



QQI

Quality and Qualifications Ireland
Dearbhú Cáilíochta agus Cáilíochtaí Éireann

Quality in Irish Further Education and Training 2020

A SUMMARY OF ETB
QUALITY REPORTING



QQI
Insights

QQI *Insights* Series

Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) is the independent State agency responsible for promoting quality and accountability in education and training services in Ireland. Our mission is to sustain public confidence in the quality of education and training, promote trust in the National Framework of Qualifications and drive a culture of continuous improvement by education and training providers.

Our unique position as the agency that spans all post-secondary education and training means that we have been centrally involved in many of the transformations and developments that have occurred in this field in recent years.

This *QQI Insights* series aims to shape a fuller understanding of quality and qualifications in education and training, to inform and influence policy in education, training and employment, and to play a role in driving future transformation across the education and training sectors. *QQI Insights* demonstrate the impact of measures taken by QQI to improve and enhance the quality of education and training in Ireland. They also analyse QQI awards and qualifications data, and how our promotion of quality enhancement among education and training providers improves the experience and outcomes of learners.

Themes for the series are drawn from our independent quality reviews, provider self-evaluations, areas of national policy interest and stakeholder feedback.

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Foreword

QQI is pleased to publish this report outlining the developments and ongoing progress achieved in quality assurance and enhancement in the education and training board (ETB) sector in 2019. The significance of these areas as foundational elements for the delivery of high-quality further education and training (FET) have been recognised in the recent Future FET Strategy¹ as “critically important in facilitating a more agile, responsive and integrated quality FET system”. The progress to date by ETBs in establishing arrangements and structures for the quality assurance of provision – particularly with regard to the governance and oversight of quality – also proved to be a significant asset to the sector in responding to the unprecedented changes to teaching, learning and assessment in early 2020 necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic. This experience uniquely demonstrated the value for all stakeholders of a systematic, provider-owned focus on quality in protecting - and ensuring internal and external confidence in - the quality of the learning experience and learning outcomes.

In 2019, QQI also worked collaboratively with the sector on the development of a framework for the inaugural statutory review of the implementation and effectiveness of quality assurance in education and training boards. This review was scheduled to commence in the second half of 2020 but implementation has been postponed to early 2021 in recognition of the challenges for, and demands on, ETBs in 2020 arising from COVID-19. Whilst QQI will continue to work flexibly with ETBs during this period of uncertainty, both parties remain committed to this statutory review process as an important driver of quality assurance and enhancement within Irish further education and training.

Dr Pádraig Walsh

CEO, Quality and Qualifications Ireland

1 https://www.solas.ie/f/70398/x/64d0718c9e/solas_fet_strategy_web.pdf



Key Findings

The 2019 ETB quality reporting process evidences the continued commitment of the sector to the establishment of comprehensive quality assurance systems and processes. Since the last reporting period, progress has been notable in **the establishment and review of quality assurance governance structures** for the oversight of quality. These structures are integral to driving the ETB's quality agenda, identifying risks to the quality of provision, and monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of quality assurance and enhancement activity. It is encouraging to note that top-level quality assurance governance structures are now largely in operation across the sector and that potential areas for the further enhancement of these are already being identified by ETBs as these structures have become operational and in response to workflows.

The **enhancement of quality assurance teams** through the appointment of additional staff also reflects a welcome recognition that the effective and consistent implementation of quality assurance processes - in addition to the significant development agenda in which ETBs are currently engaged - requires an adequate level of resources if objectives are to be achieved and the quality system is to function effectively. It was noted that in some cases ETBs experienced challenges in recruiting personnel with sufficient quality assurance expertise. It is hoped that the continued commitment of ETBs to developing quality assurance processes and systems in a consultative and collaborative manner will help to build capacity and knowledge of quality assurance within the sector whilst simultaneously embedding a culture of quality.

Partnership with, and responsiveness to the needs of, local industry remained a significant feature of programme development activity within the sector, with ETBs reporting a strong focus on traineeship and work-based learning. However, it is notable that **programme development** and systematic programme review more broadly within the sector remains relatively limited. Strategic consideration of the resources, capacity and mechanisms for programme development and review will be required if the sector is to achieve the ambitions of the Future FET Strategy for an agile and responsive FET system.

Investment in technology and the upskilling of staff in **digital learning** featured prominently in reporting as a key enhancement activity in programme delivery. The appointment of technology-enhanced learning co-ordinators across the sector signals that enhancement of capacity in this space is a significant strategic focus for ETBs, consistent with SOLAS' *Strategy for Technology-Enhanced Learning in Further Education and Training*². ETBs consider that whilst digital learning may not be the preferred or most effective mode of delivery for all FET learners, there are some learners – particularly those currently in employment - for whom digital learning offers greater flexibility and enhances the accessibility of opportunities to upskill and gain additional qualifications. It is important that any plans to enhance provision with new technologies and modes of delivery include consideration of, and are fully underpinned by, appropriate pedagogical expertise and policies and mechanisms for quality assurance, such as those referenced in QQI's *Topic-Specific Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines on Blended Learning*³, that are

2 https://www.solas.ie/f/70398/x/320655fc81/tel_strategy.pdf

3 <https://www.qqi.ie/Publications/Publications/Statutory%20QA%20Guidelines%20for%20Blended%20Learning%20Programmes.pdf>

specific and appropriate to these learning contexts.

Activity to increase the role of **learner voice** in ETB delivery is also an ongoing focus. Engagement with the National FET Learner Forum was extensive across the sector, providing opportunities for learners to input to improvements in FET delivery. The value of the information yielded from these events

identified by ETBs was a recurring feature of reporting and it is encouraging to note a number of provider-led initiatives to provide additional mechanisms to seek learner perspectives and which also facilitate the capture of inputs of much greater numbers of ETB learners.

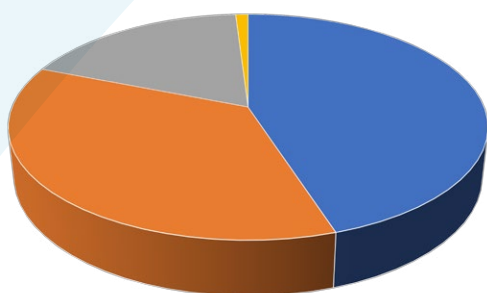


1 Introduction

- 1.1 As part of the functions specified under the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012, QQI is required to monitor a range of provider activities, including the effectiveness of providers' quality assurance procedures. Following the approval by QQI of the quality assurance procedures of the sixteen education and training boards (ETBs) in 2018, each ETB submits to QQI an annual progress report outlining its key areas of focus and its main achievements in respect of quality improvement activity in the reporting year. This is reviewed by QQI to provide assurance as to the continued focus on quality assurance and enhancement within each ETB and the ongoing development of quality systems and a quality culture.
- 1.2 ETBs were asked to submit quality reporting for the 2019 reporting year by the end of March 2020. The advent of the COVID-19 pandemic and the significant disruption to the delivery of education and training impacted on submission timelines for some ETBs as they sought to manage other pressing priorities. Reporting was subsequently received from all sixteen ETBs and this document summarises the main themes emerging from the progress reports.

2 Progress Reporting

2.1 Progress against the actions outlined in ETB quality improvement plans was reported as follows⁴ :



45% ● COMPLETE

36% ● ON TRACK

18% ● DELAYED

1% ● NOT STARTED

2.2 Resource challenges and the complexity of developing and implementing integrated systems and procedures across large and diverse organisations remain the main challenges reported by ETBs in implementing quality improvement plans. For some staff, the ability to progress the actions and activities listed in the QIP for 2019 had to be balanced against managing core activities and competing priorities and has had an impact on intended timelines. However, notwithstanding the time and resource-intensity, ETBs continue to favour consultative and collaborative models for the development and roll-out of quality enhancement activities as a means of driving a quality culture.

2.3 A number of employment/recruitment-related issues were reported, including changes to contractual arrangements for staff teaching in certain services, which are resulting in some impacts on both attracting staff to deliver these programmes and in the flexibility of timing of delivery of programmes. Some ETBs have also found it challenging to recruit personnel to specialised roles, such as quality assurance. In addition, it has been reported that contracts of indefinite duration and permanent contracts can present difficulties in upskilling and responding quickly to changes in demand for FET courses which are influenced by economic, demographic and technological change.

4 In some instances, actions were reported as being 'on track' despite the original timeframe having passed. Some actions reported as 'on track' also related to items that had been achieved but are of an ongoing/recurrent nature. One ETB reported progress as 'In progress' and 'overdue' rather than 'on track' or 'delayed'.

3 Governance

3.1 2019 saw the introduction of a new *Code of Practice for the Governance of Education and Training Boards*⁵, which outlines the expected standards for members and staff of ETBs in the overall governance of the organisation. The Code outlines expectations in relation to the role and effectiveness of the Board; codes of conduct, ethics in public office, additional disclosure of interests and protected disclosures; business and financial reporting, management of audit and risk; relations with the Oireachtas, Department and Minister; remuneration and superannuation; and quality customer service.

3.2 The implementation of governance structures for quality assurance oversight of FET provision was at varying stages across the sector during the reporting period. In some cases, ETBs were in the process of populating newly created governance structures and finalising terms of reference with a view to the new governance groups becoming operational in 2020. In most cases, the top tier of FET quality assurance governance structures, e.g. Quality Councils, is now populated and the next phase for ETBs at this stage in the establishment of their structures is to populate the next-tier groups, such as programme approval committees or teaching and learning committees.

3.3 For other ETBs, where governance structures had previously been established, 2019 marked the commencement of the operation of these groupings and/or the review and refinement of their membership and remit. Potential areas for enhancement

have been identified with regard to:

- the scheduling and sequencing of meetings of different groupings to enable efficient workflow
- incorporating governance arrangements for new apprenticeship programmes
- including learner representation on governance structures
- increasing the level of external representation on governance structures.

3.4 Whilst some progress has been made with regard to increased external representation, the identification of external personnel with suitable expertise has been identified as a challenge.

3.5 ETBs reported that the regular consideration and communication of quality assurance matters by governance structures and senior personnel is contributing to greater understanding of quality and the development of a quality culture across the organisations as it is recognised by staff as an area of strategic importance. This is also reflected in the expansion of quality assurance teams across ETBs, where several ETBs reported the recruitment of additional staff to support increased monitoring of, and support for, the quality of FET provision in ETB centres. Quality reporting included examples of the impact of these resources and structures in enabling quality assurance in action, whereby quality monitoring enabled the identification of areas for improvement which were subsequently addressed.

5 https://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0002_2019.pdf

GOVERNANCE IN FOCUS



- The introduction of an oversight unit of governance with linked sub-units of governance required the revisiting of responsibilities and associated terms of reference for existing units. This was to ensure a pipeline of information from the centre to CMETB and back out to the services. This type of review of the whole system has assisted with transparency and also an appraisal of communication in particular how the connections are being made to CMETB.
- In addition, a review of the governance structures was undertaken in early March 2020, just over a year after inception and the overwhelming feedback from the personnel involved in these structures was that they found that the system was working well and facilitating clear and comprehensive communications through the structures and from the structures to the wider CMETB FET community. The detail of this review will feed the Inaugural Self Evaluation process, 2020

Cavan and Monaghan ETB



4 Quality Assurance Procedures

4.1 The development and implementation of integrated quality assurance policies and procedures remained a core focus for ETBs in 2019 although the extent of progress in this regard remains varied across the sector. In some cases, differentiation of procedures between further education services and training services (largely based on legacy arrangements) persist: however, in some areas, work to phase out the operation of the transition quality assurance system (TQAS) manual for training services in local training initiatives and community training centres has been signalled. A number of ETBs reported work to develop processes and policies to underpin and govern future approaches to policy and procedure development activity.

4.2 Quality assurance procedures relating to assessment continued to be a major focus, with several ETBs reporting the approval of procedures relating to areas such as the use of reasonable accommodations, assessment by third parties, external authentication and learner appeals. In some cases, new guidelines and procedures on assessment were implemented in centres from the 2019/20 academic year and these are being refined in light of feedback on their operation.

4.3 Work to develop, update or implement common policies and procedures were also reported in the following areas:

Policies	Procedures & Guidelines
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retention of data from applications (to reflect GDPR requirements) • Access, transfer and progression • Recognition of prior learning • Programme design and approval • Creating & updating assessment materials • Public information & communication • Staff communications • Learner information • Admissions • Publication of quality assurance evaluation reports • Integrating literacy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Common complaints procedures • Guidelines for the operation of results approval panels and course reviews • Common documentation for internal verification, external authentication and results approval panels • Procedures for the development of locally-devised shared assessment specifications • PLSS procedures for reporting and monitoring completion and progression rates • Advertising guidelines and stylebook • Programme proposal procedures • Learner Code of Conduct/Learner Contract

5 Programme Development and Review

5.1 ETBs endeavour to review programme offerings across services and centres in response to emerging local needs. A strong focus on engagement and partnership with local industry and employers was reflected in an expansion of traineeship and workforce development initiatives. In considering the introduction of new programmes, ETBs have also reported a greater

emphasis on the focus of programmes, i.e. for progression to employment, further study, active inclusion, lifelong learning, meeting key skills gaps or new modes of delivery. Initiatives to develop greater progression linkages between Youthreach and FET Colleges/Post Leaving Certificate settings were also indicated.

The following programmes leading to QQI awards were validated by ETBs in 2019:

NFQ Level	Award Type	Programme Title	ETBs Validated
4	Special Purpose Certificate	Health & Wellbeing	1
5	Certificate	Agriculture	3
	Certificate	Beauty Therapy	1
	Certificate	Logistics & Distribution	1
	Certificate	Youthwork	1
	Special Purpose Certificate	Maths for STEM	1
6	Advanced Certificate	Advanced Dance Studies	1
	Advanced Certificate	Agriculture	3
	Advanced Certificate	Animal Science	1
	Advanced Certificate	Digital Media Production	7
	Advanced Certificate	Film & Television Production	1
	Advanced Certificate	Hairdressing	1
	Advanced Certificate	Health Service Supervisory Management Skills	1
	Advanced Certificate	Information, Advice & Advocacy	1
	Advanced Certificate	Sales	1
	Special Purpose Certificate	Farming	3
	Special Purpose Certificate	National Tour Guiding	1
	Special Purpose Certificate	Regional Tour Guiding	1

5.2 2019 saw the national roll-out and delivery of the national apprenticeships in Original Equipment Manufacturing and Hairdressing. ETBs also reported programme development activity in the following areas:



Wind Turbine
Maintenance



Advanced
Manufacturing



Professional Bakery



Garden & Parks
Supervision



Green Keeping



Literacy &
Numeracy



Dental Nursing



Animation Visual
Effects



Weaving

5.3 2019 was the concluding year of the *Strategy for Technology-Enhanced Learning in Further Education and Training*⁶ and ETBs reported continued investment in resources and professional development to further build capacity in digital learning. Several ETBs reported the appointment of TEL Co-ordinators to ensure a dedicated and coherent focus on the use of technology to support enhancements in teaching and learning. The continued roll-out of virtual learning environments to additional centres and services was also a notable feature. One ETB also reported the appointment of a Community Education Facilitator with responsibility for TEL to support capacity-building in this space.

5.4 Whilst some activity was reported in relation to the development of communities of practice to review aspects of provision in particular disciplines (e.g. revision of assessment instruments), comprehensive arrangements for regular and systematic review of programmes remain limited within the sector. Given the preponderance of programmes that are shared nationally, the sectoral initiative established in 2019 to jointly develop new programmes in early learning and care may inform developments in this space.

PROGRAMME REVIEW IN FOCUS



- A Training Needs Analysis was conducted across the following sectors- Weaving/ Craft, Retail, Care Sector and IT. In terms of weaving, training opportunities were explored that would allow for the preservation of Ireland's indigenous craft that is part of Donegal's unique heritage and would assist small medium enterprises within our County and Gaeltacht communities to continue to provide local employment. Work was conducted with the Engineering Sectors to explore the reskilling and upskilling of staff to ensure that they were well positioned for imminent growth opportunities.
- A process for updating current assessments across all of the provision and at all levels has been developed and is currently being implemented across level 5 provision with roll [out] planned for levels 4 and 6 from September [20]20. The process involves communities of practice coming together to review and update current assessments on a new and agreed template which is then used by the whole Further Education and Training Service supporting an integrated quality assurance system. Assessments are designed with feedback from [subject matter experts], EAs and other stakeholder groups including students ... As part of the Donegal ETB Student Forum ... students were asked to provide feedback about programmes, courses and ATP. This feedback will be summarised and reported to managers to inform the future planning and development of programmes.

Donegal ETB

6 https://www.solas.ie/f/70398/x/320655fc81/tel_strategy.pdf

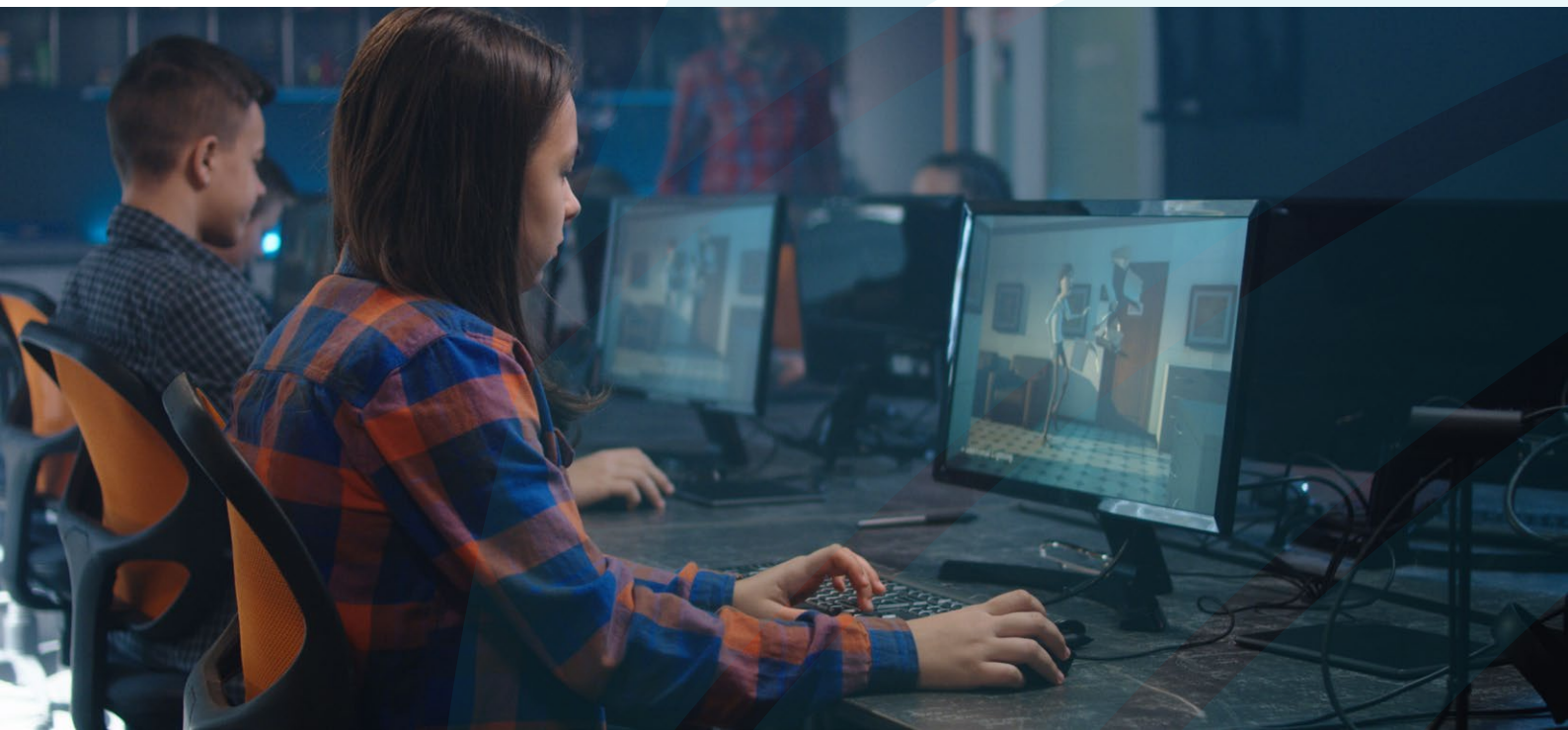
6 Professional Development

6.1 Professional development remains a core component of quality enhancement activity within the sector. Several ETBs reported the recruitment of Professional Development Coordinators to enable a more strategic and coordinated focus for the planning and delivery of professional development across FET services. Greater central coordination of professional development activity was evident in the production of ETB calendars, and the maintenance of central records, of professional development activity. A number of ETBs also reported the establishment of policies and procedures to assist staff in accessing funding and support for professional development.

6.2 ETB staff were able to avail of professional development from a variety of sources, including in-house development activities supported by QA teams; targeted development activities supported by external consultants and the Further Education Support Service; online programmes such as eCollege; and external opportunities,

including accredited higher education programmes. Community of practice-type approaches to professional development are also increasingly popular across the sector. One ETB has established professional learning networks in a number of subject areas with resources being produced to support professional development, teaching and learning and assessment.

6.3 ETBs also highlighted the value of opportunities for participation of staff in sectoral working groups or national fora such as the ETBI Quality Network and External Authenticator Working Group; the RPL Practitioner Network Steering Group and Editorial Board; and QQI standards development groups, validation and re-engagement panels. Engagement in such activity was considered beneficial in building capacity at the level of both the individual and more broadly across the ETB by virtue of information-sharing and dissemination of national and international best practice and innovation.



6.4 Consistent with the *Strategy for Technology-Enhanced Learning in Further Education and Training* and the *FET Professional Development Strategy*⁷, technology-enhanced learning was a significant focus of professional development activity within the sector in 2019. This included upskilling activities to increase familiarity with software, virtual learning platforms and digital learning pedagogies. The introduction of a TEL mentoring support model across ETB centres was also widely referenced to support the embedding of TEL for the enhancement of teaching and learning.

6.5 Following the establishment and training by ETBI of a new national external authenticator (EA) panel, ETBs also arranged training for EAs on local arrangements for external authentication. It was noted that the opportunity for staff to participate in the new national panel and the associated training also supported improvements in internal ETB practice.

6.6 Professional development was also undertaken in a wide range of other areas, including those outlined below. It was noted, however, that differences in contracts between teaching and training staff continue to pose challenges in ensuring access to professional development opportunities.



7 <https://www.solas.ie/f/70398/x/4e966c3112/solasfetpds.pdf>

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN FOCUS



FLIP-IDEAL Erasmus+ KA2 Cooperation for Innovation and Exchange of Good Practice Project.

2018-2020

- The FLIP-IDEAL Project has focused on using technology enhanced learning tools and techniques with learners in ABE literacy, numeracy and language classes. The Project is funded by Erasmus+ and has partners based in Finland, The Netherlands, Belgium, Italy and Slovenia. Tutors and students working at QQI Levels 2, 3 and 4 are now using Flipped Learning methodologies and tools such as video-making, online games and quizzes, screen-recording, virtual learning environments and Smart Board technology with students. The use of these methodologies for assessment of QQI learning outcomes has also been explored and has resulted in a much greater diversity of assessment approaches.
- The project has had a significant impact on teaching and learning in the ABE Service and has provided funding and opportunities for professional development for staff. The students are responding very well to the new approaches which are supporting more independent learning for ABE students. Tutors from KWETB ABE Service participated in training delivered by their peers and are now testing and implementing the use of technology enhanced learning techniques where appropriate. The project team has also delivered training to tutors and teachers in other ETBs, and in partner European colleges.

Kildare and Wicklow ETB



7 The Learner Experience

7.1 As part of strategic activities to enhance the learner experience, a number of ETBs reported the completion of reviews of the learner supports available across FET services. Consideration is now being given to the development and prioritisation of responses to enhance the availability and consistency of supports.

7.2 Enhancement activity included a strong focus on improvements in the early identification of literacy support needs. Initiatives targeted initial assessment of literacy (and numeracy) needs among particular cohorts, e.g. learners at NFQ levels 1-3, learners at NFQ levels 4-6, learners commencing programmes in English for Speakers of Other Languages, and apprentices. One ETB also reported the appointment of additional staff to support enhancements in the delivery of adult literacy services, including increased provision and standardisation of practice.

7.2 Examples of other initiatives to improve the learner experience included:

- The development of a childcare student work placement/experience and mentor handbook to support students and employers to get the most out of the process.
- A sector-wide primary research project on the development of good practice guidelines and a toolkit for “Initial and Ongoing Assessment of English Language Competency of Migrant Workers” at NFQ levels 1- 4.
- Expanding, on a pilot basis, a learner induction process to help learners bond and settle into their course which

in turn lessens student anxiety and improves retention.

- Publication of a learner charter, outlining the ETB’s core values and what these mean in terms of what learners can expect from the ETB and what the ETB expects of learners.

7.4 Thirteen ETBs hosted regional events of the National FET Learner Forum to gather feedback from learners on their learning experience. The events are delivered in partnership with AONTAS⁸ and provide an opportunity for ETBs to seek feedback on particular areas of interest. In 2019, these included the experience of entry and induction to FET programmes; the extent to which FET programmes met the needs of learners; assessment; and student supports. Following each ETB event, an independent report on the key issues identified by the learners is prepared by AONTAS and is shared with the ETB and SOLAS to inform improvements in future FET delivery.

7.5 ETBs have identified significant value in the feedback elicited from these events and have begun to initiate additional internal methodologies for engaging with learners with a view to reaching greater numbers of learners and in greater depth. Reporting included examples of learner surveys across service types, which yielded significant numbers of responses. ETBs have also begun to develop internal fora and mechanisms for learner voice, such as learner advisory networks and student fora, to provide targeted or ongoing learner advice on areas of particular interest or concern.

8 <https://www.aontas.com/assets/resources/AONTAS-Research/2019%20Learner%20Report%20-%20FINAL.pdf>

LEARNER EXPERIENCE IN FOCUS

- [The Public Information and Communications Group] focused on the learner experience at KCETB and looked at the learner journey in some centres and programmes ... The group devised a learner survey, the purpose of which was to gather data to improve the learner experience in KCETB FET services. The online survey focused on access, induction and assessment of KCETB FET Programmes [and was completed by] 755 learners
- Subsequent to the survey being circulated to learners, a KCETB 'Voice for Learners' forum took place in November 2019. FET Centre Co-ordinators from every programme were asked to nominate two learner representatives to attend the forum. ... All learner groups were represented including learners from unaccredited community education programmes to those currently attending Level 6 major awards.
- Those in attendance were presented with the key findings of the survey and asked key questions concerning their experience of KCET FET.
- The key findings from the discussions on the day concerned the following themes:
 1. Information regarding assessment should be distributed as early as possible in a term or module
 2. Assessment should be integrated where possible
 3. Some modules need to be updated to reflect modern technology (e.g. communications module requesting the use of a fax)
 4. Assessment content and scheduling of the assessments (planning)
- The information received was presented back to the QA overarching committee in December 2019 and will be included in policy formation going forward. It is planned that a further learner forum will be convened in 2020, in addition to the AONTAS regional learner forum, which will also take place.

Kilkenny and Carlow ETB



8 Information and Communication

- 8.1** Arrangements for internal consultation and communication with staff were the primary focus of reporting on information and communications. Consultation on strategic and business planning was a notable area of activity, with ETBs referencing engagement with staff on the development of a new strategy statement, business development and FET planning, the latter including inputs from Enterprise Ireland, SOLAS' Skills & Labour Market Research Unit and the Department of Employment Affairs & Social Protection to ensure that staff were well briefed on all aspects of skills and educational needs. One ETB is also exploring ways to integrate and feed forward strategic and quality reporting processes so as to make them more streamlined, e.g. making labour market justification mandatory in new programme proposal processes which can then feed into the ETB's labour market justification reporting to SOLAS.
- 8.2** Consultative fora and briefing events featured as common methodologies for consultation and the dissemination of information on quality assurance. These include large events with broad representation from FET staff or with more targeted initiatives for particular groups, e.g. local training initiatives and external authenticators with a view to discussing particular areas of focus, or with principals and centre managers with a view to cascading information to other staff. Briefing events featured discussion of new quality assurance governance arrangements and procedures, the Programme and Learner Support System (PLSS), the FET Strategy, SOLAS targets, the development of new award standards for early learning and care, and the inaugural review of quality assurance in ETBs.
- 8.3** ETBs have also reported the increasing use of technology to support and enhance communications strategies. One ETB has adopted a social media management platform to manage all of its social network channels, enabling relevant audiences to be reached through the use of targeted advertising. Another has developed a suite of animated videos to inform the public about the range of FET services. The use of collaborative software such as Microsoft Teams and One Drive has also been identified as supporting the development of a quality culture in aiding discourse, collaboration and innovation among centres in terms of quality assurance procedures and in working collaboratively on resources.



9 Other Parties Involved in Education & Training

9.1 The development of more strategic engagement with employers to better meet the needs of local enterprise and industry continued to feature strongly in quality improvement reporting. This is reflective of the publication of the policy framework for skills development of people in employment, *Supporting Lives and Enterprise Growth in Ireland*⁹, which seeks to support enhanced productivity in Irish small and medium-sized enterprises, drive effective regional development, respond to the changing nature of jobs and skills requirements, meet the skills development needs of target groups and support the development of 'soft' skills. Quality enhancement activity included:

- enhanced promotion and expansion of provision related to the national 'Skills to Advance' initiative, which provides upskilling and reskilling opportunities to those employed in jobs undergoing change or employed in vulnerable sectors
- the development of eCollege opportunities for vulnerable categories of employees (e.g. whose roles are being automated, who are older or who need enhanced skills to be able to continue employment in their current role);
- collaborations with regional skills fora, local enterprise offices, local government, chambers of commerce and business networks; and
- prioritisation of engagement in

designated sectors with targeted visits to employers within these fields and greater input of employers to related programmes.

9.2 There was some evidence of engagement with local community providers of education and training with a view to supporting the quality assurance of this provision. One ETB is also collaborating with a local higher education institution (HEI) as part of a regional community alliance to share national and international good practice in engaging and supporting communities to build capacity. Engagement with local HEIs was also reported with a view to supporting progression opportunities for ETB learners to higher education.

9.3 ETBs have also continued to engage with other awarding bodies with a view to enhancing the variety of programmes and awards they are able to offer. Activity reported in 2019 included developments with City and Guilds, Cambridge English and the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants. One ETB has also conducted discussions with another British awarding body to identify and mitigate the impact of Brexit on the provision and delivery of an existing award.

9 https://www.solas.ie/f/70398/x/6bcb2aa9ff/supportingworkinglives_enterprisegrowth_policyframework_sept2018.pdf

EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT IN FOCUS



- TETB set up a Workplace Development Group in 2019 to develop the team who directly engage with employers i.e. programme staff from Apprentices, Skills for Work, Skills to Advance and Explore. TETB extended the ranges of courses available to employees by developing 2 new initiatives: Explore Programme and Skills to Advance. TETB delivered 5 Explore Programmes in 2019 in partnership with the Regional Skills Fora. The purpose of the programmes was to engage with those in the manufacturing sector between the ages of 35 and 55 who are interested in upskilling their digital capacity, or those employees who upskilling with enhance digital capacity within the workplace ... [A] Skills to Advance Coordinator was appointed and is now support[ing] the overall provision of courses for those in employment in Tipperary.

Tipperary ETB



10 Self-Evaluation, Monitoring and Review

10.1 A notable focus of development activity with respect to self-evaluation, monitoring and review was the enhancement of data collection and analysis capacity to enable improved reporting to governance structures. Several ETBs referenced work to establish an agreed suite of analytical reports to inform quality monitoring. These included data on learner profiles; planning data, including data on emerging trends and economic growth areas; learner enrolment and completion; certification; grade distribution (including benchmarking against national grade achievement levels); and progression outcomes. In one case, performance measurement data from the ETB's PLSS was cross-referenced with QQI validation reports in order to effectively manage and audit programme validation

and certification data. Another ETB referenced the appointment of a data analytics consultant to enhance its data analysis and planning capacity and noted that the availability of this expertise has been of significant benefit to the organisation.

10.2 Consolidation of the findings of EA reports and results approval panel reports for consideration by governance bodies was also widely referenced. Consideration of these resulted in the provision of feedback to centres and more strategic actions such as briefings for staff, professional development and the introduction of additional supports. Enhancement activity was referenced in relation to the use of referencing by learners and the provision of feedback to learners on assessment.



- 10.3** At centre level, some ETBs referenced the establishment of centre-level quality assurance structures and the development self-evaluation tools as part of preparation for the inaugural review of quality assurance in ETBs. One ETB also highlighted the use of the SELFIE tool¹⁰, a self-evaluation tool developed by the European Commission to support the use of digital technologies in teaching, learning and assessment.
- 10.4** In one case, an ETB undertook a detailed review of two of its major centres. This involved a three-day visit to each by

the FET Director, an Adult Education Officer and the QA Officer to view learner evidence being presented for certification; determine the quality of evidence and associated paperwork; assess if the standard was appropriate to the marks being awarded; and ascertain if/what additional supports were needed for staff. A number of areas for improvement were identified and the ETB has taken action to transfer two programmes as a result with a view to increasing the availability of supports being available to the staff and to the overall programmes offered.

SELF-EVALUATION IN FOCUS



- A total of 98 [external authenticator] reports were submitted, providing feedback to the college and teaching team(s) on the overall judgement of learner performance and the quality of the assessment process. A collated report drawing on (a) the External Authentication Reports and (b) the Results Approval Panel Reports prepared by the QA Unit, [was] reviewed by the Quality Governance Board and Quality Council in the 3rd quarter of 2019.
- Strategic themes and issues were identified which have informed the planning of authentication and prompted additional enhancement actions to support the assessment of learners by tutors and instructors:
 - a) A need for the integration of assessment at NFQ Levels 1-3: Tutors engaged in training on the integration of assessment
 - b) An absence of correct referencing by learners at NFQ 3-6: Promotion and publication via SharePoint of a referencing handbook for learners
 - c) A need to further enhance consistency of marking and to employ benchmarking of grades as part of a consideration of the higher proportion of distinction and merit component grades: The piloting of the peer review of assessment is planned as part of three disciplinary communities of practice.
- A collated report was also compiled on the centralised management of external authentication (External Authentication Central Management Pilot Project). The Quality Assurance Governance Board made a number of recommendations to the Quality Council arising from a review of the report.

Kerry ETB

10 Self-reflection on Effective Learning by Fostering the use of Innovative Educational technologies https://ec.europa.eu/education/schools-go-digital/about-selfie_en



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