QQI Review Report 2021

Inaugural Review
of Laois and Offaly Education and Training Board

QQI REVIEW

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword

Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) is responsible for the external quality assurance of further and higher education and training in Ireland. One of QQI's most important statutory functions is to ensure that the quality assurance procedures that providers have in place have been implemented and are effective. To this end, QQI conducts external reviews of providers of further and higher education and training on a cyclical basis. QQI is currently conducting the inaugural review of quality assurance in education and training boards. Cyclical review is an element of the broader quality framework for ETBs composed of statutory quality assurance guidelines; quality assurance approval; annual quality reporting; dialogue meetings; the National Framework of Qualifications; validation of programmes; and, most crucially, the quality assurance system established by each ETB. The inaugural review of quality assurance in education and training boards runs from 2020-2023. During this period, QQI will organise and oversee independent reviews of each of the sixteen education and training boards. On conclusion of the sixteen reviews, a sectoral report will also be produced identifying system-level observations and findings.

The inaugural review evaluates the implementation and effectiveness of the quality assurance procedures of each ETB with a particular focus on the arrangements for the governance and management of quality; teaching, learning and assessment; and self-evaluation, monitoring and review. These are considered in the context of the expectations set out in the relevant QQI statutory quality assurance guidelines and adherence to other relevant QQI policies and procedures.

The review methodology is based on the internationally accepted and recognised approach to review:

- a self-evaluation conducted by the provider, resulting in the production of a self-evaluation report;
- an external assessment and site visit by a team of reviewers (due to the government's restrictions due to COVID-19, the review team completed a virtual visit);
- the publication of a review report including findings and recommendations; and
- a follow-up procedure to review actions taken.

This inaugural virtual review of Laois & Offaly Education and Training Board was conducted by an independent review team in line with the Terms of Reference at Appendix A. This is the report of the findings of the review team.

The Review Team

Each inaugural review is carried out by a team of independent experts and peers. The 2021 inaugural review of Laois & Offaly Education and Training Board was conducted by a team of six reviewers selected by QQI. The review team attended a virtual briefing and training session with QQI staff on 18 February 2021 and the virtual planning visit to Laois & Offaly Education and Training Board took place on 19 February 2021. The main virtual review was conducted by the full team via Microsoft Teams between 12 and 16 April 2021.

Chair

David Jones stepped down as Chief Executive / Principal of Coleg Cambria at the end of 2019 after steering the institution to great acclaim. A champion of work-based learning, apprenticeships, fundraising and accessible education for people of all ages, he has made a vast contribution to shaping the careers of tens of thousands of youngsters and mature learners over more than three decades.

Initially a chartered electronics engineer, as Chief Executive Officer and Principal of Deeside College from 2004, he led its mergers from 2009 to 2013 with the Welsh College of Horticulture, Llysfasi College and Wrexham's Yale College, to create Coleg Cambria. David has chaired several non-executive boards, currently including Qualifications Wales, and AMRI (Advanced Manufacturing Research Centre Cymru). He is also a board member of the Defence Electronics Component Agency (DECA), and the Wales Appeals Board of NSPCC Cymru and the Welsh Government's European Advisory Group. He was also a commissioner for the Independent Commission on the College of the Future, which reported in late 2020.

David was the winner of the TES UK FE Leader of the Year in 2017 and was awarded an OBE in 2015 for his services to education.

Coordinating Reviewer

Ger Looney is a former Principal of St John's Central College Cork and Past President of NAPD, with more than 30 years' experience across a range of leadership and representative roles in FET. Ger was a member of the Steering Group for the PLC Review, which produced the McIver Report in 2003,

and has worked with QQI and ETBI on various projects and advisory groups. In 2015 he undertook the role of Reporting Secretary to the QQI External Advisory Panel for the Feasibility Study on the Draft QA Guidelines for ETBs, and represented the FE sector on that panel.

He holds an honorary MA conferred by UCC for his contribution to adult education in Cork. He was conferred with an M. Ed by UCC in 2018, completing a study on 'An analysis of the effect of Government Policy on Standalone FE Colleges' as part of that degree programme. Ger is currently working with University of Limerick as well as Hibernia College on their PME Teacher Training Programmes.

Learner Representative

Claire Gillespie has over 20 years' experience in public facing roles which started in the hospitality sector before moving to the publishing and web design industry. She now works in Donegal Education & Training Board. Claire has excellent people skills and considers herself fortunate to have a job she thoroughly enjoys.

After completing a PLC Business Studies Secretarial Course, Claire progressed to Letterkenny Institute of Technology and completed a QQI Level 6 Business Studies Office Information & Administration course which led her into employment in the publishing / web design industry for 14 years. After 15 years out of the classroom, Claire went on to complete a QQI Level 6 qualification in Training and Development. This course complements Claire's new role with Donegal ETB, ensuring learners have a quality experience in their respective courses.

As a mother of three young girls, Claire has worked full-time since third level, so going back to evening education was a huge accomplishment in addition to her home and work commitments. Claire is a believer in the saying 'once education is obtained, it is easy carried' and for herself and the learners she works with. For Claire, this is a core value in helping herself and others achieve their dreams.

Peer Expert

Noreen Murphy is the Operations Manager for Specialisterne Ireland. She has an MSc in Clinical Psychology from the University of Limerick. She studied Applied Behaviour Analysis with Florida.

Institute of Technology and attained a Board Certification as an Assistant Behaviour Analyst in 2013. She has completed several years of research in the area of autism and communication and has more than a decade of experience creating and implementing programmes designed to enhance communication skills in this population.

Noreen has been employed for the past three years with Specialisterne Ireland, a specialist recruitment consultancy that supports autistic individuals and those with dyslexia, dyspraxia, ADHD and similar challenges to gain and retain employment. She brings her considerable experience in education and student support to the organisation. Noreen and her team engage with several third level institutions around Ireland to support students to develop confidence when interviewing for placements and interviews after graduation. Graduates employed through Specialisterne Ireland in their partner companies are supported to receive a disability friendly interview as well as ongoing support throughout their employment.
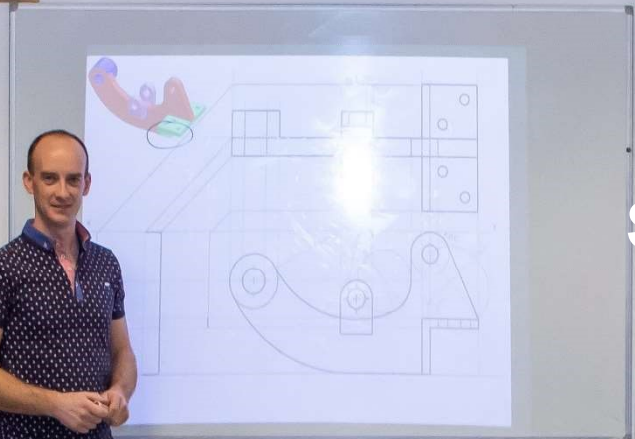
Peer Expert

After a teaching career of more than 25 years, Dr Dymph Noë now works as a policy advisor for educational quality at a VET college in the Netherlands. Starting out in secondary education, she switched to VET in 2008. That was also the year she started as internal auditor for educational quality. Over the years Dymph has expanded her audit activities to other VET colleges and has trained as lead auditor. Within the VET quality network in the Netherlands, she was involved in a new approach to quality assurance. In this new approach an organisation formulates a dilemma concerning (improvement of) quality in their own organisation and a team of auditors helps the organisation to explore the issue through dialogue with all relevant partners.

Industry Representative

Michael Quinn is a highly experienced Senior Director and passionate leader with strategic vision specialising in Operational Excellence, building high performance teams and creating an engaging, innovative and successful work environment. He has proven ability across a wide range of businesses with a strong record of accomplishment leading successful multinational start-ups, scaling small family enterprises, and managing change associated with complex merger and acquisition processes. Michael has strong international business acumen and is devoted to delivering value to customers and all key stakeholders.

Since 2019 Michael has been Head of Operations and PMO at EMR Integrated Solutions. With a track record stretching back to the early 1980s, EMR Integrated Solutions has established a strong foothold as one of the leading providers of real-time communications, telemetry, SCADA and instrumentation solutions. With clients in Ireland, UK and Europe, they serve markets as diverse as utilities, media, retail, public safety agencies, local government, NGOs, industrial and educational campuses, with a proven capability to deliver large, complex, integrated solutions on time and within budget.
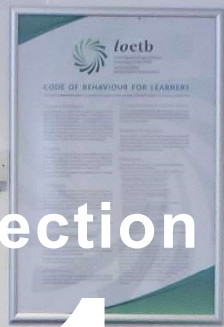
Introduction and Context

Section 1: Introduction and Context

Introduction and Context for the Review

The overview of Laois and Offaly Education and Training Board's (LOETB) governance and management structure, as well as the profile of its operation in the region, was set out by LOETB in the Self-evaluation Report (SER) submitted to QQI in January 2021 as part of the review process.

LOETB was established on 1 July 2013 through the merger of two Vocational and Education Committees (VECs); Co. Laois VEC and Co. Offaly VEC. In 2016 responsibility for the SOLAS (former FÁS) training services in Laois and Offaly, including the National Construction Training Centre, was transferred to LOETB.

Overview of Service Provision

LOETB Further Education and Training (FET) Service currently consists of eleven 11 FET centres, which includes the Midlands Skills Centre (recently opened) and the National Construction Training Centre at Mount Lucas. The operation of the other nine centres is based on an integrated FET centre model developed by LOETB. These integrated FET centres merge further education and vocational training provision which, the SER states, enables the ETB to provide an integrated service and consolidate supports to learners in standalone locations. Learner supports can be consolidated because the FET centre model enables the ETB to draw the different funding streams together to provide a single budget for each centre. The SER states that the provision of different programmes at different levels in FET centres also encourages and facilitates student progression.

There are also two education centres on the Midlands Prison campus, as well as Birr Outdoor Education and Training Centre. LOETB offers a comprehensive range of courses from part-time learning to full-time study. Each of the centres offers a broad range of full- and part-time programmes leading onto higher education, training or employment, with onsite learning supports such as literacy, guidance and learning support.

LOETB is one of the main employers in the midlands with over 1,000 staff providing education for over 4,000 post-primary students and 12,000 beneficiaries of FET. Around 40 employees are

deployed in the management of FET, where resources include four further education and training managers, FET centre managers, training officers, programme coordinators, community education facilitators, prison head teachers, an adult literacy organiser, an adult education guidance service, a quality assurance support service, as well as administrative support.

Under the Education and Training Board Act 2013, LOETB is also responsible for supporting the provision, coordination, administration and assessment of youth work services and, through cooperation with other institutions, providing support to a wide variety of programmes and agencies to deliver education and training that cannot be delivered by mainstream educational services in the area.

The Laois-Offaly region is predominantly rural with a population of 162,658 (2016 census). The 2016 figures from the Central Statistics Office (CSO) indicate that the region grew by 3.5% since 2011 – just below the national average of 3.8%. Both counties combined have a slightly younger than average age profile of 35.6, just below the national average of 37.4. The main employment sectors in the region are professional services (22.5%), commerce and trade (19.7%), and manufacturing (16.9%).

LOETB works with the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (DEASP) and other agencies to identify and engage with people in areas of high unemployment with a wide array of priority cohorts. The integrated nature of provision enables the literacy, community education, community training and adult guidance services to work in a coordinated manner with the DEASP, local development companies and community groups.

LOETB also works in partnership with a number of agencies and voluntary organisations across the region to support and develop communities through engagement in lifelong learning interventions. In 2019, LOETB provided community education courses to approximately 775 learners, including partnerships with local and regional agencies.

LOETB Vision and Mission

LOETB's stated vision is to "actively lead the provision of high-quality education and training in Laois and Offaly." Its mission is "excellence through education and training."

The SER submitted by LOETB as part of the review process lists the core values of the organisation as:

- Equality,
- Collaboration,
- Innovation,
- Professionalism, and
- Integrity.

LOETB's Statement of Strategy 2018-2022 sets out four strategic goals, with a range of strategic priorities to further the achievement of these goals, through a series of supporting actions. The SER states that LOETB's strategic goals provide the ETB's Further Education and Training (FET) Service with a framework for development.

The Provider Profile, which LOETB also submitted as part of the review process, notes that the Statement of Strategy "facilitates the prioritisation of target areas for development, particularly with respect to governance, quality assurance, and the policies and procedures needed to ensure appropriate oversight of all FET programmes."

The strategic goals are outlined as follows:

1. The provision of **Excellent Education and Training Programmes** with quality assured teaching, learning and assessment for all, with high levels of achievement and accreditation.

2. The provision of an **Excellent Experience for Learners**, with positive learning experiences and environments with suitable resources and facilities for students

3. **Organisation Transformation** through the promotion of a culture of innovation and improvement.

4. **Staff Development** with a focus on recruitment and retention of a highly qualified and motivated workforce – providing support and opportunities for continual personal and professional career development.

Operational Structure of FET Service

The FET SMT reports to the Director of FET (who, in turn, reports to the ETB's Chief Executive) and comprises four FET managers with distinct responsibilities in relation to the FET service. Each of the FET managers now has specific responsibility for one of the pillars outlined in the national FET Strategy 2020-2024 – Skills, Inclusion, Pathways and Quality. The ETB maintains in the SER that these changes have led to a greater emphasis on supporting the learner journey through the scheme, moving away from a programme-based approach to a more learner-centred process. The FET SMT meets weekly to discuss operational and strategic issues.

LOETB established a dedicated Quality Assurance Support Service (QASS) in 2016 to provide support to FET centres and services as well as ensuring that "appropriate policies and procedures are in place and are implemented across the service" (SER). The Professional Development Co-ordinator was appointed in 2018 and "significant resources have been invested in upskilling and professional development of teaching and support staff" (SER).

The diagram below, which is taken from the ETB's Provider Profile, outlines the current line management / reporting structure in LOETB FET services.
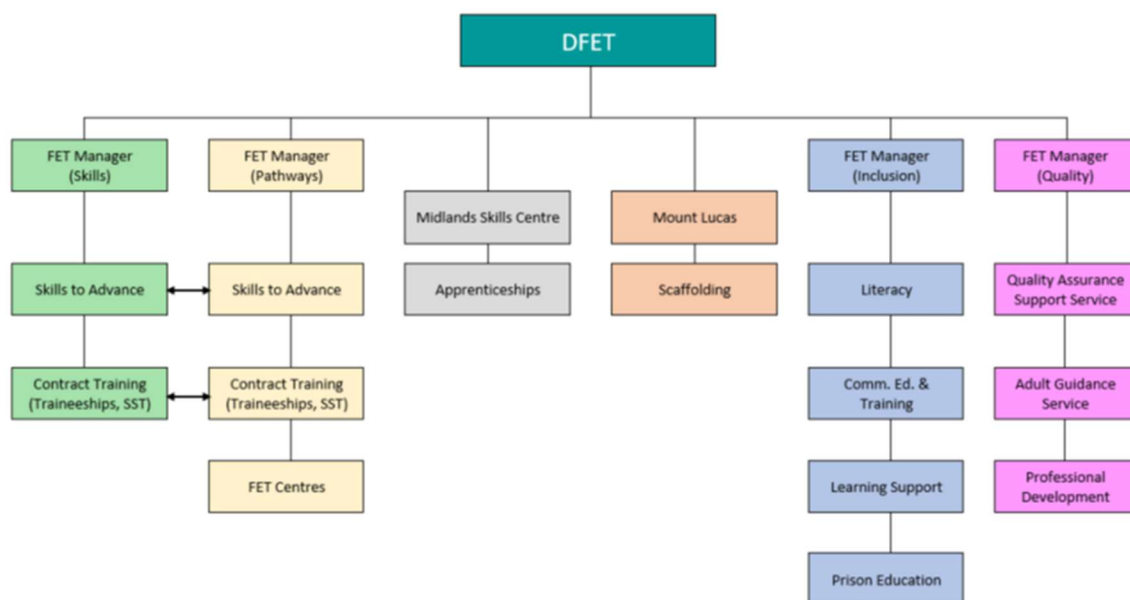
The FET governance structure, as set out in the Provider Profile, is as follows:
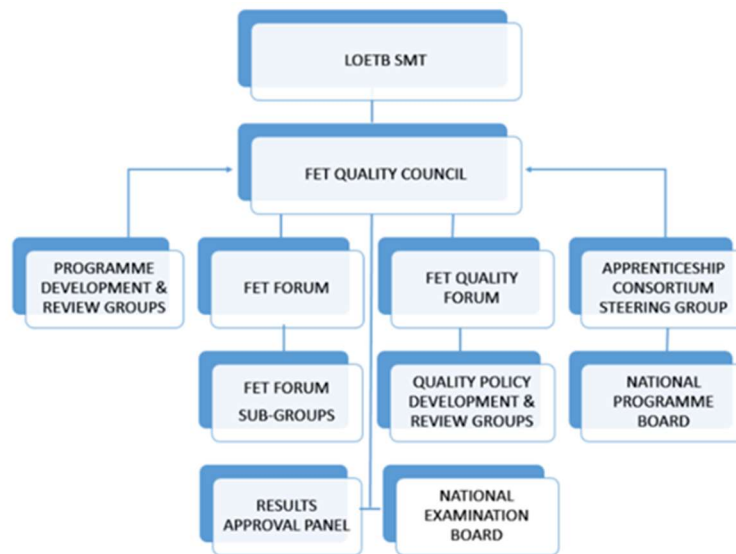
An overview of the roles and remits of each of the bodies is set out in Appendix C.

Management of QA

A FET manager is responsible for the QASS, which is in turn responsible for the management of QA. In managing QA, the QASS supports centre and service managers and staff in the implementation of all aspects of QA policies and processes, from the point where learners first access programmes to certification stage. The QASS plays a key role in overseeing the scheduling and administration of certification processes.

In order to ensure that all FET staff and external trainers (contracted training companies and second providers in the community) are aware of their responsibilities in relation to quality assurance and that they feel supported in the delivery of FET programmes, a specific member of the QASS is assigned to each FET centre/contractor/second provider. This QASS member liaises with the staff members/contractors/second providers and with the relevant LOETB centre/service manager at all stages from the admissions process right through to assessment and certification stage.

The SER states that the QASS takes a hands-on approach with the FET centres and services in order to ensure consistency in the implementation of policies and procedures that apply to all FET provision. By way of example, QASS involvement with the assessment process is outlined as follows:

- Members of the QASS conduct the internal verification (IV) process in all FET centres and have recently become involved in the (IV) process for second providers.
- Specific QASS staff members have responsibility for selecting appropriate external authenticators (EAs) for each centre/service on a programme-by-programme basis, and it is the policy of LOETB only to select as EAs individuals with subject matter expertise or relevant teaching experience for each programme.
- All EA reports are made available to the QASS, and Results Approval Panel (RAP) meetings are convened by the QASS for each certification round.

In 2019, the QASS commenced the process of integrating QA systems for former VEC and former FÁS training programmes. This involved the introduction of common policies and procedures in some areas in an incremental way. The team heard during the main review visit that this process is ongoing.

Integrated FET Centre Model Approach

LOETB's Strategic Performance Agreement (SPA) with SOLAS outlines an ambitious set of targets across the full range of provision. It is stated in the SER that these targets were established on the principle of "doing the right thing for the learner" and include, for example, ensuring that every learner is enrolled on the right programme at the right level and can avail of the full range of supports on site. Further, the SPA sets out that each of LOETB's FET facilities will be accessible, will offer progression options on-site and that the learning experience will be consistent and equitable across the scheme.

The review team notes that a cornerstone of the LOETB approach to delivering on the SOLAS agreement was the development of the FET centre model, which offers the learner multiple FET services on a single site, allowing for ease of access, transfer and progression.

The delivery model commenced in the 2019/2020 academic year, with three FET centres that traditionally only offered Youthreach programmes increasing their range of provision to offer traineeships in healthcare, childcare and/or barbering.

COVID-19

On 12 March 2020, when the Government announced public health restrictions in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, LOETB developed a contingency plan, which is outlined in the SER. The plan set out to ensure the continued provision of essential FET services and certification and to support learners as far as possible. The FET SMT immediately notified all learners and teachers of the decision to close centres and to move tuition to on-line systems.

The contingency plan identified that the immediate priority cohorts were the Post-Leaving Certificate (PLC) courses and other courses where learners were aiming to achieve a major award with a view to applying to third-level institutions through the CAO system. This affected over 500 learners in four centres, with over 80 teachers involved in programme delivery. The ETB worked to ensure that all other programmes were completed for the August certification period, or the additional July certification round provided by QQI.

The QASS team undertook a survey of teaching staff to determine which assessments had already been completed, whether all learning outcomes had been delivered, and which assessments had already been corrected. Many of the assessments that had been scheduled could not take place, as this would have required learners to attend centres to complete written examinations and skills demonstrations. The SER states that alternative assessment arrangements were developed and put in place, in line with the principles set out by QQI to guide the development of such arrangements. All of the proposed alternative assessment arrangements were submitted to the FET Management Team for approval and all approvals were issued by April 25th.

The SER states that the most common assessments that were approved were assignments or online examinations in lieu of examinations that required attendance at centres. Skills demonstrations or projects that required the use of specialist software or equipment were re-scheduled and completed over the June and July certification rounds. Alternative arrangements for the completion of the Work Experience Module were proposed by the QASS and approved by the FET Management Team. The implementation of all the alternative arrangements in each centre was supported by the QASS.

The contingency plan also enabled learner evidence that was already in teachers' possession to be collected from those teachers' homes, which ensured the continuation of the IV and EA processes, with a limited number of critical staff conducting IV under strict social distancing conditions. The IV and EA process was managed and undertaken centrally by the QASS for all FET programmes delivered across LOETB.

The QASS conducted the IV process. Because of the unique circumstances, it was decided that internal verifiers would check the marks of 100% of the folders, in order to eliminate any errors and thereby reduce the number of possible subsequent appeals. Arrangements were made to have those modules that had been taught by new teachers externally authenticated. In addition, EAs were engaged to authenticate certification to ensure consistency of standards across centres in modules such as communications and work experience that were taught by a number of different teachers.

Arrangements were made for EAs to visit or if that was not possible, then either for the evidence to be made available digitally to the EA or for the learner evidence to be delivered by courier to the EA's home, with their agreement. The EA process was successfully completed, and all reports were presented to the Results Approval Panel (RAP) as planned, in time for the June, July and August submission deadlines. RAP meetings combined face-to-face sessions where possible with Microsoft Teams meetings.

The review team heard that emphasis was placed on the following:

- A comprehensive comparison of the year's results compared to previous year's results in order to ensure that there was a level of consistency with the results awarded, taking various factors into consideration.
- Ensuring that the Record of Approved Alternative Assessments formed part of the record presented for certification processing.

In addition, LOETB engaged an external facilitator to evaluate and report on the 2019/2020 contingency arrangements. On receipt of the facilitator's report, an updated contingency plan was drawn up to ensure continuity for the 2020/2021 academic year. The review team regard this process as an example of good practice. The 2020/2021 plan included a modularised approach to delivery using a blended learning model and with additional supports for learners and staff. The FET section of the report was included as an appendix to the SER.

Section

2

Self-evaluation Methodology

Section 2: Self-evaluation Methodology

The Self-evaluation Process

LOETB established a self-evaluation steering group and planned a consultation process as its main approach to undertaking self-evaluation, producing its SER, and preparing for the external aspects of the review process. Membership of the steering group is outlined in Appendix 6 of the SER.

The steering group had wide-ranging membership from all LOETB centres and representation from all levels of the organisation. All group members were LOETB staff, and the group did not include representation from any other key stakeholders such as learners or second providers, although these were involved, as were higher education institutions (HEIs), in the consultation process. The SER states that the COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the consultation process, as most consultation had to be conducted exclusively online and predominantly through surveys. Engagement levels suffered as a result.

The review team notes it as regrettable that other stakeholders – such as employers and local community representatives as well as LOETB Board members – were not involved in the SER development process. While LOETB Board members were not part of that process, they did accept an invitation to meet the review team during the main review visit, and LOETB's chairperson also attended the oral report meeting on the final day.

Knowledge of, and familiarity with, the self-evaluation process and SER varied across the groups with whom the review team met during the main review visit. Those who were members of the steering group were, as expected, very aware of the process and SER report. Head office staff members and centre managers were also aware of the process and the SER report, but other staff and stakeholder representatives had little knowledge of the process or the report. The review team heard that the steering group will be retained for the remainder of the review process until this report is published and until LOETB has responded to the commendations and recommendations herein, along with the actions that it has identified for itself as part of the SER. This is wise in the short-term and to be commended. However, LOETB will need to ensure that it does not create an unsustainable and potentially nugatory parallel approach to the other institutional quality assurance and performance improvement structures and processes that are led through its QASS. The steering group could for

example channel the recommendations of this report through to the FET Forum sub-groups whose work is already focused on similar areas. This would also contribute to the integration centrally of all quality processes and systems.

The Self-evaluation Report

LOETB engaged very fully and positively with the review team at all stages of the review process. The SER is a comprehensive document, and LOETB used the QQI framework and guidance to inform the structure and content of the final report. The SER includes useful contextual information, particularly on the organisation and its strategic priorities and ambitions, how it is structured, and some background on the region that it serves. It also provides an overview of how the ETB has responded to the challenge of Covid-19, with a specific appendix (5) that provides an interim report on LOETB's response to the pandemic.

The sections of the SER that address the three main objectives of the QQI review framework consider each criterion under the following headings: Description, Evaluation, Conclusion, Identified Actions. There is a great deal of information provided, predominantly in the form of extensive descriptive text. There is very limited use of data and metrics, tables and other illustrations that would enhance and improve the readability and utility of the document. There is also very limited feedback from learners or direct evidence of the effectiveness of teaching and learning practice. The Identified Actions are largely binary measures and are not linked to performance measures or targets. There are no timescales presented for the actions, and the person/team responsible for addressing the action is not specified.

The report includes a short Conclusions chapter, and there are other useful appendices that provide further key information in relation to FET governance, programme development, recruitment and selection and professional development policies.

Overall, the SER is a comprehensive document that provides an informative and useful overview of the ETB's provision that could be further enhanced by addressing the points highlighted in this section, along with other specific commentary and the recommendations/commendations in this report.

Section

3

Quality Assurance &
Enhancement

Section 3: Quality Assurance & Enhancement

Objective 1: Governance and Management of Quality

ETB Mission & Strategy

As set out above in the introduction, Laois & Offaly Education and Training Board's (LOETB) mission and strategy are clearly articulated in the self-evaluation report (SER) submitted to QQI as part of this inaugural review process.

The ETB mission is 'Excellence through Education and Training' and the Chief Executive's foreword in the SER states that "in every aspect of our service, the provision of a high-quality learning experience is the cornerstone of our approach".

The SER lists the core values of the organisation as Equality, Collaboration, Innovation, Professionalism and Integrity.

Quality improvement plans (QIPs) have been developed on an annual basis since 2017 with specific actions linked to each of the above goals. The QIPs inform the development work of senior FET managers. The operational objectives align with the ETB's mission and strategy, as set out in QQI's Statutory Core QA Guidelines.

Service to Learners

LOETB's service to FET learners operates through its colleges, FET centres and specific purpose centres.

LOETB also collaborates extensively with local industry to meet labour market demands and delivers several innovative programmes. These programmes were developed in collaboration with agencies such as IDA Ireland, SOLAS and Grow Remote and are delivered by second and contracted

providers. They are outlined later in the section on Programme Development, Approval and Submission for Validation.

LOETB hosted a 'Future-Proof your Business' webinar series, promoted through LinkedIn and aimed at local employers, to assist them in their digital transition. Webinar topics have included resilience and coping strategies, how to nurture existing customers online, cybersecurity and data analytics.

The review team learned that 196 participants had registered for the programme. Nominated LOETB adult literacy staff members maintain formal links with local disability groups in each county. Certified courses have been developed in consultation with these local disability groups. The ETB provides training programmes through the National Learning Network (NLN) centres and a Community Training Centre (CTC) in Tullamore. The ETB also works with resettlement working groups as well as the relevant inter-agency support workers who support refugee families that have settled in Laois and Offaly. Courses designed for English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) are currently provided by the ETB across six locations in Laois and Offaly.

The primary focus of the QASS is the delivery of a high quality and consistent service to learners, which was noted by the review team on its visit as particularly evident on the ground where the service is provided. This is especially evident in the work done by the QASS to standardise induction and assessment procedures which is detailed elsewhere in the report (see Section 3 Objective 1f; Access, Transfer and Progression as well as Section 3 Objective 1g; Integrity and Approval of Learner Results).

It was also evident at review team meetings with teaching staff members, as well as in meetings with second and contracted providers, that these stakeholders clearly understand the need for, as well as the emphasis that LOETB has placed on, quality assuring services to learners.

The review team found clear evidence that LOETB's values are consistently focused on the needs of the learners of Laois and Offaly and is confident that LOETB's core values are reflected clearly in the ETB's work. The review team met FET centre learners and staff at separate sessions, but the message at each session was clear. The integration of services is embedded in the centres, with learners stating that they experienced a high level of support from their first point of contact through the induction process and during the delivery of their course. Learners from the Tullamore FET centre in particular spoke of a very positive engagement with the service.

At review team meetings with the guidance service, it was clearly stated that its focus prior to and during the induction stage was to ensure that learners were enrolled on the appropriate course and level. From that point onwards the emphasis was on responding to additional learner needs, as they settled into their studies. This focus on learner support was evidenced across all further education provision in LOETB centres at review team meetings with learners, teachers and management.

The focus on the needs of learners was also evident in the training service, which is delivered in response to local and national needs, in some cases by second providers and contracted trainers. The review team learned that the designated Contracted or Community Training Officer assigned to each second provider or contracted trainer meets with the learners on three set occasions during the course delivery term, to gather feedback and to arrange any additional supports that are needed. Learners themselves instanced literacy and writing skills supports as particular areas where they had received additional help.

The review team met with teaching staff from all areas of LOETB service who demonstrated an enthusiastic commitment to their work and to the learners under their care. They are strongly committed to their learners and to providing the best service possible to them. There is a consistency around this staff approach, which the review team regard as evidence of a strong commitment to a quality culture, supporting the organisational mission and ultimately promoted by the infrastructure set up by the QASS. This was particularly evidenced in learner feedback referencing their appreciation for the responsiveness of teaching staff going above and beyond with their time and support, especially during the induction process.

The learners who met with the review team, including learners on second and contracted programmes, indicated that their experience is consistent with the ETB's mission, where course delivery is the primary focus. Learners were fulsome in their praise of the efforts that staff go to in ensuring and providing support. Learners stated that 'staff can't do enough for us' and went 'above and beyond' to support them on their course. They also indicated that courses 'exceeded expectations.'

Each meeting during the site visit began with participants being asked about LOETB's mission statement and core values. Senior staff members who met with the review team were very familiar with the mission and strategy of LOETB. However, there was less familiarity with the mission and strategy in evidence at review team meetings with junior staff members below the Senior Management Team (SMT). By way of example, staff did not mention 'excellence' as the focal point of the LOETB mission. The review team believes that more frequent referencing of mission and core

values at centre and service level such as on occasions when centre/service heads conduct staff meetings or other official functions, would help in this regard. This would also help the ETB ensure a cohesive approach across the organisation.

Commendation

ETB Mission and Strategy: The review team commends LOETB for ensuring that its core values are reflected clearly across its operations, which are connected to the needs of the region. The review team further commends LOETB for ensuring that there are strong links between strategy and quality assurance.

Recommendation

ETB Mission and Strategy: The review team recommends that LOETB's mission & strategy be shared with and reiterated to staff at all levels and across all services and centres with greater frequency.

Structures and Terms of Reference for the Governance and Management of Quality Assurance

There is an extensive governance structure within the ETB, which was formalised by LOETB in 2020. Details of, and flow charts illustrating, the organisational structure are available on the LOETB website and are included on all publications where relevant. Members of the FET SMT have a strong presence across the governance structure with membership on the Programme Development and Review Groups, the FET Forum, the FET Quality Forum and the Apprenticeship Consortium Steering Group. Further, the FET SMT is either represented, or has delegated representation, on sub-groups of these pillar groups. At his meeting with the review team, the CE indicated that LOETB regards QA as being 'front and centre' in the organisation. It was clear from all groups with whom the review team met that the QASS maintains a very strong presence and interaction on QA and is central to service delivery.

The SER states that the governance structure will be well embedded by the end of 2021 and that training of members of governance groups will also have concluded by that time with reports of the work of each of the various groups published on the LOETB website.

The review team is of the opinion that publication of information in respect of the ETB's governance and management of quality assurance should include communication with staff at centre and service

level. This could be addressed in conjunction with the development of the internal communications strategy which is recommended elsewhere in this report (Section 3, Objective 1i).

FET Quality Council: As the lead body, the council includes the FET Management Team, which comprises four managers each of whom manages a particular area of responsibility in relation to the FET service, i.e. Skills, Pathways, Inclusion and Quality. There is also a facility to co-opt external members from time to time. There are currently three external members on the council: a representative from local industry, one from the National Apprenticeship Programme Board and another from the higher education sector. The council operates under specific Terms of Reference (ToR) which are based on the relevant QQI Statutory QA Guidelines.

Programme Development and Review Groups (PDRG): Membership of these groups may include industry and third-level representatives and the groups report to the FET Quality Council (SER pp 19, 20). However, the ToR for the groups make no reference to members from industry or higher education; rather, they state that "membership is designed to enable relevant LOETB management and staff to collectively contribute to the development of new programmes". The review team's view is that the inclusion of industry and third level representatives on the PDRGs is essential to providing a mechanism to ensure that all courses are up to date and meet industry needs.

The ToR also state that the process may involve facilitating learner focus groups. The review team is of the opinion that the inclusion of learner focus groups should be a mandatory part of the process. It also provides a formal opportunity to engage with and enhance the learner voice.

The ToR state that the PDRGs report to the FET Programme Advisory Forum. However, there is no mention of this forum elsewhere in the SER, nor does it appear on LOETB's governance chart.

The FET Forum: There are specific ToR for the FET Forum which may establish subgroups for specific tasks. The SER refers to the large increase in membership of the forum, given the expansion of the LOETB FET service from 2018 onwards and the engagement of a facilitator in 2019 to examine its future direction. This work was interrupted during the COVID-19 pandemic. The review team is of the opinion that the work of the facilitator with the group should re-commence as soon as possible.

The SER recognises that it is very important that information flows both ways between the forum and centres and that information is also relayed back to staff appropriately to ensure that all parties are

aware of and increase their understanding of issues that affect the FET service at local and ETB levels. The review team suggests that this issue be addressed in the development of an internal communications strategy, which is recommended elsewhere in this report (Section 3, Objective 1i).

The FET Quality Forum: There are specific ToR for the FET Quality Forum, which may establish policy development and review sub-groups to develop draft policy documentation. There is no reference to external membership in the ToR, despite one of the terms of reference specifically stating that the forum is set up "to enable management and external stakeholders to collectively contribute to the development and quality of LOETB's FET provision".

Quality Policy Development & Review Groups: There are specific ToR for the Quality Policy Development and Review Groups, which provide for a representative of industry to be a member of each group. The ToR also state that the process may involve facilitating learner focus groups. The review group is of the opinion that the inclusion of learner focus groups should be integral to the process of policy development and review. Once again, it provides a real opportunity to enhance and engage with the learner voice.

The Results Approval Panel: The membership and ToR of the panel are in line with QQI requirements in this regard.

The Apprenticeship Consortium Steering Group (ACSG): The ToR set out the role, membership and purpose of the group, and follow QQI QA Guidelines for Providers of New Apprenticeship Programmes.

National Programme Board: The ToR and membership of the board follow agreed national guidelines.

National Examination Board: The ToR are in line with QQI requirements, and membership reflects the range of providers in the consortium and the number of collaborating providers.

Under these ToR, the role of the National Examinations Board is also to "consider the delivery" of the NAP. The ToR further state that, separate to the formal business of meetings, "instructors and assessors will be afforded an opportunity to reflect on the programme and to share experiences". This

role relates to the National Examination Board's responsibility "to promote best practice in assessment and the development of community of practice among instructors and assessors". However, it is unclear how this is to be achieved and the review team is of the opinion that the ToR should set out the arrangements which will provide for this.

The review team recognises the reality of the situation as outlined in the SER that some of the governance groups are in their infancy and that it is too early to evaluate their effectiveness. By way of example, the programme development and approval process was only formalised and commenced operating in September 2020. The review team notes and supports the ETB's comment in the SER proposing that training should be provided for members of governance groups.

Management of Quality Assurance

There is a concentrated emphasis on quality assurance within the ETB, as referenced by the CE during the opening session of the main review visit and the review team is of the opinion that this also manifests itself at senior management level in the work of the ETB's senior managers. This emphasis on QA has been the case since the 2013 merger of two VECs to create LOETB, when there had to be an immediate focus on creating a single QA system for FE, together with the elimination of any duplication in service provision.

The task was further complicated in 2016, when LOETB assumed responsibility for the provision of former FÁS training programmes in Laois and Offaly. These programmes operate under the Transition Quality Assurance System (TQAS), which is significantly different to the QA system already in place for Further Education provision. The QASS has been tasked with the integration of both QA systems, which involves the introduction of common policies and procedures being developed and introduced in an incremental way. This work has been ongoing since 2019.

QA is managed by the QASS, which the review team found has a strong leadership team in place and a clear sense of purpose. There is a very deliberate policy at SMT level to prioritise the work of the QASS, with a particular emphasis on the service to learners. For this reason, the impact of the QASS was very evident moving through LOETB to the point where the service was delivered to learners at centre level. There have been a number of additional staff appointments made to the service in recent years to assist it with its work. In this regard, some aspects of developments relating to QA are very recent and have taken place as staffing and resource levels increased in the service.

The policies and procedures that have been put in place up to this point relate to course provision and delivery of service to learners. Focus has been on the management of the induction and assessment processes. QA staff for example are centrally involved in the assessment process, as they manage the entire internal verification process in all centres and work closely with the external authenticators.

The policies and procedures are comprehensive and robust and ensure strong governance of these areas. Governance is visible and transparent, and staff working in LOETB centres as well as second providers and subcontracted providers are very familiar with these QA regulations. This was evidenced in the documented policies and procedures examined by the review team and also at the review team meetings with relevant staff.

Contracted and Community Training Officers adopt a 'hands-on' approach and visit LOETB centres at designated times across the course delivery schedule, such as induction sessions.

Where multi-level arrangements exist, there is corporate oversight of, and accountability for these arrangements. The review team learned that Contracted and Community Training Officers schedule specific meetings with second providers and subcontracted providers for regular course review sessions. A designated Contracted or Community Training Officer conducts quarterly review meetings with these providers, as well as conducting monitoring visits and meeting with learners. The details of these meetings and visits are subsequently reviewed at meetings of the FET managers and Training Officers.

Commendation

Management of Quality Assurance: The review team commends LOETB for the work that it has done to date in formalising the structures to underpin the governance and management of quality assurance and to provide a platform for continuous review. The review team further commends LOETB for its strategic planning and development of FET provision.

Commendation

Integration of Further Education and Vocational Training Services: The review team commends LOETB on the significant work completed on integrating successfully the two previously distinct areas of further education and vocational training.

Recommendation

Governance Groups in General: The review team recommends that the ETB provide training for members of governance groups and that information from the various groups be published on the LOETB website. Publication of information should also include communication with staff at centre and service level. This could be addressed in conjunction with the development of the internal communications strategy which is recommended elsewhere in this report (Section 3, Objective 1i).

The review team also recommends that LOETB ensure increased clarity and co-ordination between the various quality groups. This would improve understanding of the system by all staff members. It would also improve efficiency and minimise the likelihood of nugatory duplication.

Recommendation

Management of Quality Assurance: The review team recommends that LOETB engage in a full review of all existing policies and ToR which relate to the function and membership of management groups and sub-groups. The review should place a particular focus on ensuring:

- Consistency in relation to terms of reference and the organisational structure.
- Group membership that includes all relevant stakeholders.
- The provision of relevant inductions and ongoing training for all group members.
- Clarity and co-ordination between the various quality groups.

Documentation of Quality Assurance

There is evidence of a significant focus by LOETB in recent years on developing QA-related documentation. This has been driven by the QASS' development of policies and procedures. A range of these policies and procedures have been developed, with a particular focus on the ETB's service to learners. Areas covered by these policies and procedures include pre-entry, course application, interview, induction, course delivery, assessment and results approval. The review team noted a strong and consistent awareness at management level that, despite the large volume of work undertaken in developing and implementing policies and procedures, further developments and refinements are necessary.

To date, policies have been developed by the QASS staff and presented largely as a 'fait accompli'. The review team heard during the main visit that the QASS has begun to actively involve a wider

selection of staff members in policy development. QASS members realise that the process will benefit if more staff members are involved in shaping policies.

In future, development and approval of policies and procedures will occur through newly proposed Policy Development and Review Groups (PDRG), on which staff will be represented. These PDRGs have the potential to provide an effective structure for policy and procedure development, subject to the relevant recommendations made under Objective 1(b) above.

The policies and procedures that have been developed focus particularly on the service provided to learners, as already highlighted under Objective 1(b). They are comprehensive and robust and incorporate all service types, including second and contracted providers, as well as other awarding bodies.

LOETB recognises that there are still areas where additional policies and procedures are needed to provide clarity and consistency in situations that may arise. The ETB also recognises the need for a regular review of policies and a schedule for such reviews to take place. The review team agrees with the action identified by the ETB in the SER in relation to the establishment of policy review groups.

There are various sections of the website where reference is made to QA and where policies may be accessed. One section is open to staff members only. In populating the staff section, consideration should be given to presenting policies using the format of Quality e-Manuals, which would allow for revisions/amendments over time and could also be helpful in the context of the development of the internal communications strategy, which is recommended elsewhere in this report (Section 3, Objective 1i).

Another section on the website is open to public access and purports to offer a complete list of all revised QA policies and procedures which are common across LOETB. However, this section is currently not populated; this should be addressed.

Commendation

Establishment of the QASS: The review team commends LOETB for the establishment of a dedicated quality assurance support service and further commends the work done by the QASS to date in relation to the development of policies and procedures that are particularly focused on the ETB's service to learners.

Recommendation

Documentation of Quality Assurance: The review team recommends that the ETB establish policy review groups without delay, taking into consideration the recommendations set out under Objective 1(b) above, which should:

- prioritise the remaining areas in need of policy development and proceed on that basis
- establish a formal schedule for a continual review of existing policies
- publish all policies on the website, arranged under specific categories. These should be accessible to the specific groups to whom they are relevant, e.g. staff (password secured), learners, general public

Staff Recruitment, Management and Development

Staff recruitment and management are governed by national legislation and agreements. LOETB has a recruitment and selection policy in place, which is in line with the relevant legislation and agreements. The HR department is responsible for the recruitment of suitably qualified staff, who are employed directly by LOETB.

Staff are appointed to the ETB and then assigned to a centre, or they may work across a number of centres. There are formal arrangements in place for the induction of new staff. Centre-specific induction is provided by centre managers. The QASS arranges induction sessions for groups of new teachers or on an individual basis in respect of QA policies and procedures, as well as the regulations relating to the presentation of learner material for assessment. As part of this process 'assessor packs' are provided to all new teachers. Staff suggested to the review team that it would be helpful to provide more detailed instruction with these assessor packs, because many new teachers will not have had any experience of QQI and would not be familiar with the 'language of the QQI system'. It was suggested for example that an example of an assessor pack could be made available to illustrate in particular how IV and EA operate as part of the system.

Contracted training programme staff are employed by the contracted training provider and evidence of teaching staff's qualifications is submitted to the QASS for approval prior to the commencement of programme provision.

There are formal arrangements to provide induction to community and contracted training staff. There is a designated member of the QASS assigned to each contracted and community training provider and this contact person arranges induction for their staff in relation to QA policies and procedures.

During the main review visit, the review team formed the impression that LOETB staff are generally very positive and enthusiastic; staff whom the review team met demonstrated a distinctly centre-focused mindset, which is perhaps understandable given that LOETB is such a large and complex organisation, operating across a wide geographical area.

There is no formal staff appraisal process, nor is there a teaching/training observation process for teachers, tutors or instructors. The review team recognises that this is a national area for development but is also of the opinion that a formal system of staff appraisal is necessary in order to support professional development and sectoral/institutional performance and standards. Professional standards are maintained and enhanced through LOETB's commitment to staff continuous professional development (CPD). The SER also recommends the establishment of a staff mentoring programme and the review team agrees that this would provide an important support for staff

The review team notes that current CPD initiatives have created opportunities to support the LOETB's strategic goal in relation to staff development.

In 2020 a professional development policy was adopted in order to support LOETB's delivery of its strategic goal in relation to staff development. The policy includes a professional development plan, which commits the ETB to establishing a teaching and learning centre – the development of all aspects of LOETB's professional development requirements will be guided by the SMT.

The SER recommends that staff be surveyed to establish their professional development (PD) needs. The review team suggests that consideration be given here to establishing a formal structure operating through centre managers, to ensure that the needs of each centre as well as the collective needs of the ETB can be taken into account as part of the process and that needs can be addressed efficiently and effectively.

LOETB's PD Coordinator was appointed in 2018, and the review team learned from staff during the main review visit that this development was very positively received. The PD Coordinator produces a monthly FET CPD calendar. The SER reported that there has been a very good uptake of

programmes. The Universal Design for Learning (UDL) course, for example, had 27 members of staff enrolled and was delivered within the ETB to provide a set of principles for curriculum development that give all students equal opportunities to learn. This course was well received by participants whom the review team met on the main review visit. Seven staff members attended a follow-up training course for internal facilitators and, as a result of this, LOETB's Inclusion and Support Network has been established to assist teachers in their work with learners who have additional needs. This represents the first of LOETB's community of practice networks. The SER recommends that further community of practice networks be established for staff teaching in specific areas as well as in subject-specific areas.

There is also evidence of some emerging peer observation of teaching at centres and with second providers, which the review team heard about during the main review visit. This has in part arisen from LOETB staff participation in the Master of Teaching and Learning programme provided by Carlow IT in association with LOETB.

The PD Coordinator continues to proactively drive CPD, however there is no reference in the Professional Development Policy to the involvement of the PD Coordinator. This is addressed in the below recommendation.

Commendation

Staff Professional Development: The review team commends LOETB for its appointment of a Professional Development Coordinator as well as the work done to date by the coordinator in establishing the CPD service for staff.

Recommendation

Staff Professional Development: The review team recommends a revision of the Staff Professional Development Policy to include:

- Formal recognition of the position of Professional Development Coordinator.
- A mechanism to survey staff on CPD needs, which takes the centre as well as broader LOETB requirements into account.
- A mechanism to establish communities of practice for teaching staff in specific areas as well as subject-specific areas.
- Formal recognition of, and a structure for, an LOETB staff mentoring programme.
- Formal recognition of an induction process tailored to the needs of the various staff cohorts, including an input into the process on the subject of LOETB as a corporate body.

- A major focus on online/blended learning, which could be addressed in the context of an LOETB digital strategy, recommended elsewhere in this report.

The review team also recommends that an appropriate model of teaching observation be introduced to support staff development and the realisation of institutional strategic objectives.

Programme Development, Approval and Submission for Validation

LOETB's programme development and approval process was formalised relatively recently (in September 2020). Centre and service managers who wish to offer a new programme for the first time in their centres – either certified or uncertified – must seek approval through this process.

Programme development is led by the FET managers and the Quality Team, thereby ensuring strict management of the entire process and quality as a central consideration.

The process comprises six parts, with each stage set out in the Approval Process Document. The initial proposal is accompanied by a scoping exercise, which must demonstrate that the programme is in line with LOETB's FET strategy and provision as well as meeting identified local needs. FET managers play an advisory role from this early stage. The monitoring of proposals by the FET managers aims to ensure that courses are developed in line with LOETB's strategic goals. It also ensures a rational approach to programme provision: new programmes can be considered within the context of existing programmes and progression opportunities across the entire LOETB service.

Following a scoping exercise, if the programme proposal is approved to move to development stage, a programme development team is established. The SER points out that the approach to programme development is collaborative, as the team may include external members from any other relevant stakeholder group/employer/local partnership, etc. This is not specifically provided for in the policy, but a recommendation in that regard has been made under Objective 1(b) above.

The review team supports LOETB's assertion in the SER that it is too early to accurately assess the effectiveness of these new arrangements, but would encourage the LOETB to do so once the process has bedded in. This assessment could be activated in conjunction with the recommendations on Self-evaluation, Monitoring and Review in Section 3, Objective 3a.

During the main review visit, the review team noted evidence of LOETB's responsiveness to the needs of local business and enterprise. In LOETB's programme development, there is a targeted concentration on the hospitality, building and retrofitting industries as well as the digital and green economies. LOETB has developed programmes for the Hotels Federation, led the development of the national apprenticeship in scaffolding and is involved in programme development work with Bord na Móna and the Regional Skills Forum.

A selection of programmes and initiatives recently developed include:

- Midlands Just Transition Programme – delivering training for the Nearly Zero Energy Building (NZEB) Retrofit Programme.

- Peatland Rehabilitation Traineeship – developed for Bord na Móna.

- Online programme in infection prevention and control developed and provided in response to an urgent request from the HSE in the midlands during the recent COVID-19 outbreak.

- Remote Work Ready and Leading Remote Teams programmes developed in collaboration with IDA Ireland, SOLAS and Grow Remote.

- A 'Future-Proof your Business' webinar series for local employers.

The Grow Remote Programme (remote workforce programme) was developed by LOETB pre-COVID-19. This provided insight into the future needs of companies aiming to recruit a remote workforce. The programme has proven to be both timely and successful and provision by other ETBs across the country has now commenced.

In 2017, LOETB's proposal for a scaffolding apprenticeship programme was approved by the Apprenticeship Council and the ETB, in collaboration with a consortium steering group, embarked on developing a programme validation application for submission to QQI. The ETB worked with the Construction Industry Federation, SIPTU, the Health and Safety Authority and external subject matter experts in designing the programme. LOETB facilitated and oversaw the comprehensive programme development process in line with its formal programme development process. It provided an opportunity for LOETB to pilot its programme development and approval process, which centrally involves the SMT and the QASS.

Apart from its involvement with the scaffolding programme, LOETB has limited experience of programme validation, as programmes already validated at national level have satisfied its needs to date. LOETB has seconded a childcare teacher to Dublin and Dún Laoghaire ETB (DDLETB) to

contribute to the development of new Early Learning & Care awards at NFQ Levels 5 & 6. These programmes were submitted to QQI for validation in summer 2021.

This secondment is to be commended as the experience has the potential to be extremely valuable, not just for the staff member involved, but for other sections of the organisation which will benefit from the knowledge brought back to LOETB.

The SER recognises that LOETB will need to make validation applications as the need for new programmes or revalidation of existing programmes arises. The review team agrees with the action identified in the SER that staff training should be provided in this area.

At the review team's meetings with regional representatives of business and enterprise, the ETB was described variously as 'flexible', 'responsive', 'agile' and 'embedded in the community'. The evidence presented to the review team supports its finding that the agility of the ETB results primarily from the good working relationships that it has established with contracted providers, who are able to respond quickly to new skill demands.

The review team also observed evidence of strong practice in the development of programmes for and support of marginalised learners and staff working as second providers in the community. LOETB is responsive to local needs and provides support programmes for Travellers, early school leavers and other groups. A successful education support programme for the Travelling Community was developed under the programme development and approval process.

Commendation

Response to Local Training Needs: The review team commends LOETB for the close relationships it has developed with local industry and its responsiveness to the needs of local business and enterprise. It also commends the ETB for its work on developing the scaffolding apprenticeship programme, which responds directly to national skills needs.

Commendation

Involvement with the Development of new Early Learning & Care Awards: The review team commends LOETB's facilitation of the secondment of a member of the teaching staff to work on the project being led by Dublin & Dún Laoghaire ETB (DDLETB) on the development of new Early

Learning & Care Awards at NFQ Levels 5 & 6. The secondment brings with it extremely valuable experience in programme development and validation.

Recommendation

Programme Development & Validation: The review team recommends:

- Training and support to be provided to staff in the area of programme development and validation.
- Staff secondment to programme development initiatives which are relevant to LOETB and being led by other ETBs should be facilitated where possible.

Access, Transfer and Progression

Access: The most significant feature of course applications is learners who self-refer to specific courses by directly contacting LOETB centres or apply through fetchcourses.ie. Applications are also received by referral protocols through LOETB's established network of partners and referral agencies, which work to locally and nationally agreed protocols. LOETB has an established Adult Educational Guidance and Information Service (AEGIS), which provides another avenue into the FET service. Learner information hubs are also planned for Portlaoise and Tullamore, which will provide information for Laois and Offaly, respectively.

Admission: In its SER and during the main review visit, LOETB acknowledged the importance of ensuring that learners are placed on the programmes that best suit their needs and has put significant effort into a common admissions process to be used across all centres. The initial application is by way of an online system and a common assessment and interview process for centres has been established. This is also used to establish additional learner needs and to ensure that the student is placed at the right level. All applicants are assessed using the Basic and Key Skills Builder Test (BKSB). If the assessment does not go well, a career guidance counsellor can recommend an alternative course that will serve as a progression route to the desired course.

Induction: The QASS has developed LOETB's Learner Induction Policy (LIP), which comprehensively outlines the induction process that each centre must follow. A common induction process for all learner cohorts is set out in the policy and this has been introduced across all centres. This includes a learner induction animated video which is used as part of the process. All applicants

must take the Basic Key Skills Builder Test (BKSB) and the procedures relating to the application of the BKSB are clearly documented.

The review team found that the QASS maintains significant and ongoing oversight of the access and admission process, particularly in relation to ensuring that all centres including second and contracted providers implement and sign off on the procedures set out by the service. Learners also sign an acknowledgement that they have been made aware of the procedures as part of their admission process. In addition, the access process for second and contracted providers is fully documented by way of a detailed flowchart.

The QASS surveys students in all centres to monitor implementation of the admissions process. The SER indicates that surveys to date confirm that aspects of the common admission system are not universally applied. The review team endorses the SER view that training and support needs to be provided to centres and services to ensure consistent implementation of the process.

Transfer and Progression: The review team found that LOETB maintains a focus on providing flexible pathways for the learner and an emphasis on developing integrated FET centres and linkages across to other LOETB centres and FET colleges. The Guidance Support Service is the point of contact for the learner. Learners reported that the Guidance Support Service is very active and that their options were very clearly explained. This was strongly emphasised at review team sessions with learners across a range of LOETB centres. Transfer and progression applications from learners wishing to move between LOETB services are subsequently managed through the regular application system.

There are strong links with institutes of technology (IoTs) in the area, i.e. Athlone IT (AIT) and Institute of Technology Carlow (ITC). These links are underpinned by formal co-operation agreements. These agreements have been revised and the arrangements appear to be working well in both directions. Initial contact is often made on an informal basis between course coordinators and IoT staff and builds on personal links and initiative before moving to formal recognition and cooperation. This includes the mapping of level 5 and level 6 FET modules to similar IoT courses where possible, in order to facilitate progression from level 5 FET to the first year of an IoT course and level 6 FET to year 2 of an IoT course. The review team learned that the links are particularly strong in practical areas such as engineering, where some ITC third level practical sessions are even delivered using LOETB facilities. IoT facilities are also made available to LOETB, with, for example, Tullamore FET students having access to AIT hospitality services facilities where some aspects of their practical classes are delivered. There is also IoT representation on some LOETB governance committees and

involvement with course development. Learners who transfer/progress within LOETB or on to either of the IoTs can be tracked. It is more difficult to track learners who graduate but do not progress to another LOETB programme or to one of the two IoTs with whom LOETB has formal relationships. SOLAS requires that ETBs track the destination of all learners and the Programme Learner Support System (PLSS) can be used to process and report on the data. However, there is no formal system for collecting data at ETB or at centre/service level. It is not always possible to contact learners who have moved on and such tracking requires significant resourcing. The review team understands that this is an issue that all ETBs have to grapple with and one that will only be solved at national level when there is agreement on the need to develop an appropriately resourced and structured progression tracking system for monitoring learner progression to employment or third level.

LOETB maintains a very strong focus across the entirety of its access, transfer and progression activities, with a significant initial focus on access. As a consequence, the Learner Induction Policy is the first policy to be developed. It is currently the only policy covering this area. Furthermore it is a policy that is only intended for 'internal' ETB centre/staff use.

There is an immediate requirement for an over-arching LOETB Access, Transfer and Progression Policy, as well as a suite of related policies to clarify application procedures, and the status of applications. These policies should also outline what learners can expect following their application. In relation to transfer and progression, these policies would furthermore clarify transfer and progression routes, as well as the transfer of credits, that apply to all validated programmes. The review team envisages that these policies would be published on the LOETB website and reprinted in all programme-related handbooks and publications that are issued by LOETB centres.

Commendation

Induction Process: The review team commends the substantial work that has been undertaken by the QASS to standardise the admission and induction process for the learner and for services/centres.

Commendation

Integrated FET Centres: The review team commends LOETB for its development of integrated FET centres. This has contributed substantially to the streamlining of the service for learners and to assisting with internal transfer and progression routes**.**

Recommendation

Access, Transfer and Progression: The review team recommends an over-arching LOETB policy or suite of policies on access, transfer and progression for learners, which will:

- Set out and clarify the standard application procedures across LOETB services.
- Clarify the status of learner applications.
- Outline transfer and progression routes as well as the transfer of credits that apply to all validated programmes.
- Detail a formal internal transfer system, applications for which should be underpinned by policy and procedures.

The review team recommends that training and support be provided to centres and services, to ensure consistent implementation of the induction process.

Recommendation

Information to Learners: The review team recommends that every available opportunity be used to better highlight FET opportunities and pathways for school leavers as well as for current LOETB learners. This should be addressed as part of the review of communications recommended in Section 3 Objective 1i.

Integrity and Approval of Learner Results

A comprehensive set of policies and procedures has been developed to document and streamline the assessment process across LOETB. The review team finds that LOETB has put in place robust governance and oversight processes to oversee the assessment process.

All learners sign statements of authenticity when they submit an assignment. There is an Assessment Malpractice Policy in place, as well as a Reasonable Accommodation Policy for Learners in relation to assessments and a comprehensive set of guidelines for use by centres and services in the conduct of summative examinations. These include policies and procedures relating to assessment deadlines, compassionate consideration, assessment security and storage and summative exam regulations. Assignments presented through Moodle are checked for plagiarism using Urkund.

The integrity of learner assessment materials is ensured in different ways by each LOETB centre. Second and contracted providers are specifically required to have lockable storage facilities for assessment instrument specifications. The assessment process for second and contracted providers is fully documented by way of a detailed flowchart.

The integrity of the assessment process itself is monitored through the IV and EA processes and through the results approval panels (RAP). Policies and procedures that are in place give comprehensive oversight to these processes.

The QASS takes an active role in the assessment process. QASS staff conduct the IV process to guarantee consistency across all centres. Each centre follows the same guidelines and uses the same checklists and report templates. QASS staff are also involved in the IV process for the contracted and community trainers.

The QASS maintains a panel of external authenticators (EAs), all of whom are fully trained. Each of the EAs is assigned to work with a designated QA officer on appointment and it is to that officer that they issue their report, which is in turn submitted to the RAP.

Collated (anonymised) feedback from the EAs is made available to all teaching staff. It is the responsibility of centre managers to ensure that individual teachers receive their own feedback from the process. The review team observes that there is a risk to the process at this stage as there is currently no confirmation system in place to ensure that centre managers deliver the appropriate feedback to their teachers. The QASS confirmed to the review team that it is aware of this and – particularly in light of EA feedback's role in ensuring ongoing improvement – is examining ways of improving staff awareness of EA feedback. EAs also noted that they would like to see opportunities to further develop communication of their reports to all staff and would themselves like to be involved in this process.

EAs expressed great satisfaction with the processes and procedures and further noted with approval that, in their opinion, the LOETB system of IV was an example of best practice.

The review team found that the results approval process operates well and is completed efficiently. It is at this point that any corrective actions needed are identified before confirmation of results.

During the main review visit, teachers welcomed the involvement of the QASS in the assessment process. They expressed satisfaction with the assessment system and acknowledged that the implementation of QA has strengthened provision within the ETB and across the sector as well as contributing to parity of esteem between the FE and HE sectors.

Teachers believe that this streamlining of the assessment system by the QASS has also raised standards across the ETB, contributing to parity of esteem for programmes, irrespective of where they are being delivered. The review team believes that that this also contributes to the consistency of delivery across the various centres and services.

Staff are clearly of the opinion that the progress that has been achieved has strengthened LOETB. There is a real recognition of this progress, and it was stated that there is 'no comparison with the past'.

However, some teaching staff expressed some negative feelings towards the results approval process, because their only contact with the process occurs when a question or issue is raised in relation to their results. They spoke of the negative feedback that is highlighted during the LOETB IV process and supported the surfacing of positive aspects of the process in the IV report. They would welcome involvement in the Results Approval Board to provide them with a better understanding of how their views/feedback are managed. The review team encourages LOETB to ensure that teaching staff are provided with positive feedback in addition to the identification of areas for improvement. This will ultimately promote confidence among teachers in their work and reduce anxiety regarding the evaluation process.

Commendation

Integrity and Approval of Results: The review team commends the extensive work undertaken by the QASS across the assessment system to ensure the integrity of learner assessment and results.

Recommendation

The review team recommends that LOETB:

- Investigate the possibility of providing an opportunity within the RAP for teaching staff and EAs to review the outcomes of the Exam Board's deliberations and, where appropriate, a mechanism to challenge their findings.

- Strengthen the process around the communication of feedback from EA reports to teaching staff (involving the EAs if possible) and highlight examples of good practice as part of that process.
- Ensure that all policies and procedures relating to the assessment process are accessible in a specific section for learners on the LOETB website. This could be undertaken in conjunction with the recommendation (Objective 3, Section 1i) relating to internal communications and review of the web site.

Information and Data Management

The Programme Learner Support System (PLSS) is central to the management of learner data and details relating to their programme modules. It is a system that is in use nationally and, correspondingly, subject to a high level of security. It is at the core of the standardised admissions system.

All planned accredited course provision must be scheduled on the PLSS system by centre and service managers and must then be approved by a designated QA staff member. Every centre and service has a specific QA staff member assigned to it; this QA staff member checks the data before approving the programme on the system. Currently, there is a heavy focus on data collection, based on achieving compliance with procedures.

Learner progress can be tracked on the system. The system can also be used by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (DEASP) to track learners that it has referred to programmes. Reports can be generated and uploaded to QQI's system to enter learners for certification. The review team heard during the main review visit that the PLSS system is versatile and has many capabilities, including its use as a communication tool to send messages to individual learners or groups of learners. The ETB confirmed that this facility was very important when onsite services closed during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The review team encourages LOETB to exploit more of the capabilities of the PLSS beyond the storage of raw data and communication with students. The review team also notes the finding in the SER that there can be gaps in the data in cases where learners do not provide complete information on their course application forms.

QQI's Business System (QBS) is a separate system used by FET centres and services, to enter learners for certification. Training centres use a different system – the Results Capture and Certification Request System (RCCRS) – to upload their QQI results to QBS. The training services also use the AppClient Management System for apprenticeship programmes and the System Applications and Products in Data Processing (SAP) for administration and reporting purposes.

As the IT infrastructure currently operates, the review team notes that PLSS and other systems need to be used to their fullest extent by all registered users in order to exploit opportunities to improve data collection analysis, which will in turn support QA. All QA functions and processes need to access data for reporting purposes and, currently, the PLSS should be the 'go-to' system. For the future, the review team stresses the importance of developing an integrated system capable of managing all data storage, reporting and communication requirements across the ETB. The review team recognises that this is a national issue to be addressed for the sector.

In the absence of an integrated IT system, the maintenance of the current disparate systems and records, together with the management of compliance issues, absorbs a considerable amount of time and resources. This results in less time and fewer resources available to focus on the collection and use of data to create actionable management information.

The review team notes LOETB's strengths in respect of data compliance and in the SER as well as during the main review visit, saw clear evidence of the organisation's understanding of, and compliance with, GDPR as well as FOI requirements. All head office staff receive GDPR training and complete an exam on the topic. FET managers receive more extensive training as they have more responsibility in relation to data management.

There are dedicated data compliance staff and an established protocol regarding data breaches and freedom of information. Whistle blower/protected disclosure procedures are in place but have not been used to date. There is an annual review to check who has access to organisational data. This ensures that staff who have left the organisation have had all access revoked. The Head of IT is responsible for the management of security system, firewalls, etc.

Recommendation

Information and Data Management: The review team recommends, as a matter of urgency, an increased focus on the inclusion of all relevant learner data on the PLSS system as part of the application process, as well as the appointment of a specialist data analyst to the IT or QASS Team.

Public Information and Communication

LOETB has carried out significant work to improve its website. The website provides information on the QA system, procedures and activities. It includes the LOETB Statement of Strategy, service plans, financial statements and a range of policies relating to QA. LOETB confirmed during the main review visit that this information is regularly updated and checked. There is a system in place to record the updating and ensure the accuracy of policies at particular times of the year when there are admissions to courses.

There is a system in place which operates through the QASS to ensure the accuracy of published information. All information issued by centres must be approved under this system prior to publication or uploading onto websites. This includes Twitter and Facebook. LOETB's Social Media Policy requires that login details for all social media accounts be provided to the IT Department at the time that they are set up. This is intended to ensure that accounts can be safeguarded and accessed – or, in the event of inappropriate or unauthorised access – shut down.

As referenced above, there are plans to open a number of public 'information hubs' in Portlaoise and Tullamore, which would be linked to the Adult Guidance Service, but these plans have been delayed due to the pandemic.

QA officers appointed to liaise with second and contracted providers as well as employers and employer representative groups are also tasked with ensuring the accuracy of published information.

All FET courses are entered on the National Course Calendar and selected courses are entered on the National FET website (FETCH) at www.fetchcourses.ie.

A communications officer has been appointed recently and is tasked with promoting the LOETB brand as well as maintaining the website and supporting the communications strategy for FET centres and services. During a number of sessions of the main review visit, LOETB staff stressed the need for LOETB to focus on improving and expanding both internal and external communications; staff suggested that this could be done through re-organisation of the website as well as an increased focus on broadening the ETB's social media footprint. The review team views the appointment of a communications officer as helpful in this regard and is confident that this appointment will assist the ETB in improving and expanding communications to increase awareness of LOETB's provision and the initiatives in which it is involved.

Commendation

Communication: The review team commends LOETB strategy which includes plans to develop public information hubs as well as the recent appointment of a communications officer.

Recommendation

Communication: The review team recommends an immediate focus on developing an internal and external communication strategy, which would include, among others, the following initiatives:

- Advancement of the proposal to develop information hubs as soon as circumstances allow.
- More comprehensive and targeted use of social media.
- Additions to the website, to include:
    - A search facility to assist navigation.
    - A FAQ section in the staff zone with a focus on QA policies and procedures.

Objective 2: Teaching, Learning & Assessment

The Learning Environment

The review team notes evidence in the SER and from the main review visit of the existence of a very supportive learning environment, with learners commenting on the dedication of and accessibility to teaching staff and guidance counsellors, as well as other support staff. Learners commented on staff 'going above and beyond', including providing assistance with funding applications and support for lone parents and other learners with additional needs.

There has been a concerted effort by LOETB to improve the physical learning environment each year. This is always dependent on the availability of national capital funding.

The review team notes with approval LOETB's response to COVID-19, where student assignments had to be uploaded electronically. The roll-out of ICT /software platforms demonstrated the organisation's flexibility and responsiveness in the face of public health restrictions, which prevented on-site provision of programmes. This responsiveness was praised both by students and staff during the main review visit.

At the main review visit, QASS staff noted that, in general, the roll-out of ICT/software platforms during the pandemic had worked well but was not without problems in terms of storage requirements. Teaching staff stated that they would like to see the ETB building on the experience of this year and developing a shared drive/cloud system for uploading and storing student projects/classwork. Furthermore, the teaching staff would welcome the selection by LOETB of a preferred online communication system across the service that all staff would use in future e.g. Zoom/Google Meets. Staff members who are regular users of the quality system indicated to the review team also that there could be more use of ICT to reduce the administrative burden associated with QA, which, they stated, can be overwhelming for them.

Aside from the everyday management of the service at centre level, the only formal monitoring of the learning experience is linked to assessment, and to the IV process in particular. Surveys of learners are conducted, but it is often on an informal basis by teachers, and it is difficult to ascertain how embedded or widespread practice is on a formal level, as the information gathered in surveys remains at a programme/centre level.

Monitoring, on the other hand, is more comprehensive and wide-ranging, with second providers who engage in formal peer feedback sessions, in addition to the standard evaluation conducted by their designated LOETB training officer.

There is evidence of the enhancement of teaching and learning as a result of the focus on CPD under the new PD Co-ordinator, with emerging communities of practice through courses in UDL and TEL, as well as the MA in Teaching and Learning. The review team has already commented on this in Section 3, Objective 1(d) Staff Development

Recommendation

Monitoring the Learning Experience: The review team strongly recommends that formal arrangements be standardised across all LOETB centres and services to ensure the surveying of student feedback and that these surveys be undertaken at key stages during the course delivery cycle.

The review team recommends that LOETB support the continued development of online tools and digital resources as part of the QA system.

Assessment of Learners

From the QASS' engagement during the main review visit, the review team is of the opinion that there is a determined effort to ensure a consistent approach across all centres to the assessment of learners.

A common template is issued to teaching staff for the preparation of assessment plans and schedules as part of the delivery of the programme. These plans and schedules are then included in an assessor pack as part of the IV process, together with a common assessment checklist that each teacher is required to complete.

Teachers prepare their own assessment briefs. Department/programme teams are encouraged to develop and share briefs communally. This can be facilitated by the QASS where there is delivery of the same courses in multiple centres as well as subject areas that are common to different centres.

Teaching staff provide learners with the assessment briefs for all assessments that they are asked to undertake. Assessments delivered on training programmes use the standardised instrument specifications (AIS) for each module, which include briefs, marking schemes and other documentation and are issued by the QASS. These AIS's originated from SOLAS and it was stated by LOETB that they need to be reviewed. The QASS has put a system in place to train second providers and contracted training staff to write their own briefs, which are evaluated by subject matter experts before delivery and assessment.

In general, students reported receiving detailed feedback from their tutors to help them throughout the course, although there is no formal or common system in place for this. The QASS aims to standardise the procedure across centres, an approach which the review team endorses.

Assessment calendars for learners were reported by participants in some cases to display limited data regarding the specifics of upcoming assignments. In some cases, it was suggested by learners that the assignment briefs lacked detail and in other cases the suggestion was that briefs could be very technical, particularly for the adult learner returning to education. Furthermore, there can be instances of limited communication between teachers of different modules regarding the even distribution of assignment deadlines. Students noted the occurrence of very quiet periods with few assignments followed by a period of very heavy workload during which several module teachers expected assignments to be completed.

Students in general expressed satisfaction with the system but raised some issues in respect of module overlap and consequent assessment duplication. Some referred to subject difficulty level, as well as the volume of work and assignments that they are expected to complete; in this regard, they expressed a desire for clearer information at the commencement of courses. There was a suggestion, for example, that the content of the communications module is not consistently tailored by teachers to ensure its direct relevance to the programme being studied.

Students also suggested that there could be a short, separate session at induction stage specifically aimed at adults returning to the classroom environment for the first time in several years. This session would address their particular needs and deal with academic terminology and the 'language of learning' as well as an explanation of the grading system and assessment briefs.

A system for the recognition of prior learning (RPL) is not yet in place. LOETB has an established exemption policy which is used in conjunction with advice from the guidance service. The introduction of a system of RPL for FET is a national issue and has resource implications, but some ETBs have managed to move ahead in establishing formal RPL systems. The review team is of the opinion that

LOETB should examine the arrangements that these ETBs have put in place within their own resources, with a view to assessing how similar arrangements could be introduced across its service.

Learners may appeal their final assessment results through a formal appeal system put in place by LOETB. The system appears to be robust and operating effectively.

The work experience programme is managed at centre and service level in the same way as all other modules. The most common arrangement is that students find their own work placement and the placement is then approved and monitored by the relevant teachers. During the main review visit, the EAs expressed some concern regarding the consistency and/or objectivity of some workplace competency assessments and suggested that the training/mentoring of workplace assessors should be reviewed. The review team is of the opinion that this could be an appropriate area in which to establish a community of practice to provide teachers of this module with a mechanism for working together with a view to ensuring common standards for work placements/experience.

The review team has elsewhere in this report commended the close working relationship that LOETB has established with employers and industry (Section 3, Objective 1 (b)) as well as the regional development fora. The SER identified the potential for the QASS to work with the Employer Services Team to develop formal work placements. The review team believes that there is great potential to formalise all of the arrangements necessary for the delivery, monitoring and assessment of work experience/placement through the Employer Services Team to develop what could be a national model, with LOETB taking the lead.

Commendation

Assessment of Learners: The review team commends the work that has been done by the QASS to date in standardising arrangements across all LOETB centres and services in relation to the assessment of learners.

Recommendation

Assessment of Learners: The review team recommends that LOETB establish a policy and procedures to support RPL and that it also introduces formal arrangements, standardised across all centres and services to ensure:

- Clarity for all students with regard to module descriptors
- Facilitation of teacher planning in the delivery of modules while avoiding content overlap.

- Regular student feedback on assignments and assessments.

Recommendation

Work Experience / Work Placement Module: The review team recommends that LOETB engage the expertise of the Employer Services Team to:

- Review the current arrangements that are in place to support the consistency of workplace competency assessment.
- Recommend the formal arrangements necessary for the delivery, monitoring and assessment of work experience/placement.

Supports for Learners

The review team found that there is a strong focus within LOETB on reasonable accommodation and learning support, which includes a targeted drive to maximise supports in the FET centres. This involves a certain amount of creativity around the use of resources, such as positioning a set amount of time from the guidance service as well as literacy supports in the FET centres, because there is no formal support service per se. The Adult Education and Guidance Information Service (AEGIS) is central to this initiative, with guidance counsellors having time scheduled in each of the FET centres as well as providing a service to members of the public at pre-admission stage.

There are various assessments, designed to help identify learner support needs, used as part of the common admission process across all centres. The nature and availability of supports, such as reasonable accommodations for assessment, are explained to students as part of the induction process.

Supports are also available to learners enrolled on the apprenticeship training programmes when additional needs are identified by instructors.

Some of the learner support services offered to PLC students as part of FE college provision are funded under a HE scheme and modelled, where possible, on what is provided at third level. Athlone IT (AIT) provides ongoing support and advice in this regard.

Good community outreach programmes are also in place to help address the needs of the more challenged or marginalised social groups.

Learners reported great satisfaction with arrangements in LOETB and confirmed to the review team that they felt very supported both in respect of their day-to-day needs and additional requirements. In some cases, where needs were identified by students, the provision of additional support appeared to fall to the teaching staff rather than being escalated to the specialists in the organisation. This may indicate some level of inconsistency in the application of admission and induction procedures which still exists in some centres. It may also be the case that some centres may have greater access to support staff than others.

The review team believes that learners should have clear paths to seek additional supports and concurs with the SER identified action to raise staff awareness in relation to additional supports. In addition, the team believes that the support service would benefit from being established and appropriately structured on a formal basis.

Commendation

Support for Learners: The review team commends the supports that LOETB provides for all learners across its services as well as its strategy to provide a range of supports in each standalone FET centre.

Recommendation

Support for Learners: The review team recommends that LOETB appoint a learner support officer to establish a de facto learner support service, consolidating all existing learner supports.

Objective 3: Self-evaluation, Monitoring & Review

Self-evaluation, Monitoring & Review

The processes for quality assurance planning, monitoring and reporting have been put in place by the QASS. These are tightly controlled and maintained through the direct involvement of the QASS at centre level particularly at the admissions and assessment stages of courses. With second and contracted providers, QASS involvement extends further, with scheduled monitoring meetings occurring at designated stages of course delivery. There is follow-up of the outcomes of EA review reports in particular, as noted elsewhere in this report. Learners are surveyed, but LOETB acknowledges that some of this can be quite 'ad hoc' and that the learner voice needs to be enhanced and given formal recognition.

Systematic self-evaluation has been a feature of LOETB at ETB management or system level since 2017, when the first Executive Self-evaluation Report was undertaken. Annual quality self-improvement plans (QIPs) followed in 2018, 2019 and 2020.

These reports are indicators of strategic analysis and each of the QIPs identified key areas for LOETB to improve upon. The QIPs are structured and include SMART targets; there is also evidence of follow up and progress recorded in relation to each of the targets.

Contracted training providers are monitored regularly by ETB training officers and each provider's performance is measured against specific key performance indicators (KPIs). Training officers also monitor community training programmes on a similar basis. This monitoring process is conducted using the Training Quality Assurance System Manual (TQAS), which is the training manual that was used under the old FÁS training system. It is still in common use across the ETB system nationally and is being revised over time by each ETB. LOETB QASS has been revising the TQAS policy documents and documents relating to the monitoring process. The updated documentation will then be provided for use in the monitoring of contracted and second providers.

At organisational level, aside from the involvement of the QASS, the SER identifies that the practice of self-evaluation has 'dwindled' over the past number of years. It is underdeveloped in that it consists mainly of mid-programme and end-of-programme evaluation. The SER states that it is not "as systematic as a formal self-evaluation, does not typically result in an improvement report and is not fed back to ETB level".

The integrated FET centre model has been in operation for three years and elsewhere in this report the review team has noted expressions of learner satisfaction with the level of service provided at LOETB FET centres. The SER recommends that an evaluation of the effectiveness of the model should take place and notwithstanding learner satisfaction, the review team agrees that an evaluation of the service at this time would be appropriate. The review team would also recommend the use of metrics, KPIs or other management information available to assist in the conduct of the evaluation.

The SER submitted by LOETB as part of this inaugural review of QA is an honest undertaking and provides a very good overview of the service in general, as well as a comprehensive account of the work of the QASS and its centrality to the QA system. In contrast to LOETB QIPs, however, the SER process makes insufficient use of data and quantitative measures. LOETB is committed to making full use of the outcomes from this inaugural review and its SER and has indicated that members of the SER Steering Group will remain in place and continue to work on the recommendations contained in the internal and external reports. The actions identified in each section of the institutional SER report however are largely non-SMART (i.e. not Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound) and there are no assigned owners of the actions. This is in contrast to the 2017 Executive Self-evaluation Report and QIPs. The review team notes that LOETB has an opportunity to integrate and 'SMARTen' these QA processes and reports.

The review team encountered mixed reports at its meetings in relation to the involvement of staff in the compilation of the SER. There is a sense that the process was driven by external needs and insufficiently linked to, or integrated with, existing QA processes (as identified in the previous paragraph). The report was compiled in the middle of a pandemic and there were undoubtedly obstacles to overcome. Despite this there were clear indications during the main review visit in relation to the involvement of second and contracted providers.

The review team notes that the self-evaluation process could have been more fruitful for LOETB if it had encouraged input from all levels of the ETB to create a whole-of-organisation view. This should be a consideration for any future self-evaluation process. In this way, the Board and LOETB SMT (subject to legal and other relevant governance considerations) would have been more involved in QA and in setting direction and receiving reports on performance.

Commendation

SER Steering Group: The review team commends the decision of LOETB to keep the steering group in place to work on implementation of the recommendations contained in the SER.

Recommendation

SER Steering Group: The review team recommends that the actions identified in the SER, together with the recommendations in this report, be incorporated into a strategic plan – such as the annual QIP – with SMART targets and embedded in a projected timeline.

Recommendation

Self-evaluation, Monitoring and Review: The review team recommends that LOETB work to embed a formal process of self-evaluation from institutional level up through to SMT and board level, and that this should be more fully documented in a form of a 'quality manual/handbook' or similar. The process should be structured to include, among others:

- The FET Management Team as well as the QASS in order to facilitate the evaluation of provision at centre and service level on a formal basis and so that the entire process can be considered at a strategic level.
- The learner voice across all centres and services. This should operate in addition to the recommendation on learner feedback at 2(a).

The review team recommends a full revision and subsequent issuing of the documentation associated with TQAS.

The review team recommends a review of the effectiveness of the FET centre model.

Programme Monitoring & Review

Local evaluation of programmes occurs on an annual basis at centre level. This was discussed under Objective 3, Section (a) above. The review of programmes was also discussed earlier in this report under Objective 1 Section (b) in the section on Programme Development and Review Groups. The recommendations made in both of those sections are relevant here. Importantly, whatever system is established must not be too bureaucratic and cumbersome.

There was a 2019 review of the QQI Level 5 Healthcare Support Programmes being delivered through LOETB. The review was comprehensive and provides a good review model to follow. The short-term and medium-term recommendations made in the review are listed in the SER.

To date, no formal review of any other programme provision has taken place. The review team believes that the healthcare review 'model' could be used as a basis for evaluation of courses. The process should also be designed in such a way as to provide a mechanism for an evidence-based approach to instigating changes both to module content and to modules, as well as developing new courses and programmes.

The recommendations outlined in the healthcare review could easily apply to any of the ETB courses and, indeed, some of the recommendations have been used strategically and rolled out across ETB centres and programmes, as noted elsewhere in this report. The design and implementation of the common induction programme across the ETB is an example.

Commendation

Healthcare Programme Review: The review team commends the process undertaken in the review of the healthcare programme as well as the implementation of the recommendations of that review, not just in respect of the healthcare programme, but also where relevant across LOETB course provision.

Recommendation

Programme Review: The review team recommends that there should be a policy to underpin an annual review of programmes (as suggested in Objective 3, Section (a)), with the review of programmes taking place strategically on an annual rolling basis at ETB level.

Oversight, Monitoring & Review of Relationships with External Parties

LOETB, in line with its mission, is strongly focussed on responding to the needs of local communities, businesses and individual learners. The ETB maintains strong links with local industry and businesses, both informally and through membership of local and regional fora and organisations. It has demonstrated its capability to rapidly respond to changing requirements, which has been noted elsewhere in this report.

LOETB's Employer Service Team works with employers to help the ETB understand future skills needs and to develop programmes to support the upskilling of employees. The SER states that the

formal programme approval process also includes employer representatives. This has been noted elsewhere and a recommendation has been made in relation to the policy governing that process.

Employers who take on apprentices are allocated an Authorised Officer to monitor progression as well as the work-based learning phase of training. Designated training officers also have responsibility for contracted training and conduct regular monitoring visits to courses provided by contracted training companies. Learner feedback is sought during these visits and the training officer also meets with tutors. The contractor also completes weekly reports, which are submitted at each invoice period. These reports are then dealt with by the FET Management Team as part of the governance system.

There is good evidence to indicate that second providers are closely monitored and supported. Providers confirmed that they have a designated QA staff member to contact regarding their needs and that they appreciate this consideration. They also confirmed that engagement with this person occurred on a regular basis. Second providers working with disadvantaged groups felt that LOETB should be commended for the programme development, support and level of funding they provide for groups supporting disadvantaged populations, which include Travellers, early school leavers, etc.

The review team heard from industry partners, who confirmed that reporting and paperwork was extensive. These stakeholders suggested that LOETB should develop online resources to streamline processes. The SER recognises this in the context of reforming the TQAS process, which is dealt with elsewhere in this report.

There are strong links between LOETB and the IoTs in the region, as noted elsewhere in this report, and clear evidence of a joined-up approach to the development of programmes and the creation of progression paths.

There are clearly opportunities for LOETB to build on the strong links that it enjoys with all of these stakeholders to cater for the future FET needs of the area. Further engagement through surveys with these external groups and identification of the scale of engagement, achievements, and opportunities for further evaluation, development, and communication (both internal and external) could support this. There is also clear potential to develop the formal work placement programme for learners other than apprentices, as the SER notes, and has been recommended elsewhere in this report.

Section

4

Conclusions

Section 4: Conclusions

4.1 Conclusions on Arrangements for Governance & Management of Quality

The review process took place during a period when the usual operations of LOETB were significantly affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. It is a credit to the organisation and all of its stakeholders that it has engaged so fully and openly with the process and the review team during such a challenging period. The review process itself followed the guidelines specified by QQI, but all engagement between the review team with LOETB was undertaken through remote video meetings. This was challenging for all participants, but was nonetheless effective, which was confirmed both by the review team and the ETB during the oral report session at the end of the main review week visit. The only obvious and unfortunate disadvantage of the virtual process was that the review team was unable to visit LOETB's centres and to meet in person with learners, staff and other stakeholders. This would have provided a level of engagement and immersion in an institutional review that a remotely conducted review cannot.

Despite the limitations of the virtual review, at all times throughout the review process, the review team was struck by LOETB's ambition, energy and commitment to learners, and its commitment to supporting its local communities and economy. The enthusiasm and sense of purpose from everyone in the FET Directorate was impressive. LOETB's decision to reconfigure its FET service in 2020, aligning it with the national FET Strategy 2020-24, provides clarity of purpose. This now needs to be fully integrated into its strategic plans and priorities, and effectively communicated across and outside of the organisation.

This concluding section draws together the commendations and recommendations made throughout this report. They arose from the very positive and open engagement with LOETB that the review team experienced throughout the review process. The review team hopes that these outcomes can be used by LOETB to support the realisation of its mission and strategic goals.

4.2 Conclusions on Arrangements for Teaching, Learning & Assessment

LOETB has recently amended its FET governance structure to support the local delivery of national priorities. Senior managers have a clear vision and ambition for the organisation and have put in

place strong foundations for both of these to be achieved. However, this will require a focus on ensuring that QA systems and processes are comprehensive but not unhelpfully bureaucratic, are robust and consistent at all levels (i.e. from the learner to the board/strategy) and are fully documented and effectively communicated and understood by all stakeholders.

Engagement with its local community and with local employers is a notable strength of the ETB, as is the ETB's investment in the QASS and its enthusiastic, challenging, but supportive engagement with teachers and others.

Recent developments in professional development for staff have been well received and, the review team observed, are having a positive impact on the workforce. This should be complemented by further enhancement of quality and performance management practice to include greater use of data and performance metrics, and further consideration of expanding current teaching and training observation practice, which is good but minimal.

Finally, there were a number of occasions when engagement with staff indicated a very strong allegiance to their sole or main centre of LOETB, as opposed to the organisation as a whole. It is inevitable that the previous separate and independent status of centres will have this effect on staff and is understood and not necessarily a negative feature. However, if LOETB is to maximise the potential of its individual parts, this is more likely to be achieved if all staff feel as clear and positive about their role as an employee of LOETB, as they do in relation to their role within their centre.

4.3   Conclusions on Arrangements for Self-Evaluation, Monitoring & Review

The review team is confident that learners are clearly LOETB's priority, and this was demonstrated at all levels. In order to quality assure more effectively this commitment, and building on related points in 5.1 above, the review team views it as vital that all arrangements for teaching, learning and assessment be periodically and regularly reviewed. These reviews should all be comprehensive, formalised and documented. As part of this enhancement, the 'learner voice' strategy needs to be more clearly articulated, implemented and the resulting feedback used.

Support for learners is a strong theme at all levels of the ETB and in all settings. Significant investment has been made in resources, but staff across all centres are not always aware that these resources are available.

4.4 Commendations

1. **ETB Mission and Strategy:** The review team commends LOETB for ensuring that its core values are reflected clearly across its operations, which are connected to the needs of the region. The review team further commends LOETB for ensuring that there are strong links between strategy and quality assurance.

2. **Response to Local Training Needs:** The review team commends LOETB for the close relationships it has developed with local industry and its responsiveness to the needs of local business and enterprise. It also commends the ETB for its work on developing the scaffolding apprenticeship programme, which responds directly to national skills needs.

3. **Supports for Learners:** The review team commends the supports that LOETB provides for all learners across its services as well as its strategy to provide a range of supports in each standalone FET centre.

4. **Integrated FET Centres:** The review team commends LOETB for its development of integrated FET centres. This has contributed substantially to the streamlining of the service for learners and assisting with internal transfer and progression routes.

5. **Establishment of the QASS:** The review team commends LOETB for its the establishment of a dedicated quality assurance support service and further commends the work done by the QASS to date in relation to the development of policies and procedures that are particularly focused on the ETB's service to learners.

6. **Management of Quality Assurance:** The review team commends LOETB for the work that it has done to date in formalising the structures to underpin the governance and management of quality assurance and to provide a platform for continuous review. The review team further commends LOETB for its strategic planning and development of FET provision.

7. **Staff Professional Development:** The review team commends LOETB for its appointment of the Professional Development Coordinator as well as the work done to date by the co-ordinator in establishing the CPD service for staff.

8. **Integration of Further Education and Vocational Training Services:** The review team commends LOETB on the significant work completed on integrating successfully the two previously distinct areas of further education and vocational training.

9. **Involvement with the development of new Early Learning & Care Awards:** The review team commends LOETB's facilitation of the secondment of a member of the teaching staff to work on the project being led by Dublin & Dun Laoghaire ETB (DDLETB) on the development of new Early Learning & Care Awards at Levels 5 & 6. The secondment brings with it extremely valuable experience in programme development and validation.

10. **Induction Process:** The review team commends the substantial work that has been undertaken by the QASS to standardise the admission and induction process for the learner and for services/centres.

11. **Integrity and Approval of Results:** The review team commends the extensive work undertaken by the QASS across the assessment system to ensure the integrity of learner assessment and results.

12. **Communication:** The review team commends LOETB strategy which includes plans to develop public information hubs as well as the recent appointment of a communications officer.

13. **Assessment of Learners:** The review team commends the work that has been done by the QASS to date in standardising arrangements across all LOETB centres and services in relation to the assessment of learners.

14. **SER Steering Group:** The review team commends the decision of LOETB to keep the steering group in place to work on implementation of the recommendations contained in the SER.

15. **Healthcare Programme Review:** The review team commends the process undertaken in the review of the healthcare programme as well as the implementation of the recommendations of that review, not just in respect of the healthcare programme, but also where relevant across LOETB course provision.

4.5 Recommendations

1. **Self-evaluation, Monitoring and Review:** The review team recommends that LOETB work to embed a formal process of self-evaluation from institutional level up through to SMT and board level, and that this should be more fully documented in a form of a 'quality manual/handbook' or similar. The process should be structured to include, among others:
    - The FET Management Team as well as the QASS in order to facilitate the evaluation of provision at centre and service level on a formal basis and so that the entire process can be considered at a strategic level.
    - The learner voice across all centres and services. This should operate in addition to the recommendation on learner feedback at 2(a).

2. **Programme Review:** The review team recommends that there should be a policy to underpin an annual review of programmes (as suggested Objective 3, Section (a)), with the review of programmes taking place strategically on an annual rolling basis at ETB level.

3. **Monitoring the Learning Experience:** The review team strongly recommends that formal arrangements be standardised across all LOETB centres and services to ensure the surveying of student feedback and that these surveys be undertaken at key stages during the course delivery cycle.

4. **Communication:** The review team recommends an immediate focus on developing an internal and external communication strategy, which would include, among others, the following initiatives:

- Advancement of the proposal to develop information hubs as soon as circumstances allow.
- More comprehensive and targeted use of social media.
- Additions to the web site, to include:
  - A search facility to assist navigation.
  - A FAQ section in the staff zone with a focus on QA policies and procedures.

5. **Staff Professional Development:** The review team recommends a revision of the Staff Professional Development Policy to include:
   - Formal recognition of the position of Professional Development Coordinator.
   - A mechanism to survey staff on CPD needs, which takes the centre as well as broader LOETB requirements into account.
   - A mechanism to establish communities of practice for teaching staff in specific areas as well as subject-specific areas.
   - Formal recognition of, and a structure for, an LOETB staff mentoring programme.
   - Formal recognition of an induction process tailored to the needs of the various staff cohorts, including an input into the process which relates to LOETB as a corporate body.
   - A major focus on online/blended learning, which could be addressed in the context of an LOETB digital strategy, recommended elsewhere in this report.

   The review team also recommends that an appropriate model of teaching observation be introduced to support staff development and the realisation of institutional strategic objectives.

6. **ETB Mission and Strategy:** The review team recommends that LOETB mission & strategy be shared with and reiterated to staff at all levels and across all services and centres with greater frequency.

7. **Governance Groups in General:** The review team recommends that the ETB provide training for members of governance groups and that information from the various groups should be published on the LOETB website. Publication of information should also include communication with staff at centre and service level. This could be addressed in conjunction with the development of the internal communications strategy which is recommended elsewhere in this report (Objective 1i).

   The review team also recommends that LOETB ensure increased clarity and co-ordination between the various quality groups. This would improve understanding of the system by all staff members. It would also improve efficiency and minimise the likelihood of nugatory duplication.

8. **Management of Quality Assurance:** The review team recommends that LOETB engages in a full review of all existing policies and ToR which relate to the function and membership of management groups and sub-groups. The review should place a particular focus on ensuring:

- Consistency in relation to terms of reference and the organisational structure.
- Group membership that includes all relevant stakeholders.
- The provision of relevant inductions and ongoing training for all group members.
- Clarity and co-ordination between the various quality groups.

9. **Documentation of Quality Assurance:** The review team recommends that the ETB establish policy review groups without delay, taking into consideration the recommendations set out under Objective 1(b) and which should:
    - Prioritise the remaining areas in need of policy development and proceed on that basis.
    - Establish a formal schedule for a continual rolling review of existing policies.
    - Publish all policies on the website, arranged under specific categories. These should be accessible to the specific groups to whom they are relevant, e.g. staff (password secured), learners, general public.

    The review team further recommends that LOETB support the continued development of online tools and digital resources as part of the QA system.

10. **Programme Development & Validation:** The review team recommends:
    - Training and support to be provided to staff in the area of programme development and validation.
    - Staff secondment to programme development initiatives which are relevant to LOETB and being led by other ETBs, should be facilitated where possible.

11. **Access, Transfer and Progression:** The review team recommends an over-arching LOETB policy or suite of policies on access, transfer and progression for learners, which will:
    - Set out and clarify the standard application procedures across LOETB services.
    - Clarify the status of learner applications.
    - Outline transfer and progression routes as well as the transfer of credits that apply to all validated programmes.
    - Detail a formal internal transfer system, applications for which should be underpinned by policy and procedures.
    - The review team recommends that training and support be provided to centres and services, to ensure consistent implementation of the induction process.

12. **Information to Learners:** The review team recommends that every available opportunity be used to better highlight FET opportunities and pathways for school leavers as well as for current LOETB learners. This should be addressed as part of the review of communications recommended in Section 1i.

13. **Integrity and Approval of Results:** The review team recommends that LOETB:
    - Investigate the possibility of providing an opportunity within the RAP for teaching staff and EAs to review the outcomes of the Exam Board's deliberations and, where appropriate, a mechanism to challenge their findings.

- Strengthen the process around the communication of feedback from EA reports to teaching staff (involving the EAs if possible) and as part of that process that examples of good practice are also highlighted.
- Ensure that all policies and procedures relating to the assessment process are accessible in a specific section for learners on the LOETB website. This could be undertaken in conjunction with the recommendation (Section 1i) relating to internal communications and review of the web site.

14. **Information and Data Management:** The review team recommends that, as a matter of urgency, there be an increased focus on the inclusion of all relevant learner data on the PLSS system as part of the application process, as well as the appointment of a specialist data analyst to the IT or QASS Team.

15. **Monitoring the Learning Experience:** The review team recommends that LOETB support the continued development of online tools and digital resources as part of the QA system.

16. **Assessment of Learners:** The review team recommends that LOETB establish a policy and procedures to support RPL and that it should also introduce formal arrangements, standardised across all centres and services to ensure:
    - Clarity for all students around module descriptors.
    - Facilitation of teacher planning in the delivery of modules while avoiding content overlap.
    - Regular student feedback on assignments and assessments.

17. **Work Experience / Work Placement Module:** The review team recommends that LOETB engage the expertise of the Employer Services Team to:
    - Review the current arrangements that are in place to support the consistency of workplace competency assessment.
    - Recommend the formal arrangements necessary for the delivery, monitoring and assessment of work experience/Placement

18. **Supports for Learners:** The review team recommends that LOETB appoint a learner support officer to establish a de facto learner support service, consolidating all existing learner supports.

19. **SER Steering Group:** The review team recommends that the actions identified in the SER, together with the recommendations in this report, be incorporated into a strategic plan – such as the annual QIP – with SMART targets and embedded in a projected timeline.

20. **Self-evaluation Monitoring and Review:** The review team recommends a full revision and subsequent issuing of the documentation associated with TQAS

21. **Self-evaluation Monitoring and Review:** The review team recommends a review of the effectiveness of the FET centre model

4.6 Statements on Quality Assurance

The effectiveness of the QA procedures of the institution and the extent of their implementation

The review team considered and evaluated a wide range of documents as part of the review process. These included the SER, a wide range of publicly available documents regarding LOETB, and a large number of additional documents that were provided in response to requests made as part of the review. During the main review visit, the review team met with learners, employers, second providers, community representatives, other external stakeholders, teaching and support staff, managers at all levels, and the chair and other representatives of the LOETB Board. Based on the evidence gathered, the review team is satisfied that LOETB has extensive and developing QA procedures that are being effectively implemented at present.

The extent to which existing QA procedures adhere to QQI's Quality Assurance Guidelines & Policies

The review process identified a strong focus on QA development in FET, which is consistent with LOETB's stated commitment of "developing a culture of quality, and ensuring that anyone participating in a programme of further education and training enjoys a quality assured experience". The establishment of the Quality Assurance Support Service in 2016 has proven to be highly effective. More recently, the reconfiguration of the FET service in 2020 provides further evidence of LOETB's commitment to QA and standards. Much has been achieved, from a starting point in 2013 when there was little in place at that time. However there remains a great deal to be done to lead the delivery of ambitious strategic organisational objectives.

LOETB has a wide-ranging – and developing – range of QA procedures which largely reflect QQI QA guidance and policies, including QQIs Statutory QA Guidelines. LOETB recognises the need for further development and refinement to ensure more comprehensive and fuller adherence to these guidelines and policies. In relation to QQI's Policy Restatement and Criteria for Access, Transfer and Progression (ATP) in Relation to Learners for Providers of Further and Higher Education and Training, and as identified in the SER, LOETB must provide more consistency in respect of ATP and the communication of opportunities to learners. This should be a priority for further development.

The enhancement of quality by the institution (through governance, policy, and procedures).

The review team was consistently impressed by LOETB's commitment to all learners through its enhancement of quality. This is demonstrated through the ETB's structures of governance, the

enthusiastic commitment of staff at all levels, and the ETB's investment in QA staffing and structures, policy and procedures. This was evidenced by extensive documentation and through the ETB's interviews with a wide range of learners and external stakeholders. LOETB is a responsive and ambitious organisation and has embarked on a clear path to improvement through QA. Quality is demonstrably being enhanced by the actions of staff and stakeholders, through the implementation of a clear corporate strategy that focuses on excellence and learners.

ETB Review Response

Section 5: ETB Review Response

Response to QQI Inaugural Review Report

Introduction

Laois and Offaly Education and Training Board (LOETB) welcomes the report of the independent Review Panel, convened virtually from 12th to 16th April 2021.

The Inaugural Review process was a very positive and worthwhile experience for LOETB. At all times, the Review Panel were fair, pleasant, and professional. Those that participated in the panel sessions enjoyed the experience and were satisfied that they were given a fair opportunity to provide their input into the process. The participation of our staff team in the process has helped to reaffirm the critical role that they play in our service, and further developed the collective understanding of the importance of quality in everything we do.

The Chief Executive, Senior Management Team and the Further Education and Training (FET) Management Team have considered the Panel's Report. It is our intention to use this report to inform our organisational quality approach. At the highest level, the findings contained in the report will inform the development of our next strategy statement. This will include a further review of our FET governance model to ensure its efficacy and efficiency.

The commendations contained in the report outline and confirm LOETBs commitment to a quality process. This acknowledgement is an important step for future developments and provision, and provides the entire organisation with a confidence that what we are doing is working and leading to positive, quality outcomes for learners, employees, employers and other stakeholders in our region.

LOETB's responses to the Commendations and Recommendations made in the Report are outlined below.

Response to Panel Report

Commendations

The Panel Report contained fifteen Commendations, with the key Commendations being related to the following areas:

- ETB Mission and Strategy
- response to Local Training Needs
- supports for Learners
- integrated FET Centres
- establishment of the Quality Assurance Support Service (QASS)

The Panel's inclusion of these key Commendations, and indeed all of the other Commendations, was very much appreciated, and will serve to provide the FET team with great encouragement and motivation to continue to implement continuous improvement in all aspects of our work. We believe that the fact that the Review Panel identified these areas is testament to the hard work, professionalism and dedication of the entire FET team. The Commendations will be communicated to and celebrated by FET teaching and ancillary staff.

Recommendations

The Review Panel made twenty-one Recommendations in their Report. These have been discussed, and the responses to the Recommendations, grouped according to relevant category, are set out below. Each of the Recommendations will be implemented by LOETB; the timelines, responsible persons, and measures of success for each will be identified in LOETB's Action Plan, as prescribed by QQI.

Objective 1: Governance and Management of Quality

Recommendations 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14

The recent appointment of a Communications Officer will be particularly significant in addressing recommendations 4, 6 and 12 which are focused on communication and dissemination of information among staff and learners, as well as parts of recommendation 7 which refers to an internal communications strategy. The PD Co-Ordinator will play a key role in implementing recommendation 5 – Staff Professional Development, as well as parts of recommendation 10 which relates to training and support for staff in the area of programme development and validation.

Recommendations 8 and 9 cover Management and Documentation of Quality Assurance and the FET teams are in full agreement with the recommendations, some of which are already partially in place, but need to be formalised/strengthened.

Access, Transfer and Progression are covered under recommendation 11 and the team recognise the need to streamline the policies and procedures and standardise the processes across the Centres and Services to achieve greater consistency across the scheme.

Recommendation 13 – Integrity and Approval of Results – again this recommendation is welcomed and we will endeavour to put structures in place to strengthen the approval process and afford staff the opportunity to be more involved.

Better use of PLSS data, is another area that we will strive to develop, as mentioned in recommendation 14.

Objective 2: Teaching, Learning & Assessment

Recommendations 3, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19,

Recommendations 3 and 15 relate to monitoring the learning experience – this is something that has been a little sporadic to date and streamlining and formalising the process will bring benefits to both Service and Learners alike.

Recommendation 16 relates to assessment of learners and while LOETB recognise the need for policies and procedures around RPL, this is part of a broader discussion at national level and LOETB look forward to co-operating with other ETBs in policy development, where such opportunities arise.

Work experience/placement is the subject of recommendation 17 and we agree with the need to review current arrangements to ensure consistency.

We also recognise the need to consolidate learner supports, as suggested by recommendation 18.

Objective 3: Self-evaluation, Monitoring & Review

Recommendations 1, 2

The recent Self-Evaluation process was a valuable experience and LOETB look forward to meeting the considerable challenges presented by Recommendation 1 – Self Evaluation, Monitoring and

Review. Formalising a whole-service approach will potentially bring significant improvements to the Service. The development of a quality manual has been considered for some time and is another welcome recommendation.

Conclusion

In conclusion, LOETB wishes to thank the panel for their work in carrying out the review and compiling the report. It was unfortunate that the pandemic resulted in some restrictions on the self-evaluation and the review visit, however we are confident that the overall impact was minimal. We are currently working on the compilation of our action plan to address the recommendations and look forward to the challenge of implementing same.

Joe Cunningham

Chief Executive

Laois and Offaly Education and Training Board

Appendices

Appendix A: Review Terms of Reference

Terms of Reference for the Inaugural Review of Quality Assurance in Education & Training Boards

1 Background and Context for the Review

1.1 QQI established Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for all providers in April 2016, and Sector Specific Quality Assurance Guidelines for Education and Training Boards (ETBs) in May 2017[1]. These guidelines collectively address the quality assurance responsibilities of ETBs as significant public providers of further education and training. The scope of the guidelines incorporates all education, training and related services of an ETB, leading to QQI awards, other awards recognised in the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ), or awards of other awarding, regulatory or statutory bodies.

1.2 The Education and Training Boards (ETBs) were established under the Education and Training Boards Act (2013). They are statutory providers with responsibility for education and training, youth work and other statutory functions, and operate and manage a range of centres administering and providing adult and further education and training (FET). ETBs also administer secondary and primary education through schools and engage in a range of non-accredited provision. These areas are not subject to quality assurance regulation by QQI.

1.3 In 2018, all sixteen ETBs completed re-engagement with QQI. Following this process each ETB established its quality assurance (QA) policy and procedures in accordance with section 30 of the Quality and Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 2012. QQI recognises that those policies and procedures are reflective of the evolving and developmental nature of quality assurance within the ETB sector as it continues to integrate the legacy body processes.

---

[1] Policy for the Inaugural Review of Quality Assurance in Education and Training Boards (QQI, 2019)

1.4   As outlined in QQI's Core QA Guidelines, quality and its assurance are the responsibility of the provider, i.e. an ETB, and review and self-evaluation of quality is a fundamental element of an ETB's quality assurance system.   A provider's external quality assurance obligations include a statutory review of quality assurance by QQI. QQI review functions are set out in various sections of the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act (2012) as amended (henceforth 'the 2012 Act'). The reviews relate to QQI's obligation under Section 27(b) of the 2012 Act (to establish procedures for the review by QQI of the effectiveness and implementation of a provider's quality assurance procedures) and to section 34 of the 2012 Act (the external review by QQI of a provider's quality assurance procedures).

1.5   An external review of quality assurance has not been previously undertaken for the ETBs, neither through QQI nor former legacy awarding body processes. QQI is cognisant of the ETBs' current organisational context in which the establishment of comprehensive and integrated quality assurance systems is an ongoing process. A primary function of the reviews will thus be to inform the future development of quality assurance and enhancement activities within the organisations. Following the completion of the sixteen review reports, a sectoral report will also be produced identifying systemic observations and findings.

1.6   The 2012 Act states that QQI shall consult with SOLAS (the state organisation responsible for funding, co-ordinating and monitoring further education and training in Ireland) in carrying out a review of education and training boards. This will take the form of consultation with SOLAS on the Terms of Reference for the review and the provision of contextual briefing by SOLAS to review teams.

2   Purposes

2.1   QQI has specific multi-dimensional purposes for its quality assurance reviews. The Policy for the Inaugural Review of Quality Assurance in Education and Training Boards outlines six purposes for this review process. Those purposes, and the ways in which they will be achieved and measured, are as follows:

Purpose	Achieved and Measured Through
1. To encourage a quality culture and the enhancement of the learning environment and experience within ETBs	- Emphasising the learner and the learning experience in reviews. - Constructively and meaningfully involving staff at all levels of the organisation in the self-evaluation and external evaluation. phases of the review. - Providing a source of evidence of areas for improvement and areas for revision of policy and change and basing follow-up upon them.

	• Exploring innovative and effective practices and procedures. • Providing evidence of quality assurance and quality enhancement within the ETB.
2. To provide feedback to ETBs about organisation-wide quality and the impact of mission, strategy, governance and management on quality and the overall effectiveness of their quality assurance.	• Emphasising the ownership, governance and management of quality assurance at the corporate ETB-level, i.e. how the ETB exercises oversight of quality assurance. • Pitching the review at a comprehensive ETB-wide level. • Evaluating compliance with legislation, policy and standards. • Evaluating the impact and effectiveness of quality assurance procedures.
3. To improve public confidence in the quality of ETB provision by promoting transparency and public awareness.	• Adhering to purposes, criteria and outcomes that are clear and transparent. • Publication of clear timescales and terms of reference for review. • Evaluating, as part of the review, ETB reporting on quality assurance, to ensure that it is transparent and accessible. • Publication of the individual ETB reports and outcomes of reviews in accessible locations and formats for different audiences. • Publication of sectoral findings and observations.
4. To support system-level improvement of the quality of further education and training in the ETBs.	• Publishing a sectoral report, with system-level observations and findings. • The identification and dissemination of effective practice to facilitate shared learning.
5. To encourage quality by using evidence-based, objective methods and advice.	• Using the expertise of international, national, learner, industry and other stakeholder peer reviewers who are independent of the ETB. • Ensuring that findings are based on stated evidence. • Facilitating ETBs to identify measures for quality relevant to their own mission and context. • Promoting the identification and dissemination of examples of good practice and innovation
6. To provide an opportunity for ETBs to articulate their stage of development, mission and objectives and demonstrate the quality assurance of their provision, both individually and as a sector.	• Publication of self-evaluation reports, conducted with input from ETB learners and wider stakeholder groups. • Publication of the reports and outcomes of reviews in accessible locations and formats for different audiences.

3   Objectives and Criteria for Review

3.1   The core objective of the external review is **to evaluate the implementation and effectiveness of an ETB's quality assurance procedures**. As this is the inaugural review, it will have a particular emphasis on the arrangements established to date to support the operation of the quality assurance system. Recognising that the development and implementation of an ETB-wide quality assurance system and procedural framework is an ongoing process, the review will also have a forward-looking dimension and will explore the ETB's plans and infrastructure to support the ongoing development of these systems. The review will thus examine the following:

Objective 1: Governance and Management of Quality:

Evaluate the comprehensive oversight arrangements and transparent decision-making structures for the ETB's education and training and related activities within and across all service provision (for example FE colleges, training centres, community-based education services, contracted providers, collaborative partnerships/arrangements).

The governance and quality management systems would be expected to address:

Indicative Matters to be Explored

a)   The ETB's mission and strategy

•   How/do the ETB's quality assurance arrangements contribute to the fulfilment of these?

•   Is the learner experience consistent with this mission?

b)   Structures and terms of reference for the governance and management of quality assurance

•   Are the arrangements sufficiently comprehensive and robust to ensure strong governance and management of operations (e.g. separation of responsibilities, externality, stakeholder input)?

•   Is governance visible and transparent?

•   Where multi-level arrangements exist (i.e. where responsibilities are invested in centre managers), is there sufficient clarity, co-ordination, corporate oversight of, and accountability for, these arrangements?

c)   The documentation of quality assurance policy and procedures

- How effective are the arrangements for the development and approval of policies and procedures?

- Are policies and procedures coherent and comprehensive (do they incorporate all service types and awarding bodies?), robust and fit for purpose?

- Are policies and procedures systematically evaluated?

d)   Staff recruitment, management and development

- How does the ETB assure itself as to the competence of its staff?

- How are professional standards maintained and enhanced?

- How are staff informed of developments impacting the organisation and how can they input to decision-making?

e)   Programme development, approval and submission for validation

- What arrangements are in place to ensure alignment of programme development activity with strategic goals and regional needs?

- Are the arrangements for the approval and management of programme development robust, objective and transparent?

- What arrangements are in place to facilitate and oversee a comprehensive programme development process in advance of submission for validation (e.g. the conduct of research, inclusion of external expertise, writing learning outcomes, curricula etc.)?

- Are there structures in place to support collaborative programme development with other ETBs/providers?

f)   Access, transfer and progression

- How does the ETB quality assure access, transfer and progression systematically across all programmes and services?

- Are there flexible learning pathways, respecting and attending to the diversity of learners?

- Are admissions, progression and recognition policies and processes clear and transparent for learners and implemented on a consistent basis?

g)   Integrity and approval of learner results, including the operation and outcome of internal verification and external authentication processes

- What governance and oversight processes are in place to ensure the integrity of learner assessment and results?

- How does the ETB ensure that these arrangements provide for consistent decision-making and standards across services and centres?

h)   Information and data management;

- What arrangements are in place to ensure that data are reliable and secure?

- How are data utilised as part of the quality assurance system?

- What arrangements are in place to ensure the integrity of learner records (including, where relevant, the sharing of learner data with other providers on national apprenticeships)?

- How is compliance with data legislation ensured?

i)   Public information and communications;

- Is information on the quality assurance system, procedures and activities publicly available and regularly updated?

Indicative Matters to be Explored

- What arrangements are in place to ensure that published information in relation to all provision (including by centres) is clear, accurate, up to date and easily accessible?

Objective 2: Teaching, Learning and Assessment

Evaluate the arrangements to ensure the quality of teaching, learning and assessment within the ETB and a high-quality learning experience for all learners. These will include:

Indicative Matters to be Explored

a)   The learning environment

- How/is the quality of the learning experience monitored?

- How/are modes of delivery and pedagogical methods evaluated to ensure that they meet the needs of learners?

- How is the quality of the learning experience of learners on work placements ensured?

- Is there evidence of enhancement in teaching and learning?

b)   Assessment of learners

- How is the integrity, consistency and security of assessment instruments, methodologies, procedures and records ensured – including in respect of recognition of prior learning?

- How is the standard of assessment of learners on work placements ensured – particularly where these are undertaken by non-ETB staff?

- Do learners in all settings have a clear understanding of how and why they are assessed and are they given feedback on assessment?

c) Supports for learners

- How are support services planned and monitored to ensure that they meet the needs of learners?

- How does the ETB ensure consistency in the availability of appropriate supports to learners across different settings/regions?

- Are learners aware of the existence of supports?

Objective 3: Self-Evaluation, Monitoring & Review

Evaluate the arrangements for the monitoring, review and evaluation of, and reporting on, the ETB's education, training and related services (including through third-party arrangements) and the quality assurance system and procedures underpinning them. It will also reflect on how these processes are utilised to complete the quality cycle through the identification and promotion of effective practice and by addressing areas for improvement. This will include:

Indicative Matters to be Explored

a) Self-evaluation, monitoring and review (including programme and quality review)

- What are the processes for quality assurance planning, monitoring and reporting?

- Are the processes for self-evaluation, monitoring and review (including the self-evaluation report undertaken for the inaugural review) comprehensive, inclusive and evidence-based?

- Is there evidence of strategic analysis and follow-up of the outcome of internal quality assurance reviews and monitoring (e.g. review reports, external authenticator reports, learner feedback reports etc.)?

- How is quality promoted and enhanced?

b) Programme monitoring and review

- How are programme delivery and outcomes monitored across multiple centres (including collection of feedback from learners/stakeholders)?

- Are mechanisms for periodic review of programmes comprehensive, inclusive and robust?

• Is there evidence that the outcome of programme monitoring and review informs programme modification and enhancement?

• Are the outputs of programme monitoring and review considered on a strategic basis by the ETB's governance bodies to inform decision-making?

c) Oversight, monitoring and review of relationships with external/third parties (in particular, with contracted training providers, community training providers, and other collaborative provision).

• How does the ETB ensure the suitability of the external parties with which it engages?

• Is the nature of the arrangements with each external party published?

• Is the effectiveness of these arrangements monitored and reviewed through ETB governance?

• Does the ETB assess its impact within the region and local communities?

3.2 In respect of each dimension, the review will:

i. evaluate the effectiveness of ETB's quality assurance procedures for the purposes of establishing, ascertaining, maintaining and improving the quality of further education, training, and related services; and

ii. identify perceived gaps in the internal quality assurance mechanisms and the appropriateness, sufficiency, prioritisation and timeliness of planned measures to address them in the context of the ETB's current stage of development; and

iii. explore achievements and innovations in quality assurance and in the enhancement of teaching and learning.

3.3 Following consideration of the matters above, the review will:

• Provide a qualitative statement about the effectiveness of the quality assurance procedures of the ETB and the extent of their implementation;

• Provide a statement about the extent to which existing quality assurance procedures adhere to QQI's Quality Assurance Guidelines and policies (as listed at 3.4), to include an explicit qualitative statement on the extent to which the procedures are in keeping with QQI's Policy Restatement and

Criteria for Access, Transfer and Progression in Relation to Learners for Providers of Further and Higher Education and Training;[2]

- Provide a qualitative statement on the enhancement of quality; and

- Identify effective practice and recommendations for further improvement.

3.4 The implementation and effectiveness of QQI's Core Quality Assurance Guidelines will be considered in the context of the following criteria:

- The ETB's mission and objectives for quality assurance;

- QQI's Sector-Specific Quality Assurance Guidelines for Education and Training Boards

- QQI's Topic-Specific Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Statutory Apprenticeship Programmes;

- QQI's Topic-Specific Quality Assurance Guidelines for Blended Learning;

- QQI's Policy Restatement and Criteria for Access, Transfer and Progression in Relation to Learners for Providers of Further and Higher Education and Training;

- QQI's Policies and Criteria for the Validation of Programmes of Education and Training; and

- Relevant European guidelines and practice on quality and quality assurance

4   The Review Team

4.1 QQI will appoint a review team to conduct the review. Review teams are composed of peer reviewers who are learners; leaders and staff from comparable providers; and external representatives including employer and civic representatives. The size of the team will depend on the size and complexity of the ETB but in general will comprise five or six persons. A reviewer may participate in more than one ETB review.

4.2 QQI will identify an appropriate team of reviewers for each review who are independent of the ETB with the appropriate skills and experience required to perform their tasks. This will include experts with knowledge and experience of further education and training, quality assurance, teaching and learning, and external review. It will include international representatives and QQI will seek to ensure diversity within the team. The ETB will have an opportunity to comment on the proposed

---

[2] https://www.qqi.ie/Downloads/ATP%20Policy%20Restatement%20FINAL%202018.pdf

composition of their review team to ensure there are no conflicts of interest. The roles and responsibilities of the review team members are as follows.[3]:

Chairperson

4.3.   The chairperson is a full member of the team. Their role is to provide tactical leadership and to ensure that the work of the team is conducted in a professional, impartial and fair manner, and in compliance with the Terms of Reference. The chairperson's functions include:

•   Leading the conduct of the review and ensuring that proceedings remain focused.

•   Coordinating the work of reviewers.

•   Fostering open and respectful exchanges of opinion and ensuring that the views of all participants are valued and considered.

•   Facilitating the emergence of evidence-based team decisions (ideally based on consensus).

•   Contributing to, and overseeing the production of, the review report within the timeline agreed with QQI, approving amendments or convening additional meetings if required.

Co-ordinating Reviewer

4.4   The co-ordinating reviewer is a full member of the team. Their role is to capture the team's deliberations and decisions during the proceedings and ensure that they are expressed clearly and accurately in the team report. It is vital that the co-ordinating reviewer ensures that sufficient evidence is provided in the report to support the team's recommendations. The role of the co-ordinating reviewer includes:

•   Acting as the liaison between the review team and QQI; and, during the main review visit, between the review team and the ETB review co-ordinator.

•   Maintaining records of discussions during the planning and main review visits.

•   Co-ordinating the drafting of the review report in consultation with the team members and under the direction of the chairperson within the timeline agreed with QQI.

All Review Team Members

4.5   The role of all review team members includes:

•   Preparing for the review by reading and critically evaluating all written material;

---

[3] Further detail on the conduct of reviewers is outlined in QQI's Code of Conduct for Reviewers and Evaluators.

- Investigating and testing claims made in the self-evaluation report and other ETB documents during the main review visit by speaking to a range of staff, learners and stakeholders.

- Contributing to the production of the review report, ensuring that their particular perspective and voice (i.e. learner, industry, stakeholder, international etc.) forms an integral part of the review.

- Following the individual ETB reviews, providing observations to inform the development of the sectoral report.

5   The Review Process and Timeline

5.1   The key steps in the review process with indicative timelines are outlined below. Specific dates for each ETB review will be outlined by QQI in accordance with the published review schedule.

Step	Action	Timeframe
Preparation	Preparation of a provider profile by each ETB (e.g. outlining mission; strategic objectives; local context; data on staff profiles; recent developments; key challenges).	6-9 months before first main review visit
	Provision of ETB data by SOLAS (e.g. data on learner profiles; local context; strategic direction).	
	Establishment of review teams and identification of ETBs for review by each review team, selected in accordance with the ETB provider profiles and data and in consultation with ETBs on potential conflicts of interest.	
Self-Evaluation Report (SER)	Preparation and publication by ETBs of individual, inclusive, whole-of-organisation self-evaluations of how effectively they assure the quality of teaching, learning and service activities.	11 weeks before main review visit
Desk Review	Desk review of the self-evaluation reports by the review teams.	Before initial meeting

Step	Action	Timeframe
Initial Meeting	An initial meeting of the review team, including reviewer training, briefing from SOLAS, discussion of preliminary impressions and identification of any additional documentation required.	5 weeks after submission of self-evaluation report 6 weeks before main review visit
Planning Visit	A visit to the ETB by the chair and co-ordinating reviewer of the review team to receive information about the self-evaluation process, discuss the schedule for the main review visit and discuss any additional information requests.	5 weeks after SER 6 weeks before main review visit
Main Review Visit	A visit to the ETB by the review team to receive and consider evidence from ETB staff, learners and stakeholders in respect of the objectives and criteria set out in the Terms of Reference.	11 weeks following receipt of self-evaluation report
Individual ETB Reports	Preparation of draft ETB review report by review team.	6-8 weeks after main review visit
	Draft report sent to ETB by QQI for a check of factual accuracy.	1 week following receipt by QQI
	ETB responds with any factual accuracy corrections	1 week following receipt
	Final report sent to ETB.	1 week following receipt of any factual accuracy corrections
	Response to review submitted by ETB.	2 weeks after receipt of final report

Step	Action	Timeframe
Outcomes	QQI considers findings of individual ETB review reports and organisational responses through governance processes.	Next available meeting of QQI Approvals and Reviews Committee
	ETB review reports are published with organisational response.	
Follow-Up	Preparation of an action plan by ETB.	1 month after QQI decision
	QQI seeks feedback from ETB on experience of review.	6 weeks after decision
	One-year follow-up report by ETB to QQI. This (and any subsequent follow-up) may be integrated into annual reports to QQI.	1 year after main review visit
	Continuous reporting and dialogue on follow-up through annual reporting and dialogue processes.	Continuous

Appendix B: Main Review Visit Schedule

Date: 12th April				
Theme: Learners and Learner Supports (Day 1)				
Time (GMT)	**Group**	**Participants**	**Role**	**Purpose**
9:00-10:00	1. ETB Chief Executive & Senior Management Team	Joe Cunningham	Chief Executive	Discussion of mission, strategic plan, roles and responsibilities for quality assurance and enhancement
		Tony Dalton	FET Director	
		Anne Marie Keane	FET Manager (Quality Assurance)	
		Colin Flaherty	FET Manager (Pathways)	
		Eileen Dunne	FET Manager (Inclusion)	
		Padraig Boland	FET Manager (Skills)	
10:00-10:30	ETB Review Coordinator/FET Director	Tony Dalton / Anne Marie Keane	FET Director/Review Coordinator	Meeting with ETB Review Coordinator
10.30-11.30	**Private Review Team Meeting**			
11.30-11.45	Review Team Break			
11:45-12:30	2. Parallel Session (Past Learners)			Discussion of learner experience
		Ray Harte	Remote Work Ready - now in employment	

		Aine Leonard	Level 6 Business - now in NUIG	
		Ger McIntyre	NZEB and Lean Management - STA- construction industry employee	
		Conor Feigheny	NZEB course - Skills to Advance (STA) – Bord na Mona employee	
		Pat Phelan	Leading Remote Teams - STA - DBEI employee	
		Victorita O'Brien	Remote Work Ready - now in employment	
		David Lynam	NZEB & Industrial Electrical Systems courses -STA- BNM employee	
	3. Parallel session (Apprentices and Employed Learners)	Owen Cooper	Electrical Apprenticeship - finished Phase 2 December 2020	
		Shane Cunningham	Current Electrical Apprentice	
		Noel Gilligan	Sustainable Agriculture - Employed Trainesship - BNM Employee	
		Tadhg Sheehy	Skilled Utilities Operator - Employed Traineeship (employed in utilities industry)	
		George Leahy	Lean Management Course - STA (employed in hotel industry)	
12.30-1.00	**Panel Review Team Meeting**			
1.00-2.00	Review Team Lunch/Break			
1.40-2.00	2.1 Past Learner - separate session from 11.45 session	Caroline Carswell	Remote Work Ready - now in employment	

2.00-2.45	Parallel sessions with learners			Discussion of learner experience
	4. L5-6 learners	Amy Pyke	Nursing Studies - Tullamore FET Centre (PLC)	
		Lauren Johnston	Engineering Technology - Portlaoise Institute (PLC)	
		Conor Menendez	Engineering Technology - Portlaoise Institute (PLC)	
		Aisling Mulhall	Art, Craft & Design - Abbeyleix FETC (PLC)	
		Daniel Adigun	Advanced Art - Abbeyleix FETC (PLC)	
		Therese Enright	Health Services Supervisory Management	
	5. L5-6 learners	Jamie Doonan	Healthcare Support Traineeship - Banagher FETC	
		Aoife Dunne - no VM	Art, Craft & Design - Abbeyleix FETC (PLC)	
		Maura Byrne	Advanced Art - Abbeyleix FETC (PLC)	
		Eileen Brennan - sent email.	Hairdressing - Portlaoise Institute (PLC)	
		Caoimhe Skehan	Community Health Services with Psychology - Portlaoise Institute (PLC)	
		Jordan Gibson	Community Health Services with Psychology - Portlaoise Institute (PLC)	
2.45-3.30	6. L1-4 learners	Derbhla O'Donnell	Birr FET Centre, Level 4 General Learning	Discussion of learner experience
		Luke Guinan	Birr FET Centre, Level 4 General Learning	

		Owen Scanlon	Portlaoise FET Centre (Youthreach) - L4 Employment Skills	
		Daragh Lynch	Portlaoise FET Centre (Youthreach) - L4 Employment Skills	
		Kameja Duskevic	Portlaoise FET Centre (Youthreach) - L4 Employment Skills	
		Richard Greene	Tullamore CTC - General Learning Level 4	
		Sam Younge	Tullamore CTC - Catering Support, L4	
		Sharon Gibson	Portarlington FET Centre (VTOS) - L4 Return to Learning	
	7. L1-4 Learners	Crisanta Francisco	Portarlington FET Centre (BTEI) - L4 Return to Learning	Discussion of learner experience
		Sylwia Mazja	Portarlington FET Centre (VTOS) - L4 Return to Learning	
		Jasmine McMahon	Portarlington FET Centre (VTOS) - L4 Return to Learning	
		Valerie Meehan	Abbeyleix FET Centre (VTOS) Level 4 General Studies	
		Sarah Delaney	Clara FET Centre (Youthreach) - Level 4 General Learning	
		Margaret Kelly	Clara FET Centre (Youthreach) - Level 4 General Learning	
		Martina Molyneux	Tullamore FET Centre (Adult Literacy Service - L3 modules)	
		Katie Flanagan	Portlaoise FET Centre (Adult Literacy Service - L3 modules)	
3.30-4.00	**Private Review Team Meeting**			
4.00-4.15	Review Team Break			

4.15-5.00	8. Learner support services staff (e.g. literacy, English language etc.)	Lisa McEvoy	Centre Manager, former Adult Literacy Organiser	Discussion of staff involvement in quality assurance and enhancement of support services to learners
		Allan Boyle	Manager, National Learning Network Portlaoise	
		Shauna Busto-Gilligan	Literacy Teacher, Portlaoise Prison	
		Mary O'Connor	Tutor and UDL Badge holder	
	9. Learner support services staff (e.g. literacy, English language etc.)	Hilary Murtagh	Learning Support Tutor	
		Mary Dooley	Moodle Coordinator	
		Deirdre Brennan	ESOL Tutor and Coordinator	
		Jessica Mullen	PD Coordinator	
5.00-5.30	Private Review Team Meeting			

Date: 12th April				
Theme: Self-Evaluation, Monitoring & Review, TLA (Day 2)				
Time (GMT)	Group	People	Role	Purpose
09.00-09.30	**ETB Review Coordinator**	**Anne Marie Keane**	**Anne Marie Keane**	**Meeting with ETB Review Coordinator**
9.30-10.00	Private Review Team Meeting			
10.00-10:45	10. Employer and regional skills bodies representatives	John Costello	Regional Skills Forum Manager (Midlands)	Discussion of the engagement of employers and regional skills bodies in strategic planning of programme delivery and quality assurance and enhancement activities
		Tracy Keogh	Co-Founder, Grow Remote	
		Breda O'Toole	Head of Talent Transformation & Innovation, IDA Ireland	
		Rob Downey	Design Engineer, Scaffold Elevation	

	11. Employer and regional skills bodies representatives	Dermot Carey	Director, Construction Industry Federation	
		Ciaran Butler	Health, Safety and Welfare Officer - Bord na Móna	
		Dara Cruise	General Manager, Midlands Park Hotel, Portlaoise	
10.45-11.15	Private Review Team Meeting			
11.15-11.30	Review Team Break			
11.30-12.15	12. ETB Employer Engagement Function	Jolene Hall	Enterprise Support Officer, LOETB	Discussion of the ETB's approach to, and experience of, employer engagement in responding to local skills needs and quality assuring provision
		Aideen Poole	Enterprise Support Officer, LOETB	
		Yvonne Foy	Contract Training Officer, LOETB	
	13. ETB Employer Engagement Function	Sandra Doyle	Senior Training Adviser, LOETB	
		Mary Leech	Senior Training Adviser, LOETB	
		Caroline Spollen	Senior Training Adviser & Enterprise Support Officer, LOETB	
12.15-12.45	Private Review Team Meeting			
12.45-1.45	Review Team Lunch/Break			
1.45-2.30	14.1 Academic staff (cross-section of services and programmes)	Anne Marie Keane	FET Manager (Quality Assurance)	Discussion of staff involvement in programme development & review
		John Kelly	Scaffolding Apprenticeship Programme Manager, and Centre Manager, Mount Lucas NCTC	
		Yvonne Kearney	Scaffolding Apprenticeship Programme Leader	
	14.2 Academic staff (cross-section of services and programmes)	Oonagh Flynn	Healthcare Tutor and member of Healthcare Review Group	
		Emma Gilchreest	Community Training Officer, LOETB	
		Mary Connell	QA Officer	

2.30-3.00	Private Review Team Meeting		
3.00-3.45	Discussion of staff involvement in quality assurance and enhancement		
	15. Parallel session 1 (L1-4 Teachers/Instructors/Tutors)	Dorothy Nolan	Banagher FET Centre (Youthreach)
		Marie Monaghan	Clara FET Centre (Youthreach)
		Michelle Howard	Tullamore Community Training Centre
		Ann Marie Mahon	Adult Literacy Service
		Sean Berrill	Birr FET Centre (VTOS)
		Enda Kennedy	Birr and Tullamore FET Centres (VTOS)
	16. Parallel session 2 (L5-6 Teachers/Instructors/Tutors)	Una Douglas	Tullamore FETC (PLC)
		Jackie Carter	Abbeyleix FETC (VTOS?PLC)
		Helen Nolan	Portarlington and Tullamore FET Centres (VTOS/BTEI)
		Fintan Walsh	Teacher, Portlaoise Institute (PLC)
		Jonathan O'Brien	Teacher, Tullamore FET Centre (PLC/BTEI)
3.45-4.15	Private Review Team Meeting		
4.15-4.30	Review Team Break		
4.30-5.15	Discussion of staff involvement in quality assurance and enhancement		
	17. Parallel session 1 (Teachers in Prison Education Centres)	Catherine Casey	Midlands Prison (Deputy Head Teacher)
		Jane Meally	Portlaoise Prison
		Breda Delaney	Midlands Prison
		Patricia O'Brien	Midlands Prison
		Shane Dooley	Both Prisons
		Shauna Busto-Gilligan	Portlaoise Prison

		Mary Maher	Midlands Prison	
		Paula Grant	Portlaoise Prison	
		Tomas Hassett	Both Prisons	
	18. Parallel session 2 (Apprenticeship & other WBL instructors)	Michelle Tierney	Apprenticeship Manager	
		John Kelly	Manager, Mount Lucas National Construction Training Centre	
		Seamus Connolly	Tutor, Construction Programmes	
		Anthony Byrne	Tutor, Skills to Advance Programmes	
		Reuben Noyce	Electrical Apprenticeship Instructor	
		Andy Brophy	Tutor, Skills to Advance Programmes	
5.15-5.45	Private Review Team Meeting			

Date: 14th April	
Theme: Programme Delivery, Third Parties, AT&P	

Time (GMT)	Group	People	Role	Purpose
09.00-09.30	**ETB Review Coordinator**	**Anne Marie Keane**	**Anne Marie Keane**	**Meeting with ETB Review Coordinator**
9.30-10.00	Private Review Team Meeting			
10.00-10.45	19. Heads of Centres (All services represented)	Keith McClearn	Deputy Principal, Portlaoise Institute (PLC)	Discussion of QA arrangements, responsibilities and implementation
		Finian Robbins	Manager, Clara FET Centre (Youthreach)	
		Michelle Shanahan	Manager, Tullamore FET Centre (PLC, VTOS, BTEI)	

		Eileen Kenna-Quinn	Manager, Birr FET Centre (VTOS, BTEI)	
		Brendan Pillion	Manager, Banagher FET Centre (Youthreach)	
		David Higgins	Head Teacher, Portlaoise Prison Education Centre	
10.45-11.15	Private Review Team Meeting			
11.15-11.30	Review Team Break			
11.30-12.15	20. Guidance Counsellors/ Admissions Staff/ Programme Managers	Catherine Gavigan	Guidance Coordinator	Discussion of arrangements for learner recruitment, access, transfer and progression
		Carmel Hoolan	Guidance Coordinator	
		Pamela Quinn	QA Support Service (Learner Information/Communications Group)	
		Renata Farulewska	Recruitment, Skills Department	
		Michelle Shanahan	Manager, Tullamore FET Centre	
		Melinda Niland	Contract Training Officer, LOETB	
		Aoife Horan	Recruitment Officer, NLN	
12.15-12.45	Private Review Team Meeting			
12.45-1.45	Review Team Lunch/Break			
1.45-2.30	21. Second Providers	Lynsey McCabe	Manager, Tullamore CTC	Discussion of arrangements for quality assurance and enhancement of education and training delivered by second providers
		Petrina Murray	Programme Development Officer, NLN	
		Gillian Bailey	Hartley People	
		Ger Stewart	Maltings Training	
		Alison McKeon	Irish Times Training	
2.30-3.00	Private Review Team Meeting			

3.00-3.15	Review Team Break			
	22. Parallel session 1 (Higher Education)	Dr. Joe Collins	IT Carlow	Discussion of collaboration and engagement with HEIs, including consideration of ATP
		Dr. Martin Meagher	IT Carlow	
		Dr. Enda Fallon	Athlone IT	
		Dr. Andy Fogarty	Athlone IT	
	23. Parallel session 2 (Community Providers & Groups)	Clive Davis	Youth Work Ireland Laois	Discussion of ETB engagement with community groups
		Linda Hogan	OLDC	
		Lynsey McCabe	Manager, Tullamore Community Training Centre	
		Ethna Carroll	Mental Health Services, Birr	
4.00-4.15	Private Review Team Meeting			

Date: 15th April				
Theme: QA, Governance and Management				
Time (GMT)	Group	People	Role	Purpose
09.00-09.30	**ETB Review Coordinator**	**Anne Marie Keane**	**Review Coordinator**	**Meeting with ETB Review Coordinator**
9.30-10.00	Private Review Team Meeting			
10.00-10.45	24. Quality Office	Anne Marie Keane	FET Manager (Quality)	Discussion of the operation of the ETB's quality system, including arrangements for monitoring and review of quality
		Mary Connell	QA Officer	
		Lisa Cox	QA Officer	
		Mary Dooley	QA Team, Moodle Coordinator	
		Geraldine Dunne	QA Team	
		Pamela Quinn	QA Team	

10.45-11.15	Private Review Team Meeting			
11.15-11.30	Review Team Break			
11:30-12:15	25. Self-Evaluation Team	Patricia Cullen	Deputy Principal, Portlaoise College	Discussion of the development of the self-evaluation report
		Tony Dalton	FET Director	
		Mary Dooley	QA Support Service	
		Pauline Shannon	Teacher, Abbeyleix FET Centre	
	26. Self-Evaluation Team	Geraldine Dunne	QA Support Service	
		Vivienne Keenan	Teacher, Tullamore and Birr FET Centres	
		Jessica Mullen	PD Coordinator	
		Hazel Smyth	Compliance Officer	
12.15-12.45	Private Review Team Meeting			
12.45-1.45	Review Team Lunch/Break			
1.45-2.30	27. Programme Approval/Review governance groups/committees	Colin Flaherty	FET Manager (Pathways)	Discussion of role of committee in quality assurance of programme development and approval
		Eileen Dunne	FET Manager, Inclusion	
		Melinda Niland	Contract Training Officer	
		Emma Gilchreest	Community Training Officer	
		Padraig Boland	FET Manager (Skills)	
		Anne Marie Keane	FET Manager (Quality)	
		Rob Downey	Scaffold Elevation, Chairperson of Scaffolding Apprenticeship CSG	
		Keith McClearn	Deputy Principal, Portlaoise Institute (PLC)	
2.30-3.00	Private Review Team Meeting			
3.00-3.15	Review Team Break			

3.15-4.00	28. FET Quality Council	Anne Marie Keane	FET Manager (Quality)	Discussion of the approach to, and mechanisms for, quality assurance and enhancement
		Colin Flaherty	FET Manager (Pathways)	
		Eileen Dunne	FET Manager, Inclusion	
		Padraig Boland	FET Manager (Skills)	
		David Denieffe	Higher Education Representative	
		Evelyn Dunne	Staff Representative	
		Ronan Berry	Industry Representative	
4.00-4.30	Private Review Team Meeting			
4.30-5.15	29. External Authenticators	To be confirmed - approx 3 Eas with experience of External Authentication in LOETB		Discussion re EA experience of LOETB programmes

Date: 16th April				
Theme: Wrap-up				
Time (GMT)	Group	People	Role	Purpose
9-9.30	**30. Free Session**			
9.30-10.45	Private Review Team Meeting	QQI representatives will join team at 10.30 for 15 minutes.		
10.45-11.15	31. QQI & ETB Review Coordinator/FET Director	Anne Marie Keane	FET Manager (Quality Assurance)	QQI gathers feedback on the review process

		Tony Dalton	FET Director	
10.45-11.30	32. Optional			Available for any additional/follow-up meetings with ETB participants as determined by review team. If not required, used by review team to discuss initial findings
11.30-12	Private Review Team Meeting			
12-12.30	33. ETB Chief Executive, SMT, Self-Evaluation Steering Group, Group of Learners	Joe Cunningham	Chief Executive	Oral feedback on initial review findings
		Tony Dalton	FET Director	
		Colin Flaherty	FET Manager (Pathways)	
		Eileen Dunne	FET Manager (Inclusion)	
		Padraig Boland	FET Manager (Skills)	
		Anne Marie Keane	FET Manager (Quality Assurance)	
		Lisa Cox	Quality Assurance Officer	
		Mary Connell	Quality Assurance Officer	

12.30-1	Review Team Break			
1-5.pm	Private Review Team Meeting			Review team discuss report drafting

Glossary of Terms

QQI glossary of terms and abbreviations from this report

Term	Definition/Explanation
2012 Act	Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012
AONTAS	Ireland's National Adult Learning Organisation
ATP	Access, Transfer and Progression
BTEI	Back to Education Initiative
CAO	Central Applications Office
CEDEFOP	European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
Core	Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines, developed by QQI for use by all Providers
ECVET	European credit system for vocational education and training
EQAVET	European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training
Erasmus+	European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students
ETB	Education and Training Board
EU	European Union
Fáilte Ireland	Ireland's National Tourism Development Authority
FET	Further Education and Training
HR	Human Resources
IT	Information Technology
Moodle	A free, open-source online learning management system (LMS) that supports learning and training needs
NFQ	National Framework of Qualifications
PLC	Post Leaving Certificate

QA	Quality Assurance
QQI	Quality and Qualifications Ireland
SOLAS (formerly FÁS)	The National Further Education and Training Authority (responsible for funding, co-ordinating and monitoring FET in Ireland)
SPA	Strategic Performance Agreement (between the ETB & Solas)
TEL	Technology-Enhanced Learning
Youthreach	Service providing early school leavers without and formal qualifications with opportunities for basic education, personal development, vocational training and work experience
VECs	Vocational and Education Committees (later became ETBs)