The precise nature of the complaint.

d) A copy of any documentation that may be relied upon at the hearing e.g., attendance records.

e) The right to be accompanied by a work colleague.

3. The employee will be given sufficient notice of the hearing to enable him/her to arrange for representation and prepare a response.

4. The employee will be advised of the precise nature of the complaint and any warning issued will detail the improvements required and the timescale for improvements.

5. S/he will be advised that the written warning constitutes the second stage of the disciplinary procedure and failure to improve may result in the issuing of a final written warning under Stage Three of the disciplinary procedure.

6. A written record of the warning will be issued to the employee and kept on the employee's personnel file.

7. The written record will be disregarded for disciplinary purposes after 12 months, subject to satisfactory improvement during this period.

8. The employee will have the right to appeal the written warning to a level of management higher than the original decision maker.

9. Appeals must be made in writing setting out the grounds for appeal within 5 days of the employee being notified of the decision, referenced to a five-day Monday to Friday working week.

If the necessary improvements have not been made by the employee, the matter will be referred to Stage 3 – Final Written Warning.

4.5.2.2.3 Stage Three – Final Written Warning

1. The Managing Director and Health & Safety Director or nominee will notify the employee in writing, that they are required to attend a disciplinary hearing.

2. The written notification will include the following information:

a) The time, date, and place of the hearing.

b) The status of the meeting, that it is a formal disciplinary hearing under the Company disciplinary procedure.

c) The precise nature of the complaint.

d) A copy of any documentation that may be relied upon at the hearing e.g., attendance records.

e) The right to be accompanied by a work colleague.

3. The employee will be given sufficient notice of the hearing to enable him/her to arrange for representation and prepare a response.

4. The employee will be advised of the precise nature of the complaint and any warning issued will detail the improvements required and the timescale for improvement.

5. The warning will also advise that failure to improve may lead to dismissal or some other sanction short of dismissal under Stage Four of the disciplinary procedure.

6. A written record of the final warning will be issued to the employee and kept on the employee's personnel file.

7. The written warning will be disregarded for disciplinary purposes after 12 months subject to satisfactory improvement during this period. This period may be extended in exceptional circumstances with the sanction of the Managing Director and Health & Safety Director or nominee and will be communicated to the employee in writing.

8. The employee will have the right to appeal the final written warning to a level of management higher than the original decision maker.

9. Appeals must be made in writing setting out the grounds for appeal within 5 days of the employee being notified of the decision, referenced to a five-day Monday to Friday working week.

4.5.2.2.4 Stage 4 – Dismissal

If an employee fails to make the necessary improvements and meet the required standards of work, conduct or attendance following the issuing of a final written warning or these is a case of serious misconduct, the matter will be referred to Stage Four – Dismissal.

1. In all cases of alleged serious or gross misconduct, a full investigation will be carried out.

2. The Managing Director and Health & Safety Director or nominee will notify the employee in writing, that they are required to attend a disciplinary hearing

3. The written notification will include the following information:

a) The time, date, and place of the hearing.

b) The status of the meeting, that it is a formal disciplinary hearing under the Company disciplinary procedure.

c) The precise nature of the complaint.

d) A copy of any documentation that may be relied upon at the hearing e.g., attendance records.

e) The right to be accompanied by a union representative or work colleague.

4. The clear terms of reference for the investigation.

5. The employee will be given sufficient notice of the hearing to enable him/her to arrange for representation and prepare a response.

6. The employee will be notified of the precise nature of the complaint and the possible outcomes, dismissal, or action short of dismissal.

7. A written record of the decision will be issued to the employee and kept on the employee's personnel file.

8. The employee will have the right to appeal the decision to a director or his/ her nominee. The appeals hearing is not intended to repeat the investigation process but to address specific issues which the employee feels have received insufficient consideration during the disciplinary process such as:

• Mitigating circumstances; and/or

• Procedural deficiencies

9. Appeals must be made in writing setting out the grounds for appeal within 5 days of the employee being notified of the decision, referenced to a five-day Monday to Friday working week.

10. The appeals hearing will normally be held within 10 working days of the appeal being lodged referenced to a five-day Monday to Friday working week. The Director or his/her nominee will hear all appeals and his/her decision shall be final.

11. Where an appeal against dismissal fails, the effective date of termination shall be the date on which the employee was originally dismissed.

4.5.2.2.5 Gross Misconduct

In cases of gross misconduct, the company may immediately dismiss an employee without recourse to all the steps as outlined above in the disciplinary procedure. In cases where it is warranted, the company may suspend an employee with pay to facilitate an investigation. Suspension with pay is a precautionary measure and not a disciplinary sanction.

During any period of suspension an employee will be refused access to any of the Company's premises without the prior consent of the Company and will be subject to such other reasonable conditions as the Company may impose.

Following investigation and appropriate disciplinary process, the company may decide either to impose another form of discipline, such as suspension without pay and/or final written warning without recourse or termination.

Gross Misconduct is an act of misconduct which is considered serious enough to result in summary dismissal. Summary dismissal is dismissal without notice or payment in lieu of notice.

The following list includes (but is not confined to) examples of the circumstances which will be regarded as 'Gross Misconduct'. Please note that this list is not exhaustive.

• Theft

• Deliberate damage of property

• Falsification of records or reports

• Fraud or deliberate falsification of documents

• Gross negligence or dereliction of duties

• Gross insubordination

• Incapacity to perform duties due to being under the influence of alcohol, un-prescribed drugs or misuse of prescribed medication

• Serious breach of health & safety rules

• Serious breaches of confidentiality (for instance, unauthorized IT systems access)

• Serious bullying, sexual harassment, or harassment against a member of staff

• Violent behaviour towards a member of staff, client, or member of the public

• Sexual assault

• Downloading/disseminating pornographic material from the internet

• Circulation of offensive, obscene, or indecent e-mails

4.5.3 Appeals Process

Where an employee feels that action taken under this procedure is unjustified or unfair, they shall have the right of appeal. All appeals must be made, in writing, within 5 working days to the Managing Director stating the basis of the appeal. Appeal hearings will be held within 14 days of

receipt of appeal. Any disciplinary action will stand until and unless the outcome of the appeal overturns the disciplinary action.

If desired, at the Appeal Hearing the employee concerned shall have the right to be accompanied by a fellow employee of their choice.

Where it is not appropriate or possible to involve any other person named above in conducting the procedure, another person may be substituted by the Company for that person, as is appropriate in the circumstances.

The result of the Appeal Hearing shall be notified to the employee within 5 working days of the hearing, in writing.

This decision will end the appeals procedure.

4.6 Equality, Diversity & Inclusion

Optima Training and Consulting is an Equal Opportunity Employer. All members of staff, Faculty members and learners have a role under the Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Policy, in that they are responsible for their own behaviour but also responsible for ensuring that they carry out their role in line with this policy. This includes:

• Being aware of the policy

• Attending training

• Treating others with dignity and respect

• Ensuring that during work, teaching content and resources should demonstrate sensitivity to equality and diversity issues

• Comply with the policy

Optima Training and Consulting Management will ensure that:

• They take a leadership role in equality, diversity, and inclusion issues

• They promote the policy

• Equality is promoted

• Discrimination is prevented

• Human Rights of everyone are protected

• Everyone is treated fairly across the 9 Grounds

• Prompt action is taken over alleged discrimination or harassment

• All staff are offered training on equality, diversity, and inclusion matters

• External contractors are made aware of their responsibilities in relation to equality, diversity and inclusion

Optima Training and Consulting will ensure the following:

• All staff undergo appropriate equality training for their role

• Staff are encouraged to discuss equality and diversity issues and raise any concerns

they may have with the Management

• Staff are supported in their role if they are supporting a learner with any equality,

diversity or inclusion issues they may have

Where a member of staff or learner perceives that they have been unfairly treated in respect of the 9 grounds, the following steps are in place:

1. Report the concern to the Accreditation & Quality Manager in Optima Training and Consulting

2. If the Accreditation & Quality Manager is involved in the concern, report to the Managing Director

3. Document the concerns on Discrimination Report Form

4. Optima Training and Consulting will investigate the report and, if evidence proves the report to be true, will operate a disciplinary procedure as outlined in section 4.5

4.7 Other Parties involved in Education and Training

Optima Training and Consulting collaborates and shares information openly with other providers where possible. This allows for benchmarking between providers which Optima Training and Consulting deems an invaluable quality assurance mechanism.

4.8 Peer Relationships

Optima Training and Consulting recognises the importance of collaboration and the sharing of information with peers as an effective quality assurance tool. Opportunities to develop and enhance Optima Training and Consulting's relationship with peers include the following:

• Engagement with other education and training providers in further education and higher education in programme development

• Working with Education and Training Boards

• Attending conferences and seminars to meet with other experts in the area

• Benchmarking exercises with other education and training providers

4.9 Accreditation Bodies

Optima Training and Consulting currently offers programmes accredited by QQI, IHF, and PHECC. Any proposal for a new programme partnership must be reviewed and approved by the Quality Assurance Committee. The proposed new partnership is considered under the following headings, prior to forming a Programme Development Committee:

• Optima Training and Consulting scope of practice

• Quality assurance

• Financial implications

• Legal implications

• Risk

4.10 Collaborative Partnerships

Collaborative partnerships can occur where there is co-delivery of all or parts of a programme by two providers. During the collaborative partnership there should be clear understanding between the two providers as to responsibilities.

The provider delivering the programme be responsible for ensuring the health and safety of learners (including child and vulnerable adult protection), complying with data protection requirements, and for providing adequate faculty member and resources.

All interactions associated with dispute resolution are conducted by all parties with a view to ensuring each provider can fulfil their legal and academic obligations to learners registered on the programme.

However, Optima Training and Consulting Ltd recognises that the suspension and/or termination of a collaborative provision partnership may be necessary in certain exceptional circumstances and reserves the right to suspend or terminate such agreements and arrangements. However, this would only happen in exceptional circumstances.

The type of circumstances where this might be necessary might include situations where:

- the partnership has not delivered the envisaged collaborative provision,
- the partnership is not performing in accordance with the memorandum of understanding,
- there are serious concerns about the quality of provision by either provider,
- serious concerns regarding whether the interests of learners are being adequately served,
- a significant deterioration in the financial circumstances of a provider,
- serious breaches of trust; ethical concerns emerge.

4.10.1 QQI

Optima Training and Consulting does not currently engage in collaborative provision with other providers.

If Optima Training and Consulting were to enter a collaborative partnership with another QQI approved provider as a second provider, prior to engaging in any collaborative provision, a memorandum of understanding shall be agreed upon with the first provider. The first provider shall submit QA procedures to Optima Training and Consulting Ltd for review and adhere to prior to engaging in any collaborative provision. The first provider shall be responsible for completing the submission to QQI, overall responsibility for the quality and monitoring of the programme. As secondary provider, Optima Training and Consulting would be responsible for ensuring the health and safety of learners (including child and vulnerable adult protection), complying with data protection requirements, and for providing adequate faculty member.

If Optima Training and Consulting Ltd were to act as a first QQI provider with another provider, then Optima Training and Consulting Ltd shall be responsible for completing the submission to QQI and have overall responsibility for the quality and monitoring of the programme. A memorandum of understand shall be agreed upon between Optima Training and Consulting ltd and the second provider. The second provider, shall be responsible for ensuring the health and safety of learners

(including child and vulnerable adult protection), complying with data protection requirements, and for providing adequate faculty member.

5.0 Teaching and Learning

Optima Training and Consulting Ltd uses a wide range of media when delivering a programme. This includes photos, diagrams, PowerPoint presentation, video clips, and websites. All links are checked before and during the programme to ensure that they are appropriate and accessible.

5.1 Instructional programme delivery

Throughout the programme Faculty members will be required to give detailed information about the programme content that learners are participating in. The programme delivery can include lecture-based sessions as well as practical demonstration.

5.1.1 Group discussions/group interactions

Optima Training and Consulting Ltd will use group interactions where required as a training aid during programmes. This will require learners to take part in a range of group discussions which could include brainstorming, group reviews, action plans along with practical activities.

5.1.2 Practical/tutorials sessions

Programmes delivered by Optima Training and Consulting Ltd may require a practical related session. This could include role play, skills demonstration as well as physical activities. Optima Training and Consulting Ltd will ensure that there is an appropriate timetable for practical sessions and that the timetable has been provided to learners to facilitate assimilation and practice of learning.

5.1.3 Independent learning

Depending on the level of programme and the suitability, learners will be required to complete some independent study, this will give the learners attending the programme the opportunity to reflect on their own learning experiences.

5.1.4 Blended learning

Blended learning is a combination of face-to-face learning and virtual learning. A blended learning programme can incorporate a wide range of programme delivery options such as instructional webinars, independent learning, and practical sessions. Blended learning programmes can also have a wide range of assessment types (see QP 16 Blended learning for blended learning assessments).

5.2 Supporting Documentation:

All programmes delivered on behalf of Optima Training will be provided with the following standardisation information to ensure a uniform approach to training nationwide:

5.2.1 Lesson plans

Lesson plans are in place to guide programme content (F021). The lesson plans and explain learning outcomes are achieved.

5.2.2 Assessment specification

A holistic approach shall be taken into consideration when planning the assessment for a programme. The total assessment load and the needs of learners will be considered when the assessment is being planned. Learners shall have ample opportunities to generate evidence to demonstrate achievement of the standards of knowledge, skill, and/or competence. A systematic approach will be used to ensure that assessment opportunities and planned evidence collection will meet the standards for the award. An assessment brief is used to ensure fair and consistent marking by all Faculty members.

5.2.3 Programme paperwork

During the delivery of a programme, paperwork including assessment requirements such as marking sheets, exam papers, answers sheets are required to be completed. This paperwork is required to be completed as supporting evidence for certification of the learners.

All our faculty members are equipped with an end of programme report – this is sent to our faculty members along with the programme packs before a programme commences. The end of programme report allows the faculty members to document important verification aspects of the programme:

- Detail whether any requests of accommodation have been requested from that learner at time of booking,
- The faculty member will have a check list to go through; this allows him/her to make sure that the information being presented with the group when sending back to the office is correct and accurate.

5.4 Contingency Plan for Programme Cover

A large Faculty member panel exists for each area of expertise within Optima Training and Consulting Ltd.'s scope which allows Optima Training and Consulting Ltd to cater for situations where a Faculty member originally due to deliver training is no longer available. Emergency out of hours contact information is provided to Faculty members on induction should these situations arise. The following contingency measures are in place should the need arise:

- Faculty member contacts Optima Training and Consulting Ltd staff member to advise of inability to deliver training as scheduled,
- Staff member contacts Programme Director to advise,
- Programme Director contacts all inducted and qualified Faculty members to check availability for cover,
- Programme Director provides new Faculty member with full programme briefing via Microsoft Teams/Zoom or by phone,
- If the programme is onsite, New Faculty member is met by a member of staff prior to delivery of programme any relevant paperwork,
- If the programme is offsite, the New Faculty member shall be emailed the relevant paperwork prior to the delivery of the programme,

5.5 Venue selection

Optima Training and Consulting Ltd will ensure that training venues are designed so that they meet the requirement for which they are intended.

Item	Description
Lighting	All rooms will have the lighting appropriate to their use
Accessibility	Access for people with a disability (including special arrangements) where required shall be in accordance with national legislation, or reasonable accommodation made as appropriate
Health & safety	All venues will comply with legislative requirements relating to health and safety. This will include insurance, risk assessments, safety statements, escape routes, fire drills, emergency contacts and ensuring this information is communicated to both tutors and learners.
Equipment	Venues for theory assessments and skills demonstrations will satisfy the following: • Desks/chairs set out in examination format • Space to display clock and examination regulations • Sufficient space and breakout rooms for skills demonstrations • Access to appropriate toilet facilities • Appropriate waiting areas

Table 1 Venue assessment criteria

The relevant Programme Director will identify and make booking arrangements with appropriate venues that satisfy the required standards. They will be aware of and will communicate any specific requirement beyond the minimum standard. Bookings will only be confirmed upon completion of a site visit to determine the suitability of the venue and completion of the Venue Assessment (F008). At every rebooking of an existing approved venue, the venue will be required to confirm that they continue to meet the minimum standards and must inform Optima Training and Consulting Ltd of any changes. Learners are requested to submit feedback relating to venues at the end of each programme. Learners may give feedback to any Faculty member during the programme. This feedback is collated by the Programme Director. Any issues or concerns will be notified to the Accreditation and Quality Manager and recorded in the corrective action from. Faculty members are also requested to submit feedback when they are asked to rate the on-site teaching venue and facilities at the end of each programme delivery instance (F007). The venue will be notified of concerns where corrective actions need to be taken. All concerns and issues are recorded in the improvement log (F003) and will consider these when planning venue bookings for the next sitting.

5.6 Learner issues

Complaints & appeals are managed fairly, efficiently, and effectively. Optima Training & Consulting Ltd creates an environment where clients' and learners' views are valued. All complaints and appeals received by Optima Training & Consulting Ltd will be viewed as an opportunity for improvement.

Any person wishing to make a complaint against Optima Training & Consulting Ltd, concerning its conduct as a Training Provider or an appeal regarding an assessment decision, shall have access to the complaints and appeals procedures.

All formal complaints and appeals will be heard and decided on within 20 working days of receiving the written complaint or appeal.

Where possible all non-formal attempts shall be made to resolve complaint. This may include the advice, discussions, and general mediation in relation to the issue. Any staff can be involved in this informal process to resolve issues but once a learner has placed a formal complaint or appeal, the following procedures must be followed.

5.6.1 General Complaints

Any learner, potential learner or third-party can may submit formal complaint to Optima Training & Consulting Ltd with the reasonable expectation that all complaints are treated with integrity and privacy. There is no cost involved in the complaint process unless it is referred to the third party.

If a complaint cannot be resolved informally or if the complainant feels that an informal complaint will not address the issue, then the complaint should

- Be submitted using the complaints form within 5 working days of initial contact or the issue arising to the relevant Programme Director
- The complainant should provide a detailed account of the issue

The relevant Programme Director will contact the complainant with 5 workings days to acknowledge receipt of the complaint and outline the course of action to be taken.

The Quality Manager will undertake an investigation of the complaint.

The investigation may take different forms depending on the nature of the complaint. This process should be completed within 20 days of receipt of the complaint. If there is a delay in the process the learner shall be informed.

When the investigation is complete the complainant will be notified of the outcome in writing.

Where the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome, they can make a request for a final review to be carried out.

The request for review must be submitted in writing to the Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) within 10 working days of the outcome.

The QAC will appoint an independent person to carry out the review. The decision from the review will be final.

Copies of all documents, outcomes and further action required shall be kept on file for 3 years. All complaints are logged in our improvement log and are reviewed by the QAC.

Optima Training & Consulting Ltd will ensure that it follows the principle of fairness and natural justice in dealing with all complaints.

- Informal •Discuss informally the issue with the complainant and attempt to resolve

- Formal •Submit completed Complaints form
•Complaint acknowledged within 5 working days
•Complaint investigated within 20 working days
•Outcome of complaint

- Appeal •Appeal outcome of complaint
•Final Review by independent person appointed by QAC

5.6.1.1 Ombudsman

If the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of the investigation, they may complain to the Ombudsman. The Ombudsman can examine a complaint about the service provider

The Ombudsman requires a complainant have completed the following before they can examine the complaint:

- Complained to the service provider and allowed it six weeks to respond.
- Received a final response to your complaint. (You may complain to the Ombudsman if there is a long delay in the provider replying to you).
- Used the service provider's appeals process (if they have one).
- If more than 12 months has passed since the action or decision that affected you happened, that there is a good reason for the delay in contacting the Ombudsman.

5.6.2 Results appeal

Optima Training & Consulting Ltd has put in place an Appeals Process which enables learners to appeal a result based on the assessment process or the assessment result.

Assessment Process: a learner may appeal if they perceive there to be irregularities/inequality in the implementation of Optima Training & Consulting Ltd assessment process.

Assessment Result: a learner may appeal a result if s/he believes the grade awarded is not representative of the quality of the work submitted for assessment purposes. The outcome of this type of appeal is either that the learner's grade remains unchanged or is upgraded. The only evidence which may be presented is that which has already been presented by the Learner. New evidence may not be added for the appeal.

Before appealing their result, learners are encouraged to discuss their result with the relevant Faculty member. This will allow the learner to get feedback on their assignment and where they lost

marks. If the learner is not happy after engaging with the faculty member, they can appeal the result.

Apply	Review	Recheck
Learner recieves result and is not satisfied with assessment process or assessment result	Verify correct result given to learner	Recheck of assessment evidence by an independent assessor
Learner completes result appeal form within 10 working days and email to info@optimatraining.ie	If incorrect result given, Leaner will be updated on result	The independent assessor will make either of the of the following recommendations: Agree with the original decision or uphold the appeal

Apply:

The results appeal from is available from the any Programme Director. Learners can submit the results appeal from to the relevant Programme Director within 3 working days of receiving their result. The only evidence which may be presented by the learner at appeal is that which has already been presented for assessment. New evidence may not be added by the learner for the appeal.

Review:

Once a learner has submitted the results appeal form, Optima Training & Consulting Ltd shall review the learner's result and verify that the correct result was given to the learner. If the incorrect result was given to the learner, the correct result shall be given to the learner. The learner will be given the opportunity to review the correct result and they can appeal the result within 10 working days of receiving the correct result.

Recheck:

The independent assessor who evaluates a learner appeal will not be the faculty member who made the original assessment decision. All assessment evidence and documentation (including any video or your assessment) will be thoroughly reviewed by the independent assessor.

Outcome:

The learner will be informed of the outcome of the Appeals Process within an agreed timescale.

The independent assessor will make either of the of the following recommendations:

- Agree with the original decision or
- Uphold the appeal

The learner will be informed in writing of the independent assessor's decision.

For QQI programmes:

Following the completion of the Optima Training & Consulting Ltd Appeal Process, the results for the learner(s) concerned will be forwarded to QQI as the final result. These final results are the basis on which QQI will issue certificates.

5.7 Equality & diversity

Optima Training and Consulting Ltd is committed to equal opportunities for all, irrespective of age, colour, disability, ethnic or national origin, marital status, nationality, race, religion, belief, sex, sexual orientation, or other considerations not justified in law, which are irrelevant to the performance of the task.

Optima Training and Consulting Ltd is dedicated to taking positive action to promote such equality and diversity in relation to recruitment, promotion, transfer, training, benefits, facilities, and procedures.

Optima Training and Consulting Ltd shall also, through the application of all its policies, seek to appoint, develop, and retain the people & customers required to meet its business objectives. It is Optima Training and Consulting Ltd.'s objective to achieve best practice in all policies and procedures to support its objectives of ensuring equality of opportunity for all existing and potential employees/contractors and customers/learners.

In addition to employees, this Policy will apply to the Company's treatment of agency staff, contractors, consultants, or any other person working for or on behalf of Optima Training and Consulting Ltd. Optima Training and Consulting Ltd expects other persons working for or, on behalf of us to be aware of and fully comply with this Policy.

Discrimination is viewed by Optima Training and Consulting Ltd as serious misconduct and as such will be subject to action under the Disciplinary Procedure. Employment Tribunal proceedings for discrimination can be taken against both employers and employees and in some cases, an individual employee may be found personally liable to compensate the person bringing the claim of unlawful discrimination.

The company is committed to a fully efficient and effective Equal Opportunities Policy and will:

- through appropriate communications, ensure that this Policy is understood and implemented, and that all individual employees fully understand their personal responsibilities,
- ensure that all agency workers, contractors, consultants, and any other persons working for or on behalf of the company are fully aware of and comply with this Policy,
- make appropriate provision for the implementation and periodic review of this Policy,
- review its recruitment, selection, employment practices and opportunities for training and development; and

- monitor the effectiveness of the Policy, aiming for continuous improvement in all aspects of equal opportunities in employment & business practice.

5.8 Internal verification and External authentication

Internal verification is a key component of the quality assurance system. It provides an opportunity for internal oversight of education and training activities, in particular learner assessment. The role of the Internal Verifier (IV) is determined by the type of organisation and the scope of courses being offered.

The internal verification process involves:

- Verifying that assessment procedures have been applied across all assessment activities.
- Confirming that the correct assessment techniques have been applied.
- Confirming that there is a portfolio of evidence for each learner who presented for assessment. Ensuring that learner evidence matches the assessment requirements of the course.
- Confirming learner results by checking that there is evidence for each area identified in the assessment brief.
- Checking that marks and grades have been recorded correctly.
- Checking that each learner has verified in writing that the evidence presented is their own work. Verifying that, where Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) has been applied, the correct documentation is in the learner portfolio.
- Checking for and reporting on any errors or omissions.
- Liaising with management on any issues arising from the IV process.
- Creating and maintaining accurate records of the IV process e.g., IV Report.
- Liaising with the External Verifier.
- Liaising with external bodies as required

5.8.1 Internal verification sample procedure

The following will be appropriate for internal verification for each certification period: - sample will be at a minimum the $\sqrt{n} + 1^1$ and will not be less than 4 assessment portfolio.

Where the same minor award is offered in a number of courses, the module assessments may be combined for the purpose of sampling. If this is the case, the module assessments will be clearly identified per course (and location) and per assessor. This is to ensure that internal verifier and the external can ensure the sample chosen includes module assessments from each course (and location) and each assessor.

Assessments selected by the internal verifier must be representative of all minor awards, all learner types and all assessment techniques and must:

- Be sufficient in size to enable sound judgements to be made about the fairness and consistency of assessment decisions,
- Cover a cross section of all learner types,
- Cover the full range of attainment in terms of grades achieved,
- Include a random selection of evidence of each grade,

- Identify evidence, which is borderline between grades,
- Include all named awards offered.

The portfolios will be randomly chosen, until the sample quota is reached. All Faculty members will be assessor over an 18-month period. Sampling from new Faculty members will be 100% of learners who present for certification from their first programmes.

PHECC programme assessments shall undergo internal verification every two months.

QQI programme assessments shall undergo internal verification every submission period.

Sample selected according to sampling strategy

Internal verifer selected

Agree internal verification schedule

Internal verification takes place, using internal verification checklist

Internal verification report completed by Quality Manager

Report available for external authenitatcation and Results approval panel

5.8.2 The IV Report –

Having completed the IV process, the Internal Verifier completes the IV Report (F018) confirming the outcome of the process. The report will be retained and made available to the External Authenticator and results approval panel. It captures evidence that the internal verification process has taken place.

5.8.3 External Authenticators

The External Authenticator reports to the Accreditation & Quality Manager. External authentication provides independent, authoritative confirmation of fair and consistent assessment of learners in accordance with national standards.

This process establishes the credibility of Optima Training and Consulting Ltd's assessment processes and ensures that assessment results have been marked in a valid and reliable way and are compliant with the requirements for the award.

Optima Training and Consulting Ltd will have at least one External Authenticator in any one submission period, and will be assigned depending on the following:

• the number of learners

• the number, range and diversity of awards being offered – all award areas must have an external authenticator assigned per annum

5.8.3.1 Recruitment and Requirements

External authenticators are recruited prior to a submission period. The authenticators list is used to recruit an authenticator in the relevant field.

If these authenticators are not available to complete this process, or if the requirement is for a different accrediting body, the Optima Training and Consulting Ltd database is utilised.

Otherwise, the role is advertised externally. A job specification and associated selection criteria for the role is devised by the Recruitment Manager and approved by the Managing Director prior to advertising. Posts will be advertised on the Optima Recruitment website.

Candidates are then shortlisted and approved by the Recruitment Manager prior to interviews taking place. All interview candidates are required to provide copies of relevant qualifications, photographic proof of identification, and a tax compliance certificate which are kept together with their Curriculum Vitae and other relevant documentation such as interview sheet.

Requirements for this role are as follows:

• Independent of Optima Training and Consulting Ltd

• Excellent attention to detail

• Excellent communication and report-writing skills

• Familiarity with provider's assessment policies and procedures, and accrediting body's

code of practice

• Technical/subject matter expertise within the relevant award area

• Previous experience of delivering programme assessment or work in the relevant field

• Agree to undertake appropriate training and attend appropriate briefings

• Must not have delivered training for Optima Training and Consulting Ltd previously

5.8.3.2 Responsibilities

• Confirm the fair and consistent assessment of learners consistent with the provider's

procedures and with accrediting body's policy

• Review internal verification report(s) and authenticate the findings/outcomes

• Apply a sampling strategy to moderate assessment results

• Visit Optima Training and Consulting Ltd and meet with appropriate staff

• Identify any issues/irregularities in relation to the Assessment Process

• Recommend results for approval

• Produce an external authentication report using the template provided by Optima Training and Consulting Ltd

5.9 Access to resources- Faculty member

Only approved Faculty members can use Optima Training and Consulting Ltd resources. To be approved, Faculty members must submit proof of their education, hold valid certification to conduct the programme, attend a faculty member Induction, hold appropriate and valid insurance, and keep CPD log up to date.

5.10 Access to resources- Learners

Learner will have access to programme resources upon successful admission to the programme.

5.11 Submission of annual PHECC report

An annual report for PHECC shall be submitted annually. The annual report shall include the following:

- Number of FAR certs printed,
- Number of CFR certs printed,
- Number of FAR courses,
- Number FAR Instructors on our faculty member

This will be emailed to PHECC by the PHECC administrator.

6.0 Assessment of Learners

Optima Training and Consulting has developed an assessment of learners' policy and procedure in accordance with QQI's Assessment and Standards Revised 2013. The assessment of learners' policy and procedure are in place to ensure procedures are carried out effectively and consistently. All Faculty member, learners and programme staff are briefed on the assessment of learners' policy and procedure.

1. Assessment
- Establish and implement assessment policies, process, and procedures
- Devuse assessment methods, marking schemes, and assessment criteria
- assess and judge student evidence
- record assessment outcomes

2. Authentication process
- 1) Internal verification
  - Verify that all assesssment procedures have been applied
  - monitor the outcome of the assessment procedure
- 2) External authentication
  - assign an external authenticator per award based award/filed of learning expertise
  - external auuthenicator to moderate assessment results by sampleing student evidence according to Optima Training and Consulting sampling strategy

3. Results approval
- Establish a results approval panel
- approve and sign off assessment results
- make results available to learners

4. Appeals prcoess
- Establish an appeals process
- allow 3 days for learner to lodge an appeal of the assessment process or result
- process all appeals

5.Request for certificiation
- Submit all student results
- when doing so, flag results under appeal

Table 2 Overview of Assessment procedure

6.1 Assessment responsibility

6.1.1 Provider responsibility

To ensure fair and consistent assessment of learners, Optima Training and Consulting are responsible for the below:

- developing best practice assessment policies and procedures,
- agreeing their assessment policies and procedures,
- implementing their quality assured assessment policy and procedures,
- applying all QQI requirements,
- ensuring appropriate assessment personnel are in place,
- establishing an Authentication Process to include - internal verification - external authentication, including setting criteria for the selection and appointment of external authenticators,
- establishing a Results Approval Process,
- establishing an Appeals Process

6.1.2 Assessor responsibility

The role of the assessor (faculty member) is to evaluate learner evidence and make the assessment decision/judgment on whether the outcomes of knowledge, skill, or competence, as outlined in the Award Specification, have been achieved. The faculty member must determine that the evidence is valid, reliable, and sufficient to make the assessment decision. The faculty member is a qualified practitioner who has responsibility for the assessment of learners. Whatever the context of the assessment, faculty members need to have the appropriate assessment skills. These should include:

- subject matter/technical expertise; the faculty member must be proficient in the subject/technical area in which they are assessing,
- knowledge of and proficiency of the award standards (learning outcomes) being assessed,
- knowledge of the Optima Training and Consulting's assessment procedures,
- familiarity with QQI assessment policy and guidelines.

The specific responsibilities of the faculty member are to:

- implement the provider's assessment procedures across all assessment activities,
- provide opportunities for learners to generate appropriate evidence,
- design assessment instruments,
- devise marking schemes and grading criteria,
- review and judge learner evidence,
- make the assessment decision,
- provide information and feedback to learners.

6.1.3 Learner Responsibility

Learners are required to take responsibility for demonstrating their learning achievement. To ensure that learners take responsibility, Optima Training and Consulting provides learners with information on how they will be assessed, when they will be assessed, and how they will be marked. By providing

this information, Optima Training and Consulting enables learners to achieve more control over their assessment and enables learner independence.

6.2 Assessment Plan

The assessment for each programme shall be planned prior to the programme starting.

The assessment plan shall include:

- the range of specific learning outcomes to be assessed,
- the assessment techniques and instruments,
- the timing of assessment activities,
- any deadlines and due dates,
- how marks are to be allocated and assessment criteria that needs to be applied.

A holistic approach shall be taken into consideration when planning the assessment for a programme. The total assessment load and the needs of learners will be considered when the assessment is being planned. Learners shall have ample opportunities to generate evidence to demonstrate achievement of the standards of knowledge, skill, and/or competence. A systematic approach will be used to ensure that assessment opportunities and planned evidence collection will meet the standards for the award.

The details of the assessment shall be communicated to the learners during the learner induction and included in the programme details on the website.

6.2.1 PHECC Assessment

Only PHECC assessment material shall be used for PHECC programmes.

6.2.2 QQI Assessment

Only QQI assessment material shall be used for QQI programmes.

6.3 Assessment review

Assessment methodology is reviewed during the programme review. Feedback from faculty member, learners, programme staff, and external authenticators will be considered when the assessment methodology is reviewed.

6.4 Certification Key Dates

Each year, QQI publish a set of certification key dates, assessments will be based around those dates. QQI will issue 6 sets of dates every second month with the 12th date of Feb, April, June, August, Oct and Dec being the date for final submission dates for that particular certification period. QQI will give a date for Final Statements of results available for downloading and a date for issue of certificates for that certification period also. Faculty member and learners will be notified of the key dates.

6.5 Programme Deadline Dates

Optima Training and Consulting have set out specific deadline dates based on all our programmes that are run - these have been chosen based on the type of assessment for each programme

delivered. These dates will be given to Faculty members and learners before commencement of the programme in writing.

Level 5: e.g. – Learners will have up to **2** weeks to complete their assessments and submit to our office.
Level 6: Learners will have up to **3** weeks to complete their assessments and submit to our office.

6.6 Programme locations:

Programmes can be delivered at offsite venues nationwide; these venues are chosen for their locations, adequate space, and ease of access. Site visits will be conducted by the Accreditation and Quality manager to ensure that all venues have adequate resources for the specific programme requirements.

6.7 Assessment Types

QQI have set out different assessment techniques - these are all based on the level of the programme being completed by the learner. All learners shall be fully informed of the type of assessment, supports available, and will be given the opportunity to provide feedback at any point before, during or after the assessment has taken place.

The types of assessments set out by QQI include the following:

- Assignment
- Portfolio/Collection of Work
- Project
- Skills Demonstration
- Learner Record
- Examination - this can be broken into Oral Interview Style Exam, Written Exam - Theory Based and Practical Exam

6.7.1 Assignment

An assignment is a short exercise carried out in response to a brief with specific guidelines as to what should be included. Learners will be given an assignment brief that covers the learning outcomes set for the programme. Learners must complete the assignments independently and must completed within the timeframe set. This set date is based on the final date of the programme. Learners are required to submit their assignments following the assignment submission procedure.

6.7.2 Project

A project is usually carried out over an extended period and is based on a brief given to the learner. Projects may involve investigation of a topic, issue or problem or may involve process such as a design task, a performance, practical activity, production of an artefact, or event. During each stage of the project the faculty member will supervise/assess throughout the activity against the criteria for each project stage. Learners will be required to demonstrate, document and record evidence. The faculty member will verify and, in some cases, photographic/video record evidence of learning.

6.7.3 Portfolio

A portfolio is a collection and/or collection á of pieces of work produced by the learner over a period that demonstrates achievement of a range of learning outcomes. The collection may be self-generated or may be generated in response to a particular brief or tasks/activities devised by the

assessor. Learners may be required to complete several tasks throughout the programme and in some cases the faculty member will need to verify that they completed the task. Learners can work as a group; however, they will need to each complete an independent report.

6.7.4 Skills Demonstration

A skills demonstration is used to assess a wide range of practical based learning outcomes including practical skills and knowledge. A skills demonstration will require the learner to complete a task or series of tasks that demonstrate a range of skills. Learners will be required to complete a specified number of skills demonstrations set out in our assessment criteria. During each skills demonstration, the faculty member will supervise/assess throughout the activity against the criteria for each skills demonstration. Learners will be required to demonstrate, document and record evidence, demonstrating a broad understanding. The faculty member will verify, grade and photographic/video record evidence which may be required.

6.7.5 Learner Record

A learner record is the learner's self-reported and self-reflective record in which he/she describes specific learning experiences, activities, responses, and skills acquired. The record may take several forms: it can be a structured logbook, a diary, a selective record of events or experiences over a period e.g., a learning journal.

6.7.6 Examination

An examination provides a means of assessing a learner's ability to recall and apply knowledge, skills and understanding within a set period and under clearly specified conditions.

a. Theory-based examination assesses the ability to recall, apply and understand specific theory and knowledge.

b. Interview style assesses learning through verbal questioning, one-to-one or in a group.

Depending on the type of exam set out from the validated programme - Optima Training and Consulting has devised a time allocation structure guide; this guide is based on the weighting of the percentage assessment set by QQI.

Theory based examinations may be used to assess the ability of the learner to recall, apply and understand specific theory and knowledge. Theory based examinations may comprise a range of question types such as:

- short answer questions require a response of limited length and may take several forms. Some short answer questions may seek specific words or phrases in the response,
- structured questions are divided into several related parts and generally require the learner to demonstrate more in-depth knowledge and understanding of a topic. Structured questions may also seek evidence of cognitive skills such as ability to discuss, compare, analyse, evaluate, translate, or solve an issue, problem, or topic,
- essay type questions, like structured questions require the learner to demonstrate an in-depth knowledge and understanding of a topic. Essay type questions usually focus on one area of knowledge and seek evidence of cognitive skills such as ability to discuss, compare, analyse, evaluate, translate, or solve an issue, problem, or topic,

- multiple choice tests/questions may be used to test factual knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, problem solving and evaluation. As MCQ's are not open-ended, they are not useful in assessing communication skills such as the ability to organise and express information and to write fluently and quickly.

Time allocated	Number of questions
45 minutes to 1.5 hours	10/12 short answer questions or, 15/18 short answer questions or, 5/6 short answer questions and 1/2 structured questions or, 7/8 short answer questions and 1/2 structured questions
1.5 -2 hours	18/22 short answer questions or, 10/12 short answer questions and 1/2 structured questions or, 5/6 short answer questions and 3/4 structured questions or, 3/5 structured questions
2-3 hours	10/12 short answer questions and 3/4 structured questions or, 15/18 short answer questions and 2/3 structured questions or, 3/4 structured questions 4/6 structured questions

6.7.6.1 Written Examination

Learners may be required to complete a written examination as part of the assessment criteria with their chosen programme. The examination can be broken into several different parts. Examples include:

- Short questions or multiple-choice questions. Learners are then required to answer a set number of questions. Learners will be instructed on the set amount set out in an assessment brief.
- Structured/essay style questions that will require the learner to provide detailed information. Learners will be instructed on the set amount set out in an assessment brief.

The examination will require learners to recall and apply knowledge, skills and understanding within a set time. Appropriate examination booklets and briefs will be provided to the learner.

6.8 Exam Guidelines

- Learners must show up on time for their examination as instructed by the faculty member.
- Learners will be required to sign in for the exam, if they arrive 30 minutes late, they may not be allowed to sit the exam.
- Late learners may not be given extra time to complete the exam.

- Learners must ensure they have all materials needed for examinations. For practical skills they must have the appropriate PPE required. For written exams they must ensure they have pens etc. and that their equipment is in good working order.
- Learners must leave all coats, bags etc. in the designated area as instructed by the faculty member.
- Learners shall not bring into the examination, nor have in their possession while in the exam, any computing equipment, including electronic organisers and programmable calculators, mobile phone, recording equipment, radio, books, dictionaries, notes, or paper whatsoever except answer books and other materials as shall be authorised and/or provided by the faculty member. The only equipment allowed is that which has been authorised by both Optima Training and Consulting and the Faculty member.
- Retention of any unauthorised material shall be taken as constituting evidence of infringement of the regulations and shall be reported by the faculty member to Optima Training and Consulting and where appropriate disciplinary action shall be taken.
- A learner whose behaviour is disruptive and who persists in such behaviour following a warning shall be given by the faculty member from the examination. In such circumstances all materials issued to the learner shall be retained by the faculty member. It will be reported to Optima Training and Consulting.
- No learner shall aid or attempt to aid another learner or obtain or attempt to obtain assistance from another or communicate in any way with any other learner during the examination.
- A learner shall not pass materials to, or receive materials from, another learner while in the examination.
- A learner who leaves the examination without the permission of the faculty member shall not be readmitted during that examination. The faculty member shall record any such event and report the incident to Optima Training and Consulting Ltd.

6.9 Supplying Evidence of Assessment

6.9.1 Presenting Photo/Video Evidence for Assessment

All practical programmes being submitted for assessment must be accompanied by photographic or video evidence of works or demonstrations carried out by learners. These will be recorded by the faculty member(s) while the programme is running. To ensure the quality and relevance of the digital evidence being recorded, it is Optima Training and Consulting's policy to ensure that each learner's digital evidence is presented. Below are the guidelines for recording videos and taking photographs as part of skill demonstrations or assessment on a programme. These guidelines should be adhered to in all cases to remain compliant with Data Protection Regulation laws. Learners will be required to give their consent as part of the registration process on day one to having a video, audio recording or photograph taken throughout the course. Under Optima Training and Consulting Data Protection/GDPR policy all documentation relevant to a learner's data must only be used for the purpose it was recorded. Under no circumstance are videos, audio, or photographs to be uploaded to a website or social media site without consulting with Optima Training and Consulting. In adherence with Data Protection/GDPR laws these recordings are to be kept in a secure location and deleted when no longer necessary. Optima Training and Consulting will retain these recordings and photographs for six months after certification and they will then be deleted. Videos submitted to the office on a USB stick or camcorder shall be deleted from these devices once they have been

uploaded to our shared files. Faculty members must not distribute or disclose the video/audio recordings, photographs or any information or data related to a learner. Should a learner require a copy of the evidence, they shall apply to Optima Training and Consulting for a copy and will be required to provide a copy of their ID for verification of identity.

6.9.1.1 Videos

Videos are required as part of skills demonstrations on some programmes. The guidelines for recording are listed below:

- Only the required learner is visible in the video.
- In the case of an individual presentation, only the learner delivering the presentation should be visible in the video.
- The faculty member needs to introduce the video by stating the name and location of the programme (this needs to be done for each learner individually).
- The learner should introduce themselves before commencing the presentation using their full name and stating which presentation that they are making e.g., 15-minute presentation or 25-minute presentation.
- These videos must be renamed by the faculty member with the learners' name before being sent into the office, if multiple learners in the video, all names must be listed.

6.9.1.2 Photographs:

Photographs are required of learners partaking in skills demonstrations. Below are the guidelines for taking these:

- Only the learner completing the skills demonstration shall be in the photograph.
- All photographs sent to the programme director and to be renamed by the faculty member with the learners' name before being uploaded or submitted to the office.

6.10 Lost Data Policy

For some programmes run by Optima Training and Consulting, backup evidence such as photographs or video recordings are required as proof that a skills demonstration took place. This evidence can be used by the assessor, Internal Verification team, or External Authenticator when the group is being assessed and put forward for certification. This evidence is kept for no longer than 6 months after the certification period of the learner.

If this evidence has been lost due to a technical error or human error, the faculty member will need to complete a lost data form for the learner's assessment to be accepted and put through the correction process. The lost data form acts as supporting documentation where the evidence is not there to confirm that the learner has completed their skills demonstration. The faculty member will need to provide the learners name, what skills demonstration they completed, and what date they completed their skills demonstration. The faculty member will also need to include what happened and why the evidence is not available for the learner's skills demonstration.

The lost data form will also allow the faculty member to sign off that the learner has completed their skills demonstration to a good standard, and that they are happy for the learner to pass. The learner's assessment is then brought forward to the Results Approval Panel meeting, where the panel will discuss their thoughts on the learner's assessment and if it will be put forward for certification or if further action will be required.

6.11 Assessment security

Optima Training and Consulting recognises the importance of the security arrangements for its assessment procedures to ensure its integrity. These procedures are monitored for effectiveness by the Quality Panel. Faculty members and learners are provided with examination and assessment guidelines during induction, which is reiterated in their respective handbooks.

Assessment material including assessment solutions, shall be stored securely. Exam attendance sheets shall be completed.

Learners are required to sign a declaration on the Front Cover for Portfolio of Assessment stating that all work included is their own.

Learner assessment material is sent by registered post or is hand delivered by the faculty member to Optima Training and Consulting. Where appropriate, the assessment material can be sent electronically i.e., photos. All assessment material shall be stored securely and confidentially.

6.11.1 Cheating

A new provision was included in the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) (Amendment) Act 2019 which empowers QQI to prosecute those who facilitate academic cheating, under the following headings:

- Impersonation
- Provision of cheating services
- Advertising cheating services
- Publishing advertisements for cheating services

6.11.2 Assessment Malpractice

Assessment malpractice includes any act that may undermine the integrity or validity of the assessment. In cases where a faculty member suspect assessment malpractice, the matter should be reported to the Accreditation and Quality Manager. If there is insufficient evidence, then no further action will be taken. Otherwise, the Accreditation and Quality Manager and faculty member, with appropriate witnesses, will conduct a preliminary investigation, which will include (an) interview(s) with the learner(s) concerned. If there is insufficient evidence of an offence, then no further action will be taken. If sufficient evidence that an offence has been committed exists, the Accreditation and Quality Manager will decide on a course of action, which may include any of the following:

- Reduction in the mark (including a mark of 0) for the work affected,
- Resubmission of the work subject to a reduced maximum mark awardable of grade,
- Referral of the matter to the Managing Director or Director for Health & Safety who will review the case and recommend a disciplinary action.

Examples of assessment malpractice include the following:

- Plagiarism
- Impersonation of another learner
- Fabrication of evidence
- Wrongly obtaining secure assessment materials, e.g., examination paper

- Behaving in such a way that would undermine the assessment process, e.g., mobile phone use during an exam, communication with others during an exam, bringing prohibited materials into the exam centre

6.11.3 Plagiarism

Plagiarism is the practice of taking someone else's work or ideas and passing them off as one's own. It is dishonest, unethical, and unprofessional. Work submitted for assessment may be subject to electronic or other detection methods.

6.12 Supporting Assessment & Programme Documentation

Optima Training and Consulting has developed several procedures and policies to ensure that the credibility of learner's assessments is fully in place. All programmes delivered have standardised briefs, packs, lesson plans and marking schemes to ensure this credibility. Faculty members are inducted and briefed fully on programme content learning outcomes, marking schemes and the standardisation of all our programme material.

6.13 End of programme report

All our faculty members are equipped with an end of programme report – this is sent to our faculty members along with the programme packs before a programme commences. The end of programme report allows the faculty members to document important verification aspects of the programme:

- Detail whether any requests of accommodation have been requested from that learner at time of booking,
- Detail any one-to-one meetings
- Detail any appeals or complaints
- Detail any incidents
- The faculty member will have a check list to go through; this allows him/her to make sure that the information being presented with the group when sending back to the office is correct and accurate.

6.14 Assessment Receipt

Learners are given an assessment receipt to complete and attach to their assessment material when submitting assessments back to our office or Faculty member. It provides learners with information in relation to submitting their assessment. It also acts as a learner declaration of their work completed as learners will have to read a declaration and sign if in the event any cases of assessment malpractice or plagiarism are found.

6.15 Marking system

When devising the assessment method, the corresponding mark system shall be developed. The marking system shall be transparent and reliable. A marking system should identify per assessment method the following.

- marks allocated to each assessment criterion,
- sub totals,

- total mark.

Where possible the total assessment marks should be out of 100 or multiples of 100.

6.16 Sample answers or solutions

When devising the assessment method and corresponding assessment criteria and marking schemes, sample answers shall be devised to align with the assessment method.

6.17 Grading classification

Grading criteria describe what a learner must attain to achieve a particular grade for an award at a particular level. Below is a summary for the grading criteria for awards at QQI level 4 to level 6.

Pass	Merit	Distinction
A Pass is a grade awarded to a learner who has attained the minimum standard.	A Merit is a grade awarded to a learner who has exceeded the minimum requirements.	A Distinction is a grade awarded to a learner who has substantially exceeded the minimum requirements.
A Pass indicates that the learner has: • achieved the learning outcomes as outlined in the minor award – a pass is the minimum acceptable standard, • used the language of the vocational/specialised area competently, • attempted to apply the theory and concepts appropriately, • provided sufficient evidence which has relevance and clarity.	A Merit indicates that the learner has: • achieved the learning outcomes as outlined in the minor award – a merit implies a good standard has been achieved, • used the language of the vocational/specialised area with a degree of fluency expressed and developed ideas clearly, • demonstrated initiative, evaluation and analytical skills presented coherent and comprehensive evidence.	A Distinction indicates that the learner has: • achieved the learning outcomes as outlined in the minor award – a distinction implies that an excellent standard has been achieved used the language of the vocational/specialised area fluently and confidently demonstration-depth understanding of the subject matter, • demonstrated a high level of initiative, evaluation skills demonstrated analytical and reflective thinking, • expressed and developed ideas clearly, systematically, and comprehensively presented coherent, detailed and focused evidence
Mark between 50-64%	Mark between 65-79%	Mark over 80%

6.18 Learner feedback

Learner feedback on assessments is an important factor in ensuring the continual improvement of programme assessment. Learners are requested to give feedback at the end of each programme using the learner feedback form. Learners are also able to give feedback directly to any member of the programme staff, or the Accreditation and Quality Manager. All feedback will be confidential.

6.19 Faculty member feedback

Faculty member feedback on the suitability and appropriateness of the assessment methodology is important to Optima Training and Consulting. Faculty members are afforded the ability to communicate their thoughts and experiences of completing assessments using the faculty member feedback form, workshops, direct meetings, and faculty member reviews.

6.20 Re-Assessment

While Faculty members will give learners every possible opportunity to pass, there may be occasions where learners do not for whatever reason submit an assignment back maybe due to workload or personal reasons etc. The learner will be contacted and given an opportunity to submit their assignment and be included with in the next available submission period. An assessment extension policy is in place that allows for a later to submit an assignment late once they fill a form, give a valid reason, and is approved by the relevant Programme Director.

Should a learner fail an assessment, feedback will be sought from the faculty member as to whether a learner should re-sit an exam, resubmit part of an assignment, or resit the whole programme again.

7.0   Support Services to Learners

Below outlines the support services which Optima Training and Consulting offers to learners on our programmes.

7.1 Reasonable Accommodation

Reasonable accommodation is a process that helps to support learners who may have a disadvantage due to a medical condition, impairment, learning difficulties, hidden disadvantages, or other extenuating circumstance to provide equality of access and opportunity for all. This accommodation has been designed to assist learners in demonstrating his or her achievements in their assessments. They have not been designed to compensate for a possible lack of achievement arising from a disability or other factors of disadvantage, however, should not give the learner an advantage over others. All reasonable accommodation requests (F042) granted will maintain the integrity/status and reputation of assessment. There are various types of reasonable accommodation accessible to learners, these include:

- Modified presentation of assignments/examination papers e.g., enlargements
- Spelling/grammar wavier
- Rest periods – resulting in extra time being allocated to qualifying learners
- Altered exam settings – Learners will be accommodated by our reasonable accommodation policy below, all requests will be dealt with case by case
- Extra time

While it is recommended that the standard of English required by learners on all programmes is such that they can both understand and convey the concepts contained in the programme content, learner's whose first language is not English can request the following additional supports

- Modified presentation of assignments/examination papers e.g., enlargements
- Spelling/grammar wavier
- Closed captions on Zoom
- Cart captions on Teams
- Use of subtitles in PowerPoint Presentation (this can be translated into another language)

Learners are required to notify the office and/or programme Faculty member of any special requirements needed to enable us to see how best to accommodate him/her during or after assessment. They can do this in the following ways:

- On initial booking the programme director will discuss the specific needs and requirement of the learner and if necessary, will complete the request for reasonable accommodation request form when booking the programme,

- During the completion of the registration form on the 1st day there will be an option to request reasonable accommodation and complete the request for reasonable accommodation form

If learners require reasonable accommodation for completion of an assessment while the programme is running, they are required to fill out a 'Request for Reasonable Accommodation for Assessment Form'. The following details will be required:

- What are the circumstances most relevant to your situation?
- What are your reasonable accommodation request requirements?
- This form is to be submitted along with supporting documentation, for example, a doctor's certificate.

7.1.1 Granting Reasonable Accommodations

- Optima Training and Consulting will assess each accommodation request on a case-by-case status.
- Optima Training and Consulting shall ensure that the integrity the assessment is upheld and that the request made is reasonable and justified,
- Optima Training and Consulting will then proceed to identify the accommodation that is required and how best to implement this ensuring that they do not give the learner an advantage over other learners.
- Optima Training and Consulting will note all requests for reasonable accommodations and the outcome.

7.2 Extension Request Policy

Optima Training and Consulting provides adequate assessment deadlines to ensure that learners have sufficient time to complete their assessments, considering normal work/life responsibilities. If a learner requires an extension for assessment, they are required to complete an extension request form (F012) and return into the programme director. The programme director shall review the application and shall either approve of the extension or not. The application shall be returned to the learner once the decision is completed. If the extension is approved, the form shall be attached to the assessment. If the extension is not approved, then the original date shall stand, or the learner will be offered the chance to resubmit the assessment during the next submission cycle.

7.3 Compassionate Circumstances

Optima Training & Consulting Ltd will consider compassionate circumstances issues at all stages of the learning process. We will consider the rescheduling of assessment arrangements and deadlines for submission to facilitate learners who, through no fault of their own, require compassionate consideration.

The following factors are considered as being likely to merit compassionate consideration, subject to confirmation, clarification, and as required in some cases, medical certification:

- A temporary, permanent, or long-term disability or chronic or disabling condition such as epilepsy, glandular fever, or other incapacitating illness of the learner
- A physical injury or emotional trauma during a period four to six weeks previously

- Learning disabilities involving problems with reading, writing, math, reasoning, listening, and speaking
- Recent bereavement of close family member or friend
- Severe accident
- Domestic crisis
- Terminal illness of a close family member
- Other extenuating circumstances outside the control of the learner

Optima Training & Consulting Ltd will consider the specific nature of each compassionate request made and will decide (based on evidence) on fair procedure relating to each case. Optima Training & Consulting Ltd are aware of the requirement for flexibility in terms of compassionate consideration and will balance this need for flexibility with the essential requirement to maintain the integrity and fairness of the assessment process.

Learners should contact their programme Director as soon as they are able to apply for compassionate circumstances.

7.4 After programme support
Optima Training and Consulting Ltd., offer a three-month post programme support.

8.0   Information Management

8.1 Management of Information
Information is a core asset of Optima Training and Consulting. It is a key resource required to meet our business objectives and expectations of all stakeholders. Optima Training and Consulting are committed to creating, managing, retaining secure records, and providing access to same for continuous quality improvement.

This is underpinned by the following principles:

- Management of information effectively
- Information resources are secured by the organisation
- Responsibility for managing information assets is clearly identified.
- Staff will be able to access information for the effective performance of their role and there will be the opportunity for the free flow of information, as appropriate.
- Protection of personal information, which cannot be shared for legal reasons, e.g., in relation to privacy, security or due to commercial sensitivity.
- Produce accurate information

- Information will be timely, relevant, consistent,
- Information will be managed in accordance with policies, standards, procedures, and will comply with relevant legislation,

8.2 Information systems and data management

Optima Training and Consulting Ltd uses different cloud-based software to manage its operations. The security and retention of data is vital to Optima Training and Consulting Ltd operations. Data is backed up daily and updated on a regular basis. Data is stored centrally on a shared drive.

Optima Training uses the following software:

Microsoft office 365 is used to support day to day operations.

Zoom and MS Teams for remote assessments

Go to webinar for recorded webinars

MS Teams and Go to meeting for meetings

8.2.1 Learner Database

The Learner database is a database that records each learner as attend Optima Training and Consulting programmes. The learner database is restricted to relevant administration staff and management. The Learner database records the necessary information required to process a learner i.e., information such as Name, PPS # that are required to submit for certification by QQI.

8.3 Decision making

All decision making will be based upon facts and will come from the feedback from clients, learners, faculty member, and staff.

8.4 Future Planning

8.4.1 Data collection

The Accreditation and Quality Manager shall carry out an analysis of the data collected (including-completion rates, grade analysis, learner satisfaction rates, enrolment rates target groups (learner profile details, per module/programme) and present them to the QAC and Senior Management.

8.4.2 Completion rates

To assure all our stakeholders that the organisations learning delivery, assessment, and evaluation meets best practice, Optima Training and Consulting will undertake both data collection and measurement of all completion rates of programmes. These will be tracked using KPI and provided for review by the QA Committee and Senior Management. Optima Training and Consulting will endeavour to consistently measure grading and identify any areas of concern in either the delivery of a programme or the assessment tools used in the programme.

8.5 Document maintenance and retention

Records must be managed through their lifecycle: from creation, through storage and use, to disposal.

8.5.1 Creation and Maintenance

Information users will:

- Create, keep, and manage records which document the organisation's principal activities.
- Maintain records the organisation requires for business, regulatory, legal and accountability purposes.
- Create records with meaningful titles so that they can be retrieved quickly and efficiently.
- Create and maintain records in accordance with the procedures for version and document control.
- Make sure records are authentic, reliable, have integrity, and remain usable.
- Ensure appropriate backup arrangements are in place for electronic records (including restoration of backups and disaster recovery if electronic records are damaged). - Storage

To maximise efficiency, reduce costs, enable sharing, and minimise risks, information users will not store information permanently on removable media (e.g., memory sticks, external hard drives etc.).

To balance Optima Training and Consulting commitment to openness and transparency and a desire to store our information with our responsibility for privacy and sensitivity requirements, information users will:

- Ensure all records are subject to appropriate security measures.
- Document decisions regarding access so that they are consistent, can be explained, and referred to.

8.6 Data protection and Freedom of Information

Optima Training and Consulting is committed to the protection of the rights and privacy of individuals and organisations whose data is held by the organisation. This commitment is underpinned by full compliance with the statutory measures that ensure these rights, namely the Data Protection Act 1988, the Data Protection (Amendment) Act 2003 and the General Data Protection Regulation 2016.

To meet our responsibilities under the legislation and in accordance with the data protection principles, we will:

- Obtain data and process information fairly.
- Keep it only for one or more specified, explicit, and lawful purposes.
- Use and disclose data only in ways compatible with these purposes.
- Take appropriate measures to keep data safe and secure.
- Keep data accurate, complete and up to date.
- Ensure data is adequate, relevant, and not excessive.
- Retain data for no longer than is necessary for the purpose or purposes it was collected for.
- Provide data to data subjects upon request.

8.6.1 Obtaining data and processing data

Information may only be collected for the provision of education, training activities, and associated services.

Information will be collected to:

- Provide services including, but not limited to, training and consultancy.
- Provide personnel, payroll, and pension administration services.
- Update databases.

The data subject will made aware of the following prior to processing their data:

- Reason for collecting the data.
- How it will be used.
- Legal basis for processing the data.
- Disclosure to third parties.
- Retention period.
- Contact details for the DPO.

Learners' rights:

- Right to be informed.
- Right of access.
- Right to rectification.
- Right to erasure.
- Right to restrict processing.
- Right to data portability.
- Right to object.
- Rights around automated decision making and profiling.
- Right to withdraw consent at any time.
- Right to make a complaint.

Personal data should only be processed for the specific purpose(s) notified to the data subject(s) and for which it was gathered in the first place:

- If it is requested to be used for any other purpose, consent must be obtained from the data subject(s)
- Data should only be disclosed for the original purpose it was obtained.
- Data should not be disclosed to third parties without the explicit consent of the data subject.
- Verbal consent may be obtained for the disclosure of non-sensitive data.
- Written consent must be obtained for the disclosure of sensitive data.
- Sensitive personal data may be disclosed without the express written consent of the data subject in the following circumstances: Where it is required by law.
- Where it is required for legal advice or legal proceedings, and the person making the disclosure is a party or a witness.
- Where it is required for the purposes of preventing, detecting, or investigating offences, apprehending, or prosecuting offenders, or assessing moneys due to the state.

- Where it is required urgently to prevent injury or damage to health, or serious loss of or damage to property.

8.6.2 Data requests

Once a data request is received, the following applies:

- Inform the individual that the request must be submitted in writing to the DPO using the organisation's access request form (form issued by email upon request).
- Once the written request is received the DPO will verify the identity of the individual using reasonable means – e.g., request a copy of recent photo I.D.
- Once verified, the DPO will process the request or assign a person who will process it.
- The DPO will track/record results to ensure compliance (In the event of a dispute, an audit trail must be available to demonstrate compliance).
- Processing the request should be complete within one month of receiving the request in writing. This time-period can be extended to two months where requests are complex or numerous.
- Inform the individual of the extended time-period.
- Send the data electronically to the individual in the agreed time unless the individual requests that it be sent manually.

8.6.3 Requests to rectify, erase, restrict, or objections to processing

Once a request is received the following applies:

- Inform the individual that the request must be submitted in writing to the DPO.
- Once the written request is received, the DPO will verify the identity of the individual using reasonable means – e.g., a copy of a recent photo I.D.
- Once verified, the DPO will process the request or assign a person to it.
- The DPO will track/record results to ensure compliance (In the event of a dispute a trail must be available to demonstrate compliance).
- Processing the request should be complete within one month of receiving the request in writing. This time-period can be extended to two months where requests are complex or numerous.
- Inform the individual of the extended time-period.
- Notify the individual of the results of their request within the agreed timeframe.

8.6.4 Data sharing requests

Handling a Request

Once a data portability request is received, the following applies:

- Inform the individual that the request must be submitted in writing to the DPO using the organisation's data request form, detailing all data requested (form issued by email upon request).

Once the written request is received, the DPO will:

- Verify or delegate a person who will verify the identity of the individual using reasonable means -e.g., a copy of a recent photo I.D.
- Once verified, the DPO will process the request or delegate someone to process it.

Processing a Request

- Gather all data requested in whatever format it is in.
- Save all data in PDF format.
- Send the data to the data subject for review and agree upon it.
- Once agreed, send the data in PDF format to the other controller identified by the data subject and request a receipt.
- Processing the request should be completed within one month of receiving the request in writing.
- This period can be extended to two months where requests are complex or numerous.
- If the period is to be extended, inform the individual.
- The DPO will track/record results to ensure compliance.
- In the event of a dispute, an audit trail must be available to demonstrate compliance.
- The person responsible must send notification to the data subject of the results of their request within the agreed timeframe.

8.7 Confidentiality and security

Standards of security include the following:

- Access to the IT system is limited to authorised personnel only, each of which will have individual passwords for secure access.
- Access to IT servers is restricted, in a secure location and available to a limited number of approved Staff.
- Access to any staff personal data is restricted to authorised personnel for legitimate purposes only.
- Access to computer systems is password protected with other factors of authentication as appropriate to the sensitivity of the data.
- Non-disclosure of personal security passwords to any other individual including other personnel is encouraged.
- Information on computer screens and manual files to be kept out of sight from unauthorised individuals.
- Back-up procedures in operation for information held on computer servers, including off-site back-up.
- Computers are protected by anti-virus software.
- Computers have automatic screen savers should the user fail to log out.
- Personal manual data is to be held securely in locked cabinets, locked rooms, or rooms with limited access.
- Staff are provided with data protection information and training relevant to their role.

8.8 Data cleansing

To ensure clean data, all fields must be complete at time of initial entry on any systems. Quality checks are carried out quarterly on a random selection of:

- Learner Records
- Log any issues identified.
- Contact all organisations annually to verify and update information.

Maintain the database:

- Assign responsibility for systematic cleansing.
- Update policies and procedures.
- Seek external expertise, if required.
- Keep staff informed and upskilled.
- Carry out random spot checks.
- Discuss issues with relevant staff members.
- Ensure consistency of data entry among all staff.
- All policies and procedures are reviewed annually, as per the document control matrix.
- Staff records are updated annually, or sooner if required, in line with performance reviews.
- Information on the website and/or social media is reviewed and updated weekly.
- All data is reviewed annually for relevance and updated or disposed of as required.

8.9 Managing a data breach

A data breach may happen for several reasons, including:

- Loss or theft of equipment on which data is stored.
- Inappropriate access controls allowing unauthorised use.
- Equipment failure.
- Human error e.g., the sending of an email to the wrong address.
- Unforeseen circumstances, such as a flood or fire.
- Computer hacking.
- Access where information is obtained by deception.

Should a breach occur it is to be manged in the following way:

- Details of the incident should be recorded, including.
- A description of the incident.
- The date and time of the incident.
- The date and time it was detected.
- Who reported the incident and to whom it was reported?
- The type of data involved and how sensitive it is.
- The number of individuals affected by the breach.
- Was the data encrypted?
- Details of any IT systems involved.
- Notification of the breach
- Internal Notification

A data breach must be reported without delay to the DPO and the Senior Management Team, with the incident details.

- The DPO will immediately convene a meeting of relevant people to deal with the incident.

- The group will assess the incident details and the risks involved, including:
- What type of data is involved?
- How sensitive is the data involved?
- How many individuals' personal data are affected by the breach?
- Were there protections in place e.g., encryption?
- What are the potential adverse consequences for individuals?
- How serious or substantial are they likely to be?
- How likely is it that adverse consequences will materialise?

External Notification

- It is best practice to inform the office of the data commissioner immediately for advice on how best to deal with the aftermath of a data breach.
- The DPO will be responsible for contacting the office of the data commissioner.
- The Senior Management Team, in consultation with the office of the data commissioner, will decide if it is appropriate to inform the persons whose data has been breached (Not every incident will warrant notification).
- When notifying individuals, Senior Management will consider the most appropriate medium for doing so. It will bear in mind the security of the medium for notification and the urgency of the situation.
- Specific and clear advice will be given to individuals on the steps they can take to protect themselves and, what the organisation is willing to do to assist them.
- The DPO will be the contact person for further or ongoing information.
- The Senior Management Team will also consider notifying third parties, such as An Garda Síochána who can assist in reducing the adverse consequences to the data subject(s).
- Other statutory agencies will be informed, as required.

Evaluation and Response

After any breach, a review of the incident will be made by Senior Management. The purpose of this review will be to:

- Ensure that the steps taken during the incident were appropriate.
- Describe and record the measures being taken to prevent any repetition of the incident.
- Identify areas that may need improvement.
- Document any recommended changes to policy and/or procedures which are to be implemented as soon as possible thereafter.

8.10 Internal audits

Internal audits will be carried out annually by the DPO, who will:

- Complete the audit schedule

The schedule specifies the areas and/or processes to be audited, the audit criteria and scope of the audit.

- Areas specified in the schedule are audited against relevant documentation and standards (audit criteria).

- Internal audits are carried out across selected activities annually, with greater frequency, if required.
- The frequency of audits can be adjusted depending on the results of previous audits, Evaluation, new procedures, or the importance of an identified issue.

The audits are carried out by:

- Reviewing manual and electronic procedures and compliance.
- Consultation with relevant Staff. - Reviewing previous audit reports and improvement plans.
- A summary internal audit report is completed by the Data Protection Off outlining any strengths and areas for improvement.
- Where an issue is discovered, it is recorded, and any Issues will be prioritised for completion.
- The issue and corrective action should be agreed between the auditor and the person tasked with completing the corrective action.
- Where no issues are found, a record is retained to signify that an audit has been carried out, i.e., an audit report must still be completed.
- Corrective actions are checked at the end of each month by the Data Protection Officer to verify completion.
- Reports are provided to the next quality team meeting for review.
- Internal audit reports are to be maintained for a period of three years.

8.11 Staff training and support
Initial data protection information will be provided at induction.

- All new staff members will receive training on the IT system.
- Management will provide periodic updates and awareness training as required.
- Upskilling workshops will be held annually.
- Manuals will be reviewed and updated annually or sooner if required.
- Updates will be communicated to stakeholders electronically.

The IT lead will provide ongoing advice and support.

8.12 Records Maintenance, data retention and disposal
Management will:

Ensure all Staff are made aware of the records retention schedule so that they know which records the organisation has decided to keep and their personal responsibility to follow the retention schedules.

Information users will:

Review records in accordance with the retention schedule when they are no longer required for on-going business or specific legal or regulatory purposes.

Review records at the end of their retention period and arrange for secure destruction, transfer to storage or given a further review date.

Documentation of the disposal or transfer of records will be completed and retained.

Manage electronic records in accordance with the retention schedule. It is recommended that an intended disposal or review date is captured when creating electronic records. All data created and/or received by staff in the course of their duties are retained for as long as they are required to meet legal, administrative, financial, and operational requirements. The final disposal, either through transfer to archives or destruction, is carried out according to the retention schedules. Retention periods depend on different criteria, including compliance with legislation and best practice. The retention periods are the minimum time that records should be kept and are calculated from the end of the calendar month, following the last entry on the record. A records retention schedule will apply to a series of records and will indicate when eligible records must be destroyed or deleted, as well as when permanent records are to be archived. In conjunction with the retention periods included in this policy, the following principles should also be observed:

- Be conservative and avoid inordinate degrees of risk.
- Consider the consensus of knowledgeable/experienced people.
- Retain a record if it is likely to be needed in the future, and if the potential consequences of not having it would be substantial and are foreseeable at the time.
- Apply common sense.
- Disposal of records must be authorised by a senior manager or the Data Protection Officer.

Where hard copy records are to be destroyed after the retention period has expired, they should be destroyed using a shredder, or where there is many records to be destroyed, a professional contractor with expertise in this field should be employed on a confidential basis with the intention that such contractor will oversee the process and issue a certificate of destruction.

A record in the form of a register is to be maintained of all records destroyed, providing verifiable authorised proof of destruction.

The register should be kept in perpetuity and should provide details of all records destroyed, including identifying the name of the person to whom the record relates.

The register should be signed and dated by the person who authorised the destruction of the records. This register should be held in a secure location.

Electronic records should be disposed of as per the retention schedule.

Third parties who have received records should be notified and requested to dispose of those records according to the retention schedule.

8.12.1 Retention schedule
The record retention schedule for procedures is listed in the document register (F001).

9.0 Communications Policy

Optima Training and Consulting is committed to ensuring effective two-way communication between Management, Staff, learners, and Stakeholders. Optima Training and Consulting believe that for communication to be effective it must be based on mutual trust and inclusive of diversity. Optima Training and Consulting commit to providing accurate, relevant, and up to date information, and welcome constructive feedback to further enhance our programmes and services.

All communication with learners and the public shall be subjected to review and internal approval prior to publication.

9.1 Communication with learners

Optima training and Consulting is committed to ensuring that accurate and up to date information on quality assurance and programme information is available to all prospective learners on the Optima training and Consulting website and through direct communication with programme staff. The relevant programme director shall be responsible for the regular review of programme information to ensure that the information is accurate, up to date, and fulfils the requirements of the awarding body. Where changes are required, the changes shall be reviewed by the Accreditation and Quality Manager in conjunction with the relevant Programme Director prior to sign off.

9.1.2 Programme information

The following Programme information will be available on the Optima training and Consulting website:

- Programme title and outline,
- Programme duration and times,
- Programme pricing,

- Entry requirements,
- Expected learning outcomes,
- Learner profile,
- Refund and cancelled programme policy,
- Award type (if applicable),
- Awarding body and information on the awarding body (if applicable),
- Assessment information (if applicable),
- NFQ (if applicable),
- Details of protection of learners' arrangements (if applicable),
- Details of transfer and progression arrangements (if applicable),
- Details of recognised prior learning (if applicable).

An outline of what information is to be communicated, when will it be communicated, how it is to be communicated and who will communicate it is summarised in the table below:

What is to be communicated	When is to be communicated	With whom is it to be communicated	How is it to be communicated	Who communicates
Programme information	Initial enquiry	All learners	Induction, learner handbook, website	Programme staff
Entry requirements	Initial enquiry	All learners	Induction, learner handbook, website	Programme staff
Programme fees and payment information	Initial enquiry	All learners	Induction, learner handbook, website	Programme staff
Assessment	Induction	All learners	Induction, learner handbook, website	Programme director and Faculty member
Appeals process	Induction	All learners	Induction, learner handbook	Programme director and Faculty member
Appeals Decision	Once appeal process is completed	All learners	Personal communication	Programme director

Supports & reasonable accommodation	Initial enquiry, induction	All learners	Induction, learner handbook	Programme director and Faculty member
Complaints	Induction	All learners	Induction, learner handbook	Programme director and Faculty member
Complaints decision	Once complaints process is completed	All learners	Personal communication	Programme director
Contact details	Induction	All learners	Website, induction	Programme director and Faculty member
Equality & diversity	Induction	All learners	Induction, learner handbook	Programme director and Faculty member
Results	Once results process is completed	All learners	Personal communication	Programme director and Faculty member
Access, transfer, and progression for learners	Induction	All learners	Induction	Programme director and Faculty member
Quality Assurance	Induction	All learners	Induction, learner handbook	Programme director and Faculty member

9.2 Communication with staff and Faculty member

Communication serves as the foundation to good business management. Effective communication between staff, faculty member, and management is an important part in ensuring Optima Training and Consulting operates efficiently and consistently. To ensure that communication is effective, it should be clear, timely, complete, and concise.

An outline of what information is to be communicated between staff, faculty member, and management, when will it be communicated, how it is to be communicated and who will communicate it is summarised in the table below:

What is to be communicated	When is to be communicated	With whom is it to be communicated	How and where is it to be communicated	Who communicates
Quality Policy	To all new hires at the beginning of employment and as deemed necessary	All employees and Faculty member	Quality manual Personal communication, Induction	Accreditation & Quality Manager or designee

Quality manual	To all new hires at the beginning of employment and as deemed necessary	All employees and Faculty member	Induction, website	Accreditation & Quality Manager or designee
Relevant quality objectives	At regular intervals	All employees and Faculty member	Personal communication, email	Accreditation & Quality Manager or designee
Quality Performance	At regular intervals	All employees and Faculty member	Personal communication, email	Accreditation & Quality Manager or designee
Quality Assurance responsibilities	To all new hires at the beginning of employment and as deemed necessary	All employees and Faculty member	Quality Manual, Faculty member handbook	MD, Accreditation & Quality Manager, or designee
Internal Audit finding	As they occur	All employees and Faculty member	Personal communication, email	Accreditation & Quality Manager or designee
Corrective Actions	As they occur	Affected employees and Faculty member	Personal communication, email	Accreditation & Quality Manager or designee
Procedure revisions	As required	Affected employees	Workshops, Email	Accreditation & Quality Manager or designee
External audits	As they occur	All employees and Faculty member	Personal communication, email	Accreditation & Quality Manager or designee
Client audits	As they occur	All employees and Faculty member	Personal communication, email	Accreditation & Quality Manager or designee
Self-assessment reports	Annual	All employees and Faculty member	Personal communication, email	Accreditation & Quality Manager or designee
Management review	Annual	All employees and Faculty member	Meeting minutes	Accreditation & Quality Manager or designee
Programme review	Annual	Programme staff, Faculty member	Programme review report	Programme review Committee
Results approval committee	As they occur	Faculty member, QAC	Meeting minutes	Results approval committee
Quality Panel minutes	As they occur	Quality Panel, Quality Assurance committee	Meeting minutes	Quality Panel, Accreditation & Quality Manager

Quality Assurance committee	As they occur	All employees and Faculty member	Meeting minutes	Quality Assurance committee, MD, Accreditation & Quality Manager
Insurance details from Faculty member and from Optima Training and Consulting	Annual	All employees and Faculty member	Personal communication, email	Faculty member, MD
Course issues	As they occur	Programme staff, Faculty member	End of course report	Programme staff, Faculty member

Communication between staff and faculty member shall occur before, during, and after each programme. Communication before starting a programme can include time, date, and location of the programme, programme resources availability, and any reasonable requests. Communication during the programme can include any issues with the venue, resources, and additional reasonable requests. Communication after the programme can include the end of course report which includes faculty member and learner feedback, and assessment material.

An annual newsletter with quality information will be sent to faculty members. An annual Faculty member meeting shall take place, the minutes of the meeting shall be recorded using the meeting minutes form (F011).

Staff meetings shall take place every quarter to ensure that staff are up to date on any quality issues, changes to procedures, and any other updates relevant to the operation of Optima Training and Consulting. The minutes of the meeting shall be recorded using the meeting minutes form (F011).

9.3 Communication with public

Optima training and Consulting is committed to ensuring that up to date information on quality assurance is available to the public on the Optima training and Consulting website. Marketing and promotional material on programmes shall be reviewed by the Programme Director to ensure that is accurate, up to date, and fulfils the requirements of the awarding body. Where changes are required, the changes shall be reviewed by the Accreditation and Quality Manager in conjunction with the relevant Programme Director prior to sign off.

An outline of what public information that will be communicated, when will it be communicated, how it is to be communicated and who will communicate it to the public is summarised in the table below:

What is to be communicated	When is to be communicated	With whom is it to be communicated	How is it to be communicated	Who communicates

Quality Policy	On enquiry	Public	website	Accreditation & Quality Manager or designee
Quality manual & procedures	On enquiry	Public	Website (once approved by QQI)	Accreditation & Quality Manager or designee
Cyclical review reports	On enquiry	Public	website	Accreditation & Quality Manager or designee

9.4 Protection for Enrolled Learners

Protection for enrolled learners is required for providers that offer programmes 3 months or longer in duration where fees are charged. Optima Training and Consulting do not currently offer programmes that are 3 months or longer.

9.5 Quality assurance and Evaluation Reports

Optima Training and Consulting will publish the following on its website:

- Awarding Body Reports
- Quality Assurance Manual
- Quality Assurance Policy

Optima Training and Consulting will make available upon request the following:

- Policies and Procedures
- Summary Reports from Internal Self-Evaluation
- External Evaluation Reports available

10. Other Third Parties

Optima Training and Consulting values the importance of any external advice, opinions and support mechanisms that can enhance our services. It helps us to validate our existing practices that are already in place. Before engaging in any external supports Quality Assurance Committee will ensure an appropriate selection and recruitment procedure for the expert shall take place. Any third parties affiliated with Optima Training and Consulting shall complete an appropriate declaration that there are no conflicts or interests. Upon engaging with the appropriate third party, Optima Training and Consulting will ensure that their roles and responsibilities is clearly identifiable, and any supports or services required for them to complete their function is available to them.

10.1 External Quality Assurance Advisor

If necessary, Optima Training and Consulting may engage with an external quality assurance advisor to advise on the Quality Assurance Framework and to avail of services to aid in the implementation, monitoring, review, and evaluation processes of our services offered and programmes that are

delivered by the company. Optima Training and Consulting is committed to ensuring that this evaluation process is a critical component to ensuring that all quality assurance operational procedures are being adhered to.

10.2 External Authenticators

An External authenticator will be selected for the programmes identified to be certified in that submission cycle. The purpose of the authenticator will be to ensure that fair and consistent marking for each submission is being achieved by ensuring that marks are being allocated in a fair and transparent way in line with the awards assessment requirement and QQI national standards. Once a faculty member has marked the assessment required for successful completion, and internal verification has been completed, the authenticator will be required to review information presented, double checking that information presented is correct and up to the required standard. They will be required to provide unbiased feedback to Optima Training and Consulting in relation to the assessment that has been produced highlighting areas for improvements as well as identifying good practices. A sample of the assessments produced during a submission cycle will be reviewed by the authenticator to ensure integrity. The authenticator will be a subject matter expert in programme assessment, as well as being very familiar with the delivery and marking criteria of the programme. They will have no conflict of interest in relation the assessments they are assessing/reviewing.

10.3 Contract Faculty members

Optima Training and Consulting works with contract Faculty members for the delivery of programmes. All Faculty members working with Optima Training and Consulting will be required to meet the criteria agreed for our recruitment and selection process of our QA system. They will be required to attend an induction before engaging in any programme delivery on behalf of Optima Training and Consulting. The first two programmes delivered by the faculty member shall undergo a 100% internal verification.

They will have a minimum of 2 years' experience within their respected delivery field. Our faculty members suggestions and opinions are crucial to us as it enables us to continuously improve our practices and as a result trainers' complete feedback during and after each programme completed. Our faculty members are asked to be key members of our programme development process and to aid in programme alterations during programme reviews practices. As a result, Faculty members form part of the Programme Development and Review Committee. Optima Training and Consulting will work closely with Faculty members by engaging with them on providing feedback to us during the self-evaluation process. Training and support will also be provided to Faculty members should the need arise. Optima Training and Consulting will require Faculty members to carry out on the job training. Where practical assessments are carried out such as skills demonstrations, video presentations etc., the faculty member is required to assess these skills. Optima Training and Consulting have a management system in place to ensure consistency across the board. There are assessment sheets and marking guidelines in the end of course report to be filled out for each learner.

10.4 Clients and Learner Representatives

As required, learners may be asked to be a learner representative for Programme reviews and self-evaluations to ensure full insight of our academic practices are being considered and reflected on. The learner representative forms an integral part of our QA system and will be consulted in a range of aspects of the academic systems in place. This individual or individuals will provide feedback they will help us to identify areas of improving our standards and can be a strong influence on any decisions on our processes and programmes. Optima Training and Consulting will engage with client representatives also for self-evaluations and the programme review processes to ensure that programmes are relevant and meet the requirements of industry.

10.5 External Independent Evaluator

During a cyclical review of programmes, Optima Training and Consulting may engage in the services of this highly experienced evaluator that is both academically and professionally qualified during its self-evaluation processes. They will be an expert in QQI systems and processes, specifically in the monitoring and reporting section. They will also have extensive knowledge in working within the quality assurance framework. The purpose of the process is for the evaluator to review in particular the quality and impact of our Learners and stakeholders' experiences, achievements and contributions. Therefore, we will require this individual evaluator to be capable of providing independent expert advice to enhance our operating QA systems. The evaluator will be required to complete an External Evaluator Report which will express emerging thoughts and recommendations they will set out their findings and will examine the internal self-evaluation against QQI recommendations and other standards.

11.0 Self-evaluation, monitoring, and review

11.1 Internal monitoring

The ongoing/internal monitoring process comes from a variety of information sources including learner and Faculty member feedback, programme reviews, external stakeholder engagement, and management meetings. The table below provides a summary of internal evaluation methods that are used to inform practice and ensure continual improvement of Optima Training and Consulting quality system. Ongoing monitoring may also lead to minor changes/updates to programmes, changes to policies and procedures, and operational changes.

Methods used	Stakeholder types	Type of Monitoring	When?	Areas of Review

Learner Surveys & Feedback Forms	Learners	Informal & formal	End of programme	• Faculty member support & assessment, • Admin & learner supports, • Training platforms, • Programme content & documentation, • Facilities
Faculty member feedback forms	Faculty member	Informal & Formal	End of programme	• Programme content & documentation • Training facilities • Training equipment and resources • Issues with Learners • Support
Programme Review meeting minutes	Programme director, Programme administrator faculty member, Managing Director, Director for Health & Safety, Accreditation and Quality Manager, Learners,	Formal	Annually	• Faculty member & learner feedback • Administration issues • Completion rates • External examiner reports • Programme module content reviews • Review of self-evaluations • Programme improvement plans • Planned validation activity. • RPL • Progression & transfer
Day-to-day Learner communication Activities	Learners, Faculty member, programme administrator	Formal	On-going	• Programme content, • delivery and day-to-day matters arising
Key stakeholder feedback		Informal & formal	On-going	• Feedback from day-to-day activities Formal reports received from stakeholders
Quality Assurance committee meeting minutes	Programme director, Programme administrator faculty member, Optima Management, Learners,	Formal	Every 6 months	• Programme reviews • External reports • KPIs • Policy development • Programme approval • Compliance

Internal Audits	Optima Management	Formal	Annual	• Compliance with procedures
Quality Panel meeting minutes	Accreditation and Quality Manager, Programme staff	Formal	Every 2 months	• Compliance • Completion rates • Learner achievement • Trends
Results approval panel meeting minutes	Programme staff, Faculty member, external examiner	Formal	On-going	• Completion rates • Learner achievement • Trends
External Examiner reports	External Examiner	Formal	On-going	• Examination report • Evidence, programme learning outcomes, assessment procedures, trends
Workshop meeting minutes	Faculty member, Programme staff, MD, H&S Director, Accreditation and Quality Manager	Informal & formal	As required	• Programme content & documentation • Training facilities • Training equipment and resources • Issues with Learners • Support • CPD
Management Review meeting minutes	MD, H&S Director, company management	Formal	Annually	• Progress against corporate goals • Financial review • Sales & marketing • HR & operations • QA & opportunities for improvement

Table 3 Overview of documents used during internal review

11.2 Self-assessment

The purpose of the self-assessment/evaluation is to ensure that all processes are completed according to written procedures and standards. Self-assessment/evaluation shall include evidence that is relevant, reliable, and adequate. The evidence may come in several forms, including documentation (procedures and forms completed), interviews, and observation of processes.

The self-assessment/evaluation process shall include using the PHECC self-assessment and the QQI Self Evaluation Report and the methods used below as inputs into the self-assessment/evaluation process. The outcome of the self-assessment/evaluation process shall be a list of areas that need to be improved. This list is then incorporated into the Improvement Log (F003), where items are actioned upon to improve Optima Training and Consulting quality assurance system.

11.3 Programme Review and revalidation

Currently a process for revalidation of programmes has yet to rolled out for further education training (FET) programmes. Currently validated programmes may continue to be delivered until further communication from QQI. New programmes that require validation will undergo the validation process as described below.

11.3.1 QQI

QQI has five specific measurable purposes for its cyclical reviews which are:

1. To encourage a QA culture and the enhancement of the Learner learning environment and experience within institutions.
2. To provide feedback to institutions about institution-wide quality and the impact of mission, strategy, governance, and management on quality and the overall effectiveness of their quality assurance.
3. To improve public confidence in the quality of institutions by promoting transparency and public awareness.
4. To support systems-level improvement of the quality of higher education.
5. To facilitate quality enhancement by using evidence-based, objective methods and advice.

11.3.1.1 Initial steps
1. The Accreditation and Quality Manager liaises with QQI to agree a review date.
2. QQI provides draft Terms of Reference for Optima Training and Consulting to consider and contextualise.
3. The Terms of Reference, when contextualised, are submitted by the Accreditation and Quality Manager to the Quality Assurance Committee for approval.
4. Following approval by the Quality Assurance Committee, the Accreditation and Quality Manager returns the Terms of Reference to QQI.

11.3.1.2 Self-Evaluation
1. The Accreditation and Quality Manager co-ordinates the Optima Training and Consulting Self Evaluation and the prepares the Self-Evaluation Report (SER) based on the agreed QQI Terms of Reference. The SER will consider self-evaluations from the previous 5 years.
2. The Accreditation and Quality Manager is the lead author and establishes a Quality Improvement Plan for approval by the Quality Assurance Committee.

The Accreditation and Quality Manager presents the SER and Quality Improvement Plan to the Quality Assurance Committee for approval and returns the approved copy to QQI.

11.3.1.3 QQI process
Typically, the following occurs:

1. QQI appoints an Expert Review Team (ERT) in consultation with the Accreditation and Quality Manager to ensure there is no conflict of interest.
2. The Chairperson of the Review Team meets with representatives of the college to determine the agenda for the ERT visit.
3. The Expert Review Team meet with Optima Training and Consulting Staff and Stakeholders as per the agenda.
4. Initial observations and recommendations are communicated at the conclusion of the visit.

5. The ERT prepare a draft report which is provided to Optima Training and Consulting for factual checking.
6. The Accreditation and Quality Manager, in consultation with the Quality Assurance Committee prepares and returns any factual corrections to the draft report to QQI.

11.3.1.4 The Report of the Expert Review Team

On receipt of the final report, the Accreditation and Quality Manager circulates it to the Quality Assurance Committee to consider the contents and recommendations.

The Accreditation and Quality Manager co-ordinates the responses and implements the plans to include timeframes for implementation and prepares the Institutional Response.

The Accreditation and Quality Manager presents the Institutional Response complete with implementation plan to the Quality Assurance Committee for approval.

Following approval by the Quality Assurance Committee, the Accreditation and Quality Manager submits the Institutional Response to QQI.

11.3.1.5 Publication of Panel Report and Response

When received and agreed, QQI will make arrangements for the publication of the panel report and institutional response.

11.3.1.6 Follow-Up Report

Optima Training and Consulting will provide a follow-up report to QQI one year after the approval of the implementation plan.

The Accreditation and Quality Manager will coordinate the compilation of the report based on updates provided by appropriate Optima Training and Consulting personnel in respect of actions relating to their areas of responsibility.

Whilst subsequent reports are not normally required by QQI, the Accreditation and Quality Manager will undertake annual updating of progress regarding the implementation plan. Appropriate personnel will be required to advise on actions that are met, in progress, or still outstanding.

11.3.2 PHECC

If a new programme is to be offered by Optima Training and Consulting ltd, that is accredited by PHECC, it shall undergo the internal programme development process. Once the programme successfully completes the internal programme development process and is approved by the QAC; an application to PHECC to provide the programme will be completed. If the application is successful, the programme shall be launched. If the application is not successful, the programme along with associated reports from PHECC shall be reassessed by the QAC.

11.4 Internal Audit

Internal audits are carried out across each operational area at least once a year but may be carried out at a greater frequency depending on requirements and possible gaps identified. Where gaps are noted in the audit, improvement plans will be constructed and circulated to the relevant staff.

An internal audit schedule will be agreed at the start of each year and will specify the areas and or processes to be audited, the auditor, the audit criteria, and scope of the audit.

All Evaluation tools will be utilised during audits, these will include but not limited to:

- Learner evaluation forms and other communications.
- Faculty member evaluations
- End of programme reports
- Programme reviews
- IV/ EA/RAP reports
- Previous audit results.
- Improvement plans
- Awarding body criteria and correspondence

The Accreditation and Quality Manager will ensure that all those involved in the audit are independent of the area/process being audited. Where a gap or issue is identified it will be noted on the non-conformance logs. Information gathered on the non-conformance log will include:

- Details of the issue,
- How the non-conformance was found,
- The root cause of the non-conformance,
- The corrective actions to be put in place,
- The person responsible for the corrective action,
- A completion date is assigned to the corrective action,
- The name of person that has verified that the corrective action has been completed.

A summary internal audit report will be completed by the internal auditor outlining any strengths and areas for improvement. Copies of internal audit reports together with any checklists and/or notes used by the auditor during the audit will be retained and used for reference in next audits. A record will be retained to show that an audit has been carried out, even there are no non-conformances. Internal audit reports are to be maintained for a period of three years.

11.5 Benchmarking

Optima Training and Consulting shall use benchmarking to compare the company's performance with other relevant providers. QP 18 Benching marking procedure covers how bench marking is competed.

12.0 Procedure for recording meetings

To ensure that the outcomes of meetings are accurately recorded a minute taker should be identified before the start of the meeting.

12.1 Before the Meeting

Before the meeting commences, please check the minutes of the previous meeting for actions to be followed up on.

Decide how the notes will be recorded, i.e. pen and paper, laptop computer, or tape recorder.

Make sure the tool of choice is in working order and have a backup just in case.

Use the meeting agenda to formulate an outline of the meeting minutes.

12.2 During the Meeting

Record attendance

Note the time the meeting begins.

Ensure that all of the essential elements are noted, such as type of meeting, date and time, location, name of the person who called the meeting, name of committee, agenda topics, and meeting finish time.

Concentrate on getting the gist of the discussion and taking enough notes to summarize it later. Think in terms of issues discussed, major points raised, and decisions taken.

Write down the actions to be completed, the person responsible, and the deadline for the actions to be completed by.

Make a note of the resources required to complete the actions.

Note any special notes or issues.

Note the ending time of the meeting.

12.3 After the Meeting

Type up the minutes as soon as possible after the meeting, while everything is still fresh in your mind.

Don't wait too long to type up the minutes, especially while your memory is fresh.

Proofread the minutes before submitting them.

Be sure to have the minutes approved by the chair or facilitator before distributing them to the attendees.

Include the name of committee, type of meeting (daily, weekly, monthly, annual, or special), and purpose of meeting.

Include the time the meeting began and ended.

Save the minutes to the correct folder (Quality\11. Meetings) e.g., by committee or if the meeting was specifically related to PHECC or QQI.

13.0 Performance review of employees:

The performance review is intended to be a fair and balanced assessment of an employee's performance. It is a time for the Managing Director and employee to review the performance of the last year, give and receive feedback, clarify job duties, explain management's expectations, and set goals for the coming year. To accomplish a fair and balanced assessment, management must provide the employee an opportunity to express his/her opinions about the employment relationship. Even though the employee's past performance is reviewed, an essential component is planning for the next year.

Essential Elements of Performance Reviews:

1. Employee completes the self-evaluation process. This step in the process is very important for the employee to reflect on the last year to state their accomplishments and assess their own performance.
2. Managing Director reviews the employee's self-evaluation and completes the employee performance evaluation form.
3. Employee and Supervisor meet to discuss the review. The performance review process must include one-on-one discussion between the supervisor and employee with both parties being full participants.
4. Review objectives and set goals for the employee:
    I.   New hires – upon successful completion of the probationary period, all employees will meet with their supervisor to review objectives and set goals for the remaining performance review period. The Managing Director should update the employee's training development plan.
    II. All other employees- Objectives will be reviewed and goals set at the beginning of each performance review period. The Managing Director should update the employee's training development plan.
5. If the objectives and goals are not met, they should be reassessed, and a continual improvement plan completed with a reason given as to why the objectives and goals were not completed.

Ratings

Expectations should be specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and timely. All employees shall be evaluated based on how well he/she has met the known expectations of his/her position. All employees will be reviewed using the following options:

1 = Does Not Meet Expectations

• employee did not consistently meet the job standards

• performance needs improvement in areas of consistent weakness

• employee requires close supervision to meet expectations

• if employee fails to improve, corrective action may be recommended

2 = Meets Expectations

• employee consistently met the job standards

• results were timely and accurate and were produced with minimum supervision

• employee recognized and adjusted well to changes in work situations and assignments

• solid, good performance was the employee's norm

3 = Occasionally Exceeds Expectations

• employee periodically exceeded the job standards

• employee achieved results above expectations

• employee showed exceptional performance and effort from time to time

• performance is sustained and uniformly high with thorough and on time results

4 = Consistently Exceeds Expectations

• employee clearly and consistently exceeded the job standards

• exceptional performance and effort was the employee's norm

• employee achieved results well beyond expectations

• employee contributed unique, innovative, and workable solutions to projects and/or problems

14.0 Cleaning and checking equipment procedure

Optima Training and Consulting ltd have adopted a "Clean as you go" approach to cleaning of resources and equipment during programmes. Learners shall be required to stay in the same seat for the duration of the training to prevent cross contamination and for contact tracing purposes.

14.1 Cleaning resources

Faculty members and learners shall be provided with essential cleaning materials to keep their own workspace clean.

Essential cleaning materials include:

- Antiviral and disinfectant spray
- paper towels,
- Antiviral wipes,
- waste bins,
- waste bags.

14.2 Contact/touch surfaces

Contact/touch surfaces such as tabletops, work equipment, door handles, and handrails are visibly clean at all times and shall be cleaned at least twice daily.

The contact/touch surface shall be sprayed with an antiviral and disinfectant spray and left for 5 minutes.

The contact/touch surface shall then be wiped down using paper towels.

If antiviral spray is not available, antiviral wipes can be used to wipe down contact/touch surfaces. The contact/touch surface shall be left to dry.

Used paper towels and wipes shall be placed in the bin provided.

14.3 Bins

The number of waste collection points have been increased.

Waste bins shall be emptied regularly throughout the day and at the end of each day.

14.4 Washroom facilities and communal spaces

Washroom facilities and communal spaces shall be cleaned at regular intervals.

14.5 Hot desks

The use of hot desks shall be limited, if hot desks are required to be used, the desk shall be cleaned using the procedure above for contact/touch surfaces before and after use.

No rubbish shall be left on the hot desk, all waste shall be placed in the provided waste bins.

14.6 Ventilation

Passively ventilated offices and training rooms shall be ventilated by opening windows. It is recommended to actively open windows, although this may cause some discomfort as the venue may be colder.

Windows should be opened when entering the room and closed at the end of the day for security purposes.

Venues where there is mechanical ventilation systems should be modified to eliminate air recirculation i.e., to only produce fresh air.

14.7 Checking equipment

All equipment required shall undergo a visual inspection at the start of each programme using the equipment checklist. Electrical equipment should be checked for electrical safety using an annual portable appliance test.

As part of the programme requirements, back up equipment should be available where reasonably practicable.

Where the equipment is found to be defective, the faculty member shall report this to the relevant programme director and the equipment shall be replaced. The defective equipment shall be inspected and repaired where possible.

Where a programme is run off site, it may not be possible to start the programme due to the lack of replacement equipment. The faculty member shall report this to the programme director. The programme director and Faculty member in conjunction with the learners shall discuss re-scheduling the course to another suitable date.

Faculty members should ensure that they have back up equipment available to them. If the programme does not go ahead, they should advise the relevant programme director of this. The faculty members shall re-schedule the programme and inform Optima Training and Consulting of this.

15.0 Document Control procedure

All documents relating to the quality system are located on Optima Training and Consultation one drive for ease of access. All documents from the one drive are deemed to be controlled. Any document that is printed shall be controlled for one day, after which it will be deemed uncontrolled.

15.1 Document creation

Any employee or contractor of Optima training may identify and request the need for a new document. The Quality Manager shall verify if there is a document already existing with the management system that meets the requirements of the request. If there is no suitable document in existence, the Quality Manager shall arrange for the development of a new document. The development of all documents shall include input and consultation of relevant employees and contractors. Documents will carry a unique identification, that will consist of the document reference number, date, issue and/or revision number.

15.2 Document format

15.2.1 Policies

All Optima training policies shall be signed by the Managing Director and dated.

15.2.2 Quality Procedures

The following standard format shall be used for all quality procedures:

- Title
- Purpose
- Scope

- References
- Definitions
- Responsibilities
- Procedure
- Performance measures (if applicable)
- Appendices (if applicable)
- Review

15.3   Document properties

The following standard format shall be used for all quality documents:

- Document control number
- Version number
- Issue date
- Document author
- Number of pages
- Location

QM- Quality Manual

QA- Policies

F- form or log

QP- Quality procedure or process

WI- work instruction

S- sign

PR- presentation

15.4 Consultation and communication

Consultation on new or revised documents is required to approval. Evidence of consultation shall be documented using meeting minutes, memorandums or emails or other records. Feedback shall be reviewed and incorporated into draft documents, where relevant, and a final draft prepared by the document controller for approval.

15.4   Document Approval

New or revised final drafts shall be approved by the QMR (Quality and Accreditation Manager).

Once approved, the final controlled document shall be released by the Document Controller via Optima training intranet and communicated to relevant personnel to allow implementation.

15.6 Document Review

All documentation that forms part of Optima training quality management system shall be formally reviewed annually to ensure that they are:

a) Still required,
b) Accurate,
c) Comply with the appropriate template,
d) Comply with associated Optima training documents.

Documentation may be reviewed more frequently due to changes in Optima Training practises.

15.7 Obsolete Documents

Obsolete controlled documents, are documents that are no longer required, replaced, or superseded by a new version of the controlled document. Obsolete documents shall be removed from the quality folder and appropriately archived in an obsolete folder to prevent unintended use. Archived documents should be retained for system evaluation and verification purposes.

15.8 Document Control Register

A document control register shall be maintained by the document controller for all Optima training documentation created or modified. The document control register shall include the following:

- Document number,
- Document type,
- Document title,
- Issue date,
- Revision number,
- Description,
- Review date, and
- Owner.

15.9 Records Management

The purpose of records management is to ensure that Optima training business activity is recorded accurately and

15.10 Record retention

Records shall be retained in accordance with the retention period set out in the document register.

15.11 Record storage

All controlled documents shall be stored within the appropriate documents libraries on the intranet and made available to all workers. These filles are stored on an electronic server system that is regularly backed up and archived.

Records generated may be in the form of hardcopy or electronic media. Records shall be stored in an orderly manner, and in an easily identifiable system to ensure their efficient and effective retrieval and/or replacement by an authorised person.

15.12 External documents

External documents such as guidelines, standards shall be maintained on the intranet for access by workers.

16.0 Blended Learning

16.1 Criteria for Admission to a Blended Learning Programme

Entry to the initial stage of a programme is gained through:

- Meeting the minimum educational entry requirements,
- Assessment of recognition of prior learning (RPL) which is specific to each QQI and PHECC programme
- Minimum English
- Minimum Age

Applicants must be self-motivated and have the capacity to take responsibility for their own learning as they progress through a blended learning programme. Basic computer literacy is required to enrol on a blended learning programme, e.g., opening an internet page, following simple instructions, and creating a Word document.

16.2 Learner requirements prior to commencing a blended learning programme:

- Access to a laptop with functioning camera and audio OR access to a PC with functioning camera and audio (earphones may be required when using PC) OR access to a mobile device with functioning camera and audio.
- Strong internet connection
- Microsoft Teams downloaded or alternative software downloaded,
- Be able to provide photo ID in the form of a passport, public service card or driving license.

16.3 Assessments

QQI have set out different assessment techniques - these are all based on the level of the programme being completed by the learner. All learners shall be fully informed of the type of assessment, supports available, and will be given the opportunity to provide feedback at any point before, during or after the assessment has taken place.

The types of assessments set out by QQI include the following:

- Assignment
- Portfolio/Collection of Work
- Project
- Skills Demonstration

- Learner Record
- Examination - this can be broken into Oral Interview Style Exam, Written Exam - Theory Based and Practical Exam

Some assessments may be possible to be completed virtually such as a skills demonstration or examination. To ensure that these assessments are consistent with a traditional face to face assessment, the integrity of the assessment should be maintained.

16.4 Integrity of Assessments

Assessments that are completed online or live online lectures include the following practices:

• Learners verify their identity during live online lectures by entering a breakout room and presenting the faculty member with proof of identification.

• Written protocol is provided to learners for live assessment. The protocol covers information including mobile phones/tablets cannot be used for such sessions as the functionalities are limited, the webcam must be always turned on, desk must be clear – the learner must pick up laptop/webcam and show the table to the assessor, and the screen must be shared to allow the assessor to see if access to online sites/files occurs. These assessments are recorded for verification purposes.

• Digital mechanisms for the transfer of learners' work directly to assessors are approved and tested by Optima Training and Consulting to ensure they are secure and reliable

• Learner is issued confirmation of safe receipt of assessment work

• Only enrolled learners are permitted to attend and participate in assessment activities. If another individual is present at the time, they will be asked to leave by the faculty member prior to the commencement of the assessment. If they refuse to do so, the assessment will be rescheduled.

To confirm that learners' assessment work is their own original work, the following criteria for submission of assessment will apply:

1. A statement and clear instructions about identity fraud and the consequences of academic malpractice that must be signed and agreed to

2. Submission of assessments incorporates that the learner must confirm authenticity of own work by selecting an honesty and non-plagiarism box on each submission

16.5 Learners outside Ireland

Optima Training and Consulting does not enrol learners onto its programmes who reside outside Ireland.

16.6 Blended Learning in a Programme

16.6.1 Programme Development and Delivery

Optima Training and Consulting will develop and deliver programmes that are well-structured, relevant to the needs of learners and industry, and reflect the standards as set out by the National Framework of Qualifications (if applicable). This process is guided by the Policies and criteria for the validation by QQI of programmes of education and training.

16.6.2 Blended Learning Programme Design

All programmes that are developed by Optima Training and Consulting Ltd shall adhere the Programme of Education and Training procedure (QP 03). All programmes developed shall have a balance between theory and practice, this balance shall be detailed in the delivery section of the new programme development application form. The proposed new programme is required to be approved through all stages of the new programme procedure. This is to ensure that the proposed programme meets all quality assurance standards, is viable, fit for purpose, and in lines with Optima Training and Consulting strategic and educational goals and core beliefs.

16.6.3 Course Overview and Introduction

At the start of a programme, there are clear instructions on the structure, layout, purpose, assessment, and participation in the course. Minimum technology requirements for the course are clearly stated, and information on how to obtain the technologies is provided. The self-introduction by the faculty member is professional and designed to build rapport with the learners.

16.6.4 Learning outcomes

During the development of a programme, learning outcomes are created. Learning outcomes are statements of what a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to demonstrate on successful completion of their studies.

Learning outcomes can assist learning in several ways:

- They can assist teachers in planning the most appropriate teaching, learning and assessment strategies,
- Provide a clear illustration of what is expected from both the learner and the faculty member,
- Guide learners in self-directed learning and allow them to self-assess,
- Allow Faculty members to monitor the progress of their learners.

16.6.4.1 Writing learning outcomes

When writing learning outcomes, it is important to:

- Be specific, using one verb per sentence.
- Be concise and clear, using language that is easy to understand,
- Ensure that they are assessable,
- Be realistic.
- Consider the learners' prior knowledge and the timeframe for the module or programme

Faculty members should routinely check learners' understanding of course content and focus on the programme's learning outcomes. They must ensure that learners understand what is expected of them to successfully complete the programme (e.g., active participation in online discussions; completion of formative and summative assessments; attendance at workshop events), recognising that learners will often focus on learning what is needed to pass the course.

16.6.6 Learning Resources and Materials

Learners are provided with programme information, assessment plan, and learner handbook which provides information on the supports available. Additionally, an annual audit of each programme is

planned and conducted by the Accreditation & Quality Manager in conjunction with the relevant Programme Director. Issues are logged in the Improvement Log.

Additional resources for face-to-face days include the following:

• Projector and screen

• Laptop/mobile device

• Whiteboard and/or flipchart

• Webcam

Skills demonstration equipment varies by module and the Programme Development Committee consider this early in the process. A resource list is drawn up for each programme to ensure that skills demonstrations that cannot be completed in the workplace can be completed via a role play method onsite.

Learner requirements prior to commencing a blended learning programme:

- Access to a laptop with functioning camera and audio OR access to a PC with functioning camera and audio (earphones may be required when using PC) OR access to a mobile device with functioning camera and audio,
- Strong internet connection,
- Microsoft Teams or alternative software downloaded.
- Be able to provide photo ID in the form of a passport, public service card or driving license.

16.6.7 Learning Activities
The following methodologies will be implemented for the delivery of blended learning programmes with Optima Training and Consulting:

 • One-to-one support by o Phone o Email o Meetings via Microsoft Teams

• Group meetings and discussions via Microsoft Teams

• Study and revision days if required

• Online exercises

• Practical sessions to include role-play scenarios

• Simulated environments on skills demonstration days

16.6.8 Classroom-Based Days
Learners on blended learning programmes are invited to classroom-based days which involve a variety of the following:

• Practical skills demonstrations and assessments

• Exam (if applicable)

• Face-to-face Faculty member support

• Group revision and study sessions

Learners completing their QQI- or PHECC-accredited training and education programmes through blended learning are invited to a classroom-based assessment day, where they will meet with their faculty member for assessment of knowledge and practical skills. Classroom-based days for learners completing a blended learning programme are scheduled as required. Offsite classroom-based days are organised as required. All practical skills demonstrations that take place on these classroom-based days are demonstrated initially by the faculty member, then practiced by the learner before final assessment takes place.

Skills demonstrations that form part of the assessment are photographed or, preferably, video recorded to be presented as evidence. If the programme assessment includes a skills assessment, learners sign a consent form which confirms that the learner understand that video recordings/photographs of their skills demonstration will be submitted as part of their assessment for certification in line with GDPR requirements. Evidence of skills demonstrations are stored in an encrypted file and made available only to those involved in the certification process, i.e., Faculty member, internal verifier, external authenticator and results approval panel. The maximum timeframe for these to be stored is nine months. After this time, skills demonstrations are deleted from the Optima Training and Consulting system.

Learners who complete skills demonstrations in the workplace must also present video/photographic evidence, as appropriate. Skills such as these are quality assured by the workplace supervisor, and a report is compiled as part of the assessment.

All examinations held in Optima Training and Consulting adhere to the procedures and standards that are required by the respective awarding body. Exam papers are provided to the faculty member in a sealed envelope and stamped with the Optima Training and Consulting stamp. The exam date must be clearly written on the envelope along with the statement "must be opened and witnessed in class". This envelope must be stored securely by the faculty member. Learners are made aware of the exam code of conduct during their induction, and this is reiterated to the learners immediately prior to the exam. Faculty members must then return corrected exams to the Optima Training and Consulting office in person or by registered post. Any spare exam papers are also returned and are shredded and destroyed.

Should a learner fail an assessment, feedback will be sought from the faculty member as to whether a learner should re-sit an exam, resubmit part of an assignment, or resit the whole programme again.

16.6.5 Assessments
A holistic approach shall be taken into consideration when planning the assessment for a programme. The total assessment load and the needs of learners will be considered when the assessment is being planned. Learners shall have ample opportunities to generate evidence to demonstrate achievement of the standards of knowledge, skill, and/or competence. A systematic approach will be used to ensure that assessment opportunities and planned evidence collection will

meet the standards for the award. An assessment brief is used to ensure fair and consistent marking by all Faculty members.

16.6.9 Virtual Classroom Scenario

Microsoft Teams is used by Optima Training and Consulting to offer one-to-one support between learners on a blended learning programme, to facilitate group meetings and discussions, and to complete skills demonstrations. Where existing company policy may prevent us from using Microsoft Teams, an alternative method of delivery would be sought, e.g., Zoom.

The learner(s) will remain in the 'waiting room' until access is granted by the faculty member or programme administrator. Learners then verify their identity in the virtual classroom by entering a breakout room and presenting the faculty member with proof of identification. An email invitation is issued to the learner, along with the instructions to access the online training. It will be decided with the faculty member and individual/group at the beginning of the meeting when breaks will take place, but it is advised that a break is taken every 60-90 minutes for 10-15 minutes. It is important to step away from the screen at the opportunities provided to prevent dry eyes, to use the bathroom, have a snack, etc. If a learner does not return after a break or leaves during the meeting, they will be signed out by the faculty member/programme administrator and marked as absent.

16.7 Support Available to Learners

Reasonable accommodation is a process that helps to support learners who may have a disadvantage due to a medical condition, impairment, learning difficulties, hidden disadvantages, or other extenuating circumstance to provide equality of access and opportunity for all. This accommodation has been designed to assist learners in demonstrating his or her achievements in their assessments. They have not been designed to compensate for a possible lack of achievement arising from a disability or other factors of disadvantage, however, should not give the learner an advantage over others. All reasonable accommodation requests (F042) granted will maintain the integrity/status and reputation of assessment. More details on reasonable accommodations is available in Support services to Learners procedure (QP 07).

16.7.1 Induction

All learners are provided with an induction to the programme, this will be delivered online (for an online programme). This includes, but is not limited to:

- QQI Overview, Grading Criteria and Awards Standards /PHECC Overview, Grading Criteria and Awards Standards/Optima Training and Consulting Overview, Grading Criteria and Awards Standards – Delete as required
- Optima Training and Consulting Training Learner handbook
- Trainers Responsibilities & Learner Responsibilities
- Comfort and Safety
- Plagiarism
- Equal Opportunities and Anti-Harassment Policy
- Protection for Learners Policy (where applicable)
- Access, Transfer and Progression Policy
- Data Protection
- The Assessment Process / Plan
- Submission of Coursework - Deadlines / Extensions

- Appeals Process
- Certification Process

The learner induction will also specify requirements for access to the online learning environment – detailing the required broadband specification and any specific hardware or software requirements, for example. The learner induction will provide information on the level and nature of support available. Further detail will be offered to learners in the Learner Handbook (HB002).

16.7.2 One to one meeting
Learners will be still able to able to access to a one-to-one meeting with faculty members using video calls or during classroom-based days.

16.8 Blended Learning Faculty members
The role and responsibilities of an Optima Training and Consulting Blended Learning faculty member includes, but is not limited to the following:

• Understand the Optima Training and Consulting organisation and your role

• Respect and follow Optima Training and Consulting Ltd QA and administrative policies and procedures

• Deliver training and complete assessment on behalf of Optima Training and Consulting in line with requirements

• Return promptly all relevant paperwork and assignments

• Read and understand all Optima Training and Consulting updates sent to you

• Inform Optima Training and Consulting immediately if you are late for classroom-based or virtual training days or need to cancel

• Continue to check our website and QQI and PHECC website for updates and current information

• Maintain your content expertise by being knowledgeable about the research, current practice, and future trends regarding the topic you train in

• Always appear professional in dress and manner

• Do not promote or sell any non-training related material or market your own services

• Respect client confidentiality and advise learners to do the same

• Know how to set up, operate and troubleshoot all necessary equipment

• Utilise feedback given to improve content and delivery

• Have your own equipment necessary for training e.g., PC/laptop, webcam, headphones, strong internet connection

• Provide informal feedback to learners on assignments and learners throughout the course

16.8.1 Professionalism

Professionalism is characterised by behaviour that shows respect for the interests and welfare of learners. Optima Training and Consulting aims to promote self-respect and a positive self-image in its learners. All staff must be well presented; a smart casual dress code is permitted. Good hygiene standards are always expected. Faculty members should not engage in demeaning descriptions of either learners, learner representatives or colleagues. Use of the internet and email by Faculty members and learners is permitted where such use supports the goals and objectives of the training programme. Learners and Faculty members must ensure that they use this tool in a responsible, effective, and lawful manner. The internet or email cannot be used for personal gain or profit. The faculty member must make Optima Training and Consulting aware of the following:

• Any discussion around the changing of dates or times of classroom-based days

• Any change in the number of learners, e.g., additional learners now attending the course.

• Any issues with learners not logging in or not spending enough time on each aspect of their course.
• If there are any issues relating to Optima Training and Consulting paperwork or materials, e.g., if you are short any documentation, packs, or assignments, we must be informed and will arrange for additional paperwork to be sent to you immediately.

• Permission must be sought from Optima Training and Consulting before any additional materials are bought and any requests for materials should come through us. If materials are purchased without prior permission, they will be at the faculty member's own cost.

• Photos/video recordings are mandatory in meeting QQI requirements on certain programmes. If for any reason you do not have a camera or cannot provide one to take evidence of skills demonstrations, you must contact us in advance of the course commencing, and we will provide you with a camera or other equipment, as necessary.

17.0 Legislation Review procedure

17.1 Determining compliance obligations

Key personnel shall Identify legislation and regulations that are relevant to the operations of Optima Training and Consulting ltd. Identification of relevant legislation and regulations, can occur in several ways, these include:

1. Monthly check of Irish Statues website
2. Staff are signed up for HSA newsletter and publications update. Staff will get an email if there is an update to publications.
3. Discussion with Clients and industry experts.
4. Attendance at workshops, webinars, information briefs.

17.2 Requirements of compliance obligations

1. All newly identified legislation and regulations shall be assessed to ensure that it is relevant to Optima training and Consulting Ltd prior to being recorded in the Legal Register (F074).
2. Any newly identified legislation and regulations shall be reviewed to determine what obligations do Optima Training and Consulting Ltd must put in place to ensure compliance.
3. Newly identified legislation and regulations that are relevant shall be recorded in the Legal Register (F074).

17.3 Organisational and technical measures

Implement organisational and technical measures that are required to ensure compliance with all relevant legislation.

17.4 Self assessing compliance

Upon review of the measures implement, the measures will be assessed in house to ensure compliance.

17.5 Internal audit

The measures implement shall be subject to internal audits once a year by management to ensure that the requirement of the relevant legislation is being adhered to.

17.6 Management review of compliance

The results of the internal audits shall be reviewed at an annual management review, any changes or updates shall be implemented, and a review timeframe agreed upon.

18.0 Benchmarking process

18.1 Benchmarking with relevant providers

The outcomes of the bench marking process shall be reviewed at the Quality Assurance Committee and at the Management Review.
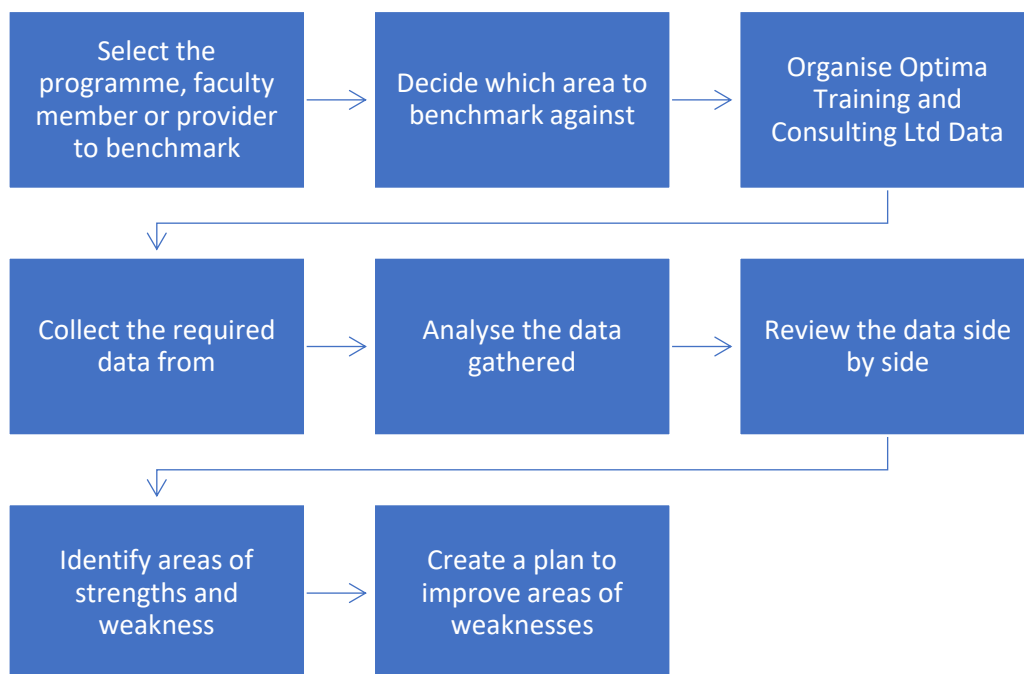

Figure 68.1 Overview of benchmarking process for QQI programmes

Step 1 Select the programme to benchmark

Open the benchmarking excel sheet (located: Optima Data\Data\Quality\13. Benchmarking). Change the tab to the programme that is being benchmarked against.

Step 2 Decide which area you want to benchmark against e.g.,

- Grades
- Learner numbers
- Learner profiles (gender)
- Number achieving certifications

Step 3 Organise Optima Training and Consulting Ltd Data

Using the QQI Infographics website (https://infographics.qqi.ie/)- gather the data required for Optima Training and record on benchmarking excel sheet.

Search for the programme using the named award tab (please ensure you have the right code).

Select Optima Training and Consulting Ltd on the map.

Select the year you wish to look at e.g., 2020.

Record the data e.g., grades, or learner numbers.

Step 4 Collect the required data

Using the QQI Infographics website- gather the data required for the provider(s) (Comparable provider list is included in the excel sheet) you want to benchmark against and record on benchmarking excel sheet.

Search for the programme using the named award tab (please ensure you have the right code).

Select the provider you wish to compare to on the map.

Select the year you wish to look at e.g., 2020.

Record the data e.g., grades, or learner numbers.

Step 5 Analyse the data gathered

Review the data to ensure that there are no gaps.

Step 6 Review the data side by side

Compare the data from Optima Training and the provider(s) you want to benchmark against.

Step 7 Identify areas of strengths and weakness

Identify areas where Optima Training and Consulting did not perform as well as the other company or companies e.g., less learners in Optima Training and Consulting Ltd.

Identify areas where Optima Training and Consulting performed better than the other company or companies e.g., more distinctions in Optima Training and Consulting Ltd.

Step 8 Create a plan to improve areas of weaknesses:

Suggest areas where Optima Training and Consulting Ltd can improve the weaknesses found during the benchmarking process.

Step 9 Repeat the procedure for different programmes:

Repeat the procedure for other QQI programmes.

18.2 Benchmarking between programmes

Step 1 Select the programme to benchmark

Open the benchmarking QQI Programmes excel sheet (located: Optima Data\Data\Quality\13. Benchmarking). Change the tab to the programme that is being benchmarked against.

Step 2 Decide which area you want to benchmark against e.g.

- Number of learners registered,
- Number of learners completed, or
- Number of appeals

Step 3 Organise Optima Training and Consulting Ltd Programme Data

Using the learner evaluation sheets- gather the data required for Optima Training and record on benchmarking excel sheet.

Step 4 Collect the required data

Once you have gathered data, record the data on the bench marking QQI programmes excel sheet.

Search for the programme using the named award tab.

Step 5 Analyse the data gathered

Review the data to ensure that there are no gaps.

Step 6 Review the data side by side

Compare the data from each year of the programme.

Step 7 Identify areas of strengths and weakness

Identify areas where a programme did not perform as well as the other programmes e.g., content.

Identify areas where a programme performed better than the other company or companies e.g., instructor knowledge.

Step 8 Create a plan to improve areas of weaknesses:

Suggest areas where Optima Training and Consulting Ltd can improve the weaknesses found during the benchmarking process.

18.3 Benchmarking faculty members

Step 1 Select the programme in which you want to benchmark the faculty member against.

Open the benchmarking QQI Faculty member excel sheet (located: Optima Data\Data\Quality\13. Benchmarking). Change the tab to the programme that is being benchmarked.

Step 2 Decide which area you want to benchmark the faculty members against e.g.

- Instructor presentation,
- Instructor preparation, or
- Instructor knowledge

Use average scores if you are bench marking a faculty member for a programme over a year.

Step 3 Organise Optima Training and Consulting Ltd Programme Data

Using the learner evaluation sheets- gather the data required for each faculty member.

Step 4 Record the required data

Search for the programme using the named award tab. Once you have gathered data, record the data on the bench marking QQI Faculty member excel sheet for each Faculty member.

Step 5 Analyse the data gathered

Review the data to ensure that there are no gaps.

Step 6 Review the data side by side

Compare the data from each year of the programme.

Step 7 Identify areas of strengths and weakness

Identify areas where a faculty member did not perform as well as the other Faculty members e.g., content.

Identify areas where a faculty member performed better than the other Faculty members e.g., instructor knowledge.

Step 8 Create a plan to improve areas of weaknesses:

Suggest areas where Optima Training and Consulting Ltd can improve the faculty member weaknesses found during the benchmarking process.

Step 9 Repeat

Repeat the process for other programmes and the related Faculty members.

19.0 Revision history

Rev	Reason for change	Date	Initiator
01	New	30/04/2021	Á Broderick
02	Updated based on Mandatory changes from QQI Panel	11/11/2021	Á Broderick
03	Grammar and spell review	18/11/2021	Á Broderick
04	Removal of reference to QQI external appeal and correction of typo	29/11/2021	Á Broderick