gretb

Bord Oideachais agus Oiliúna
na Gaillimhe agus Ros Comáin
*Galway and Roscommon
Education and Training Board*

SOLAS learning works

Galway and Roscommon
Education and Training Board

SELF-EVALUATION REPORT

December
2021

*Prepared for the Inaugural Review
of Quality Assurance by Quality
and Qualifications Ireland*

Foreword

Galway and Roscommon Education and Training Board's vision to *'actively lead the provision of high-quality education and training programmes and services that respond to the changing needs of learners and society'* is predicated by our intention to **empower people for life**. In order to achieve the high-level objectives as set out in GRETB's Strategy Statement 2017-2021 it is incumbent upon us to reflect, review, and assess our performance. It is timely therefore, as we reach the end of the lifetime of the current Strategy Statement, that we have conducted this self-evaluation as part of QQI's inaugural review of quality assurance in ETBs.

The experience of engaging in self-evaluation has been an extremely positive one for Galway and Roscommon ETB. As the catalyst to produce this report, preparation for the inaugural review has facilitated an organisation-wide reflection on the significant developments, achievements, and successes of both learners and staff over the previous five years.

This evaluation presents a snapshot of the structures and systems of governance in operation across the Further Education and Training service in the organisation. It confirms that they are both rigorous and robust but it also facilitates preparations for the next stage in the QA life-cycle in GRETB. As GRETB's learners' needs change, so too must the solutions and services we provide.

The process of self-evaluation is a significant undertaking. I would like to thank the Quality Assurance staff, the members of the Self-Evaluation Oversight Group, our learners, staff, and all of our stakeholders who gave their time, dedication, and feedback to this process, culminating in the report presented here.

We look forward to welcoming the QQI review panel to GRETB in Spring 2022 to engage in further dialogue and to receive feedback and guidance for our plans for the continuous enhancement of our quality assurance processes.

David Leahy

Chief Executive

Glossary and Abbreviations

A list of definitions of terms and acronyms

AEO	Adult Education Officer
AIGS	Adult Information and Guidance Services.
AIS	Assessment Instrument Specifications
CDT	Curriculum Development Team
CSG	Consortium Steering Group
CTC	Community Training Scheme
DES	Department of Education
DFHERIS	Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science
EA	External Authentication
ELC	Early Learning and Care
ETBI	Education and Training Boards Ireland
FET	Further Education and Training
GCC	Galway Community College
GRETB	Galway and Roscommon Education and Training Board
GTI	Galway Technical Institute
HEA	Higher Education Authority
IBEC	Irish Business and Employers Confederation
ILTA	Irish Learning Technology Association
IV	Internal Verification
LTI	Local Training Initiative
MIMLOS	Minimum intended module learning outcomes
MIPLOS	Minimum intended programme learning outcomes
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NALA	National Adult Literacy Agency
NALA	National Adult Literacy Agency
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
NFQ	National Framework of Qualifications
OETC	Outdoor Education and Training Centre
OSD	Organisation Support and Development
PL&D	Professional Learning & Development
PLC	Post Leaving Certificate
PLSS	Programme Learner Support System
QA	Quality Assurance
QBS	Quality Business System
QIP	Quality Improvement Plan
QQI	Quality and Qualifications Ireland
RAP	Results Approval Process
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
SER	Self-Evaluation Report
SLA	Service Level Agreement
SLMRU	Skills and Labour Market Research Unit
SME	Subject Matter Expert
SMT	Senior Management Team
SOLAS	An tSeirbhís Oideachais Leanúnaigh agus Scileanna (Further Education and Training Authority)
STP	Specialist Training Provider
TEL	Technology-Enhanced Learning
TNA	Training Needs Assessment
ToR	Terms of Reference
TQAS	Transition Quality Assurance System
TSO	Training Standards Officer
UDL	Universal Design for Learning
VEC	Vocational Educational Committee
VTOS	Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme

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Photo: Chaosheng Zhang

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Background and Context

1.1 Context

Galway and Roscommon Education and Training Board (GRETB) is a statutory education and training body, which was established on 1st July 2013 under the Education and Training Boards Act, 2013, as an amalgamation of three Vocational Educational Committees (Galway City, County Galway, and County Roscommon). The former FÁS training centre, Galway, came under the auspices of GRETB in July 2014.

GRETB employs over 2,000 staff and has 23,367 learners annually. GRETB administers a budget of approximately €115 million with over €50 million allocated to FET. There are over 40 Further Education and Training Centres across Galway and Roscommon, including one PLC College, three Dual Provision schools that offer PLC courses, several community education and training initiatives, 19 Post-Primary Schools and two Community Primary Schools.

GRETB's further education and training centres are wide-reaching across counties Galway and Roscommon with over 15,800 learners taking part in programmes both full and part-time. Just under 800 FET staff members manage and deliver education and training through a wide range of programmes and services.

GRETB offers a wide range of full-time and part-time programmes from Levels 1 – 6 on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) throughout the region. Unaccredited provision forms a large component of Core Personal and General Learning provision for learners provided by Adult Basic Education and Community Education Services. Central to supporting this FET provision is the Adult Information and Guidance Services.

Geographically, GRETB covers an **area of 8699 km,** including four offshore islands, and is the second largest ETB in the country in terms of land area. GRETB serves a **population of just over 320,000** people (258,552 in County Galway and 64,544 in County Roscommon). The GRETB region is characterised by a diverse and unique natural landscape that includes a spectacular coastline. The key context information is set out below, but a more detailed analysis can be explored in the GRETB *Provider Profile*.

A distinguishing element of GRETB's provision is that County Galway has the single largest, and most populous, **Gaeltacht** area in Ireland. The promotion of education and training trí mhéan na Gaeilge is an essential element of GRETB's core service. GRETB has several FET centres which provide learning through the medium of Gaeilge. GRETB has eight Coláistí Lán-Ghaeilge within the scheme.

In 2016, the **National Unemployment** rate was 12.9%. Figure 1 below illustrates the unemployment rates for Galway and Roscommon during the same period.

The overall **deprivation** rate for **County Galway was 1.81** in 2016 which improved from 1.56 in 2011 according to CSO

(2016) and is just marginally above the national average. There are 13 Electoral Districts4 with a score of -10 or below which categorises them as **'disadvantaged'**.

In **County Roscommon** the deprivation rate in 2016 was **-2.36** which is marginally below average and an improvement from 2011. There are eight Electoral districts with a HP deprivation score of -10 or below which fall within the 'disadvantaged' band of deprivation. When the data is examined at Small Area (SA) level there are four SAs which are classified as **'very disadvantaged'** and a further 44 SAs which are classified as **'disadvantaged'** primarily in the northwest of the county around Castlerea, Ballaghaderreen and Boyle. (CSO 2016).

Figure 1: Unemployment Rate in GRETB region

11.7% in County Galway

13% in County Roscommon

12.9% in Galway City (CSO, 2016)

There are three **unemployment blackspots** in the GRETB region:

1 Boyle, Co. Roscommon

2 Scainimh, Co. na Gaillimhe

3 Garumna, Co. na Gaillimhe

Deprivation Score (2016)

1.81

Galway

-2.36

Roscommon
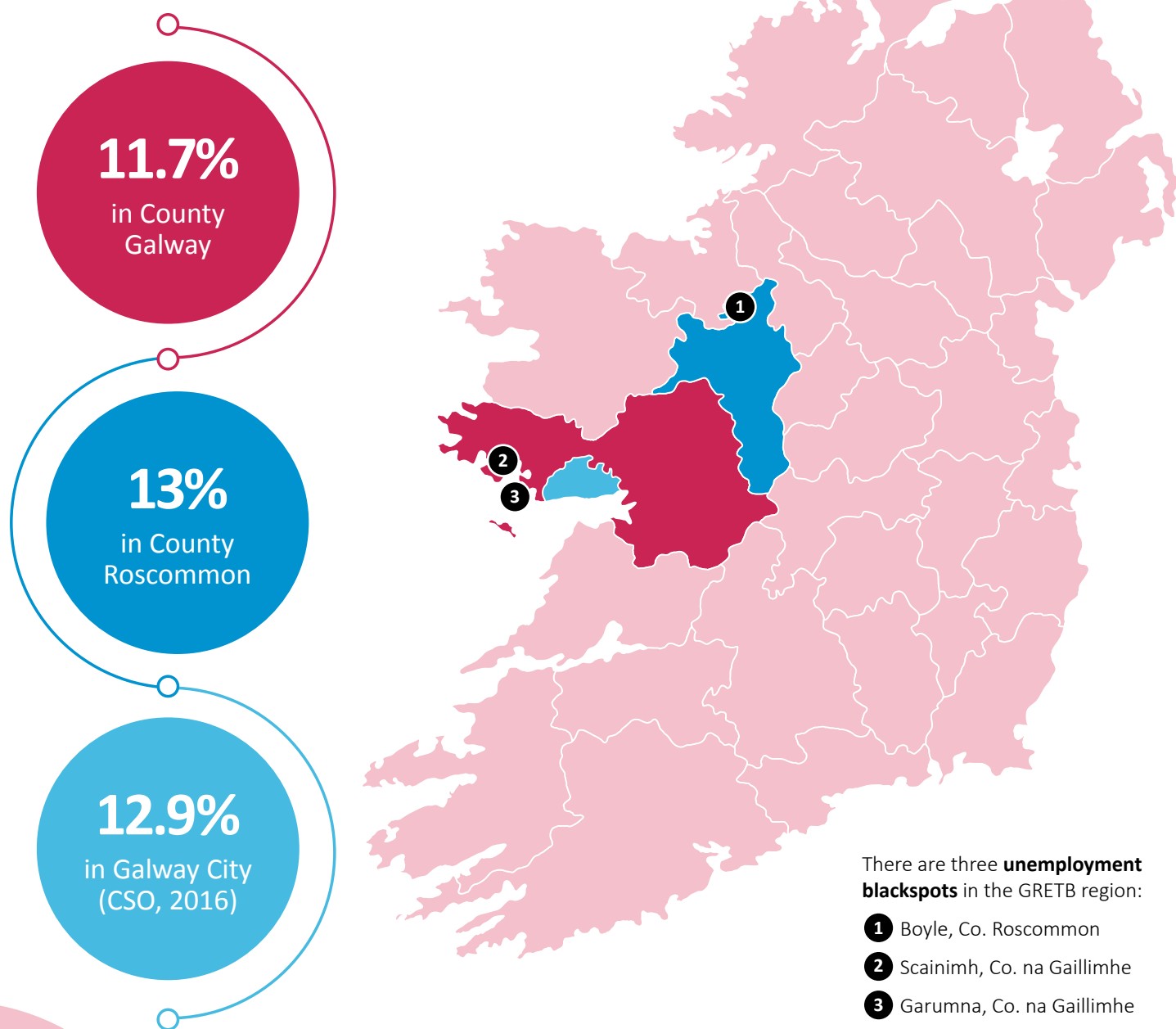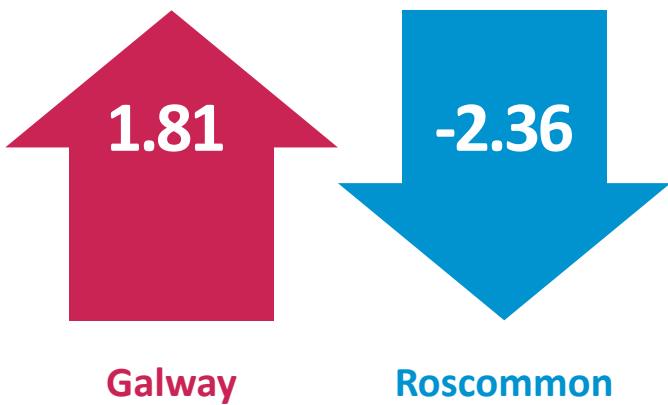
*The 2016 CSO figures below show **educational attainment** levels for the region. These are consistent with national levels, as stated in the CSO's Educational Attainment Thematic Report 2019, 14% of persons aged 18-64 were engaged in a Level 4/5/6 programme in the state.*

17,356
County Galway
(Technical/Vocational advanced certificate)

6,636
County Roscommon
(Technical/Vocational advanced certificate)

6,433
Galway City
(Technical/Vocational advanced certificate)

The primary categories of employment in the region are set out below. The West, Galway in particular, has the largest MedTech cluster in Europe. Manufacturing accounts for over 16% of industry whilst the agriculture, forestry and fishing industries combined, account for 9% of all employment in the region.

GRETB's organisational and governance structures can be reviewed in our *Provider Profile*.

Section 4 of the Provider Profile describes GRETB's approach to quality assurance.

Medical Devices

Information Communications Technology

Wholesale and Retail

Manufacturing

Health

Agri/forestry/ fishing

Construction

GRETB's centres by location and provision interactive map

To view GRETB centres by provision and location control (ctrl) and click on the interactive map below.

1.2 Recent Developments and Initiatives

GRETB has developed new initiatives over the past number of years, in response to both local, regional and national policies and needs. These initiatives were developed to engage learners and ensure an improved service to those learners. These have been categorised under a number of headings and further details are available in the GRETB *Provider Profile*.

New Programmes and modes of delivery:

Apprenticeships: Auctioneering and Property Services, ICT Software, Auctioneering, Plumbing, Arborist, Craft Butchery.

FET Traineeships: Outdoor Education, Childcare, Social Media, Health Care and Office Skills, Media Production

Modes of Delivery: Alternative Education Service for 12-15 Year olds 'TURAS', Youthreach and Youth Services 'DEEP' Programme, Level 3 Foundations Programme in Boyle.

Programme Development: Arborist Apprenticeship, Agriculture Programmes at QQI Level 5 and 6 and Remote Working Skills (Online) Programme.

Employer Engagement: Increased focus on those in employment, including Level 5 Traineeship in Engineering

Turas Alternative Education Centre

The 'Evaluation of the Turas Alternative Education Pilot Programme' authored by Dr.Clíona Murray, School of Education, NUI Galway was launched in January 2021. The main finding was that 'the Centre has high impact for the young people who are enrolled and that it is effective in enabling them to continue their education.' Key recommendations were that; the Turas Centre framework for practice should be used as a template for future development of sector, the Department of Education should develop policies on Alternative Education, future development should adopt a cluster model and cross-sectoral exchange of learning could be initiated.

Staff Supports/Development

Wellbeing: 2021 IBEC List of: Leading in Wellbeing – Top 100 Companies. Mindfulness and Yoga courses for Staff are available online. May 2021 virtual retirement seminar.

Upskilling / Professional Development: TEL SharePoint April 2020, 'Getting Read to Teach online' course developed and delivered, Regional Skills Award winner January 2021. First virtual CPD event for FET coordinators in 2021, QA Training for new and existing centres, including writing briefs and assessments

QA Supports: Supported new programme development and the transition of Community Training programmes from TQAS to FET QA System. New policy and programmes developed alongside centralised contingency assessment arrangements.

Wider Community Supports

Funding: In December 2020, over €200,000 from the Mitigating Educational Disadvantage Fund was disbursed to 32 Community Education Projects. In September 2021, over €312,000 from the Mitigating Educational Disadvantage Fund was allocated to Community Education Projects in the region. Community Education Grants are also allocated annually to over 60 community groups in the region, with over €80,000 distributed annually through this grant scheme.

Community Engagement: In April 2020, the Community Education YouTube Channel was launched. From April 2020 a range of free community education courses were delivered online. Many of these courses were provided with the support of a sign language interpreter to ensure access. In July 2021, the GRETB Youth Work Plan 2021-2024 was launched.

Sample of recent learner achievements

- In 2021 Media Production learners developed a promotional video created for the Galway Film Fleadh. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qZQjHOsQBhI

- GTI Art showcase https://gtiartshowcase.weebly.com/

- Virtual Art Exhibition Gort https://fb.watch/5ideKY7x2u/

- GRETB apprentice won four medals at national skills competition in 2019.

OSD Developments

- GRETB moved to Payroll Shared Services on **12th June 2020**. CORE was implemented as the HR/Payroll System.

- GRETB's roll out of the SUN project with over 200 users trained on the new Financial System in **May 2021**.

- Public Sector Duty Values statement agreed, assessment and validation of Equality and Human Rights issues completed and action plan for implementation of GRETB's Public Sector Duty now in place.

Challenges during a global pandemic:

The main challenge for GRETB during the pandemic was to ensure continued engagement with the learner. GRETB responded to the needs of learners and staff by offering support, technology, and training in new pedagogical methodologies throughout the period of the pandemic. Thus, ensuring learners continued their programmes despite restrictions and other factors. The Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL) department worked closely with the IT department to develop programmes and supports for all staff. The TEL SharePoint was developed as a central repository for TEL resources and included a bespoke course 'Getting Ready to Teach Online' alongside other training resources such as using teams for teaching and using a visualiser for remote delivery. The 'Tea with TEL' initiative is an online session for staff to troubleshoot problems in terms of remote delivery and share ideas with colleagues. Teaching staff were given laptops and other technology, such as visualisers, to enable online delivery and assist teaching. Learners were given laptops, as required, through a disadvantaged laptop loan scheme.

Innovative ideas emerged whereby some learners who had poor Wi-Fi could access broadband in a safe manner in the carparks of their FET centres. Many learners who had no access to technology were posted resources by teaching staff to complete and return. Course materials and assessments were adapted to suit the new learning environment. An example of this is the QQI Level 6 National and Regional Tour Guiding programme adhering to good assessment practice, teachers and tutors provided fully invigilated exams remotely to learners.

There were specific challenges for practical programmes such as the apprenticeships. The training workshops had to be reconfigured to allow for apprentices to return to some elements of training. Class timetables were adjusted with some classes beginning at 7am and others running until 6.30pm to accommodate all learners.

All FET services developed online presentations and presented to potential learners as part of course recruitment. Online Open Days became the 'norm'. For some programmes, such as apprenticeships, registrations and inductions for new learners were moved online.

The Community Education Service developed a suite of non-accredited courses open to the wider community and delivered these courses online throughout the pandemic. Many of these courses were delivered with the support of a sign language interpreter. The aim was to engage with people who were isolated or lonely and facilitate them to connect with others as well as learning new skills. Almost 1,000 learners availed of these online courses. The tutors in the Community Education Service and Adult Basic Education developed a range of short video clips for the YouTube channel to enable learners to practice in their own homes, at their own time and pace. There has been 9000+ views to date.

Responding to local community and employer needs, GRETB provided new programmes including 15 online courses in the QQI Level 5 Infection Prevention & Control, which was a direct response to employer needs and requests.

The Training Centre participated in a national pilot to run antigen testing in training and education settings. The Employer Engagement Unit offered upskilling courses specifically for learners in receipt of the Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP).

The experience of delivering Further Education and Training during the pandemic and the series of lockdowns demonstrates the ability of all GRETB staff to respond to ensure learner engagement is maintained. The ability of our learners to continue to engage in a variety of different ways shows the creativity and resilience of our learners.

A full profile of GRETB's FET provision is contained in the *Provider Profile* that accompanies this report.

1.3 Context of FET Provision

Strategic Context

GRETB agreed a Strategic Performance Agreement in consultation with SOLAS for 2018-2020. This agreement sets out the context, strategic priorities, and GRETB's contribution to achieving key national FET sector targets over the period of the agreement. It also articulates the ETB's commitment to supporting the implementation of a range of national policies and strategies relevant to FET provision and identifies the key risks and challenges which must be mitigated and addressed to ensure successful delivery of this agreement. The agreement is the product of extensive dialogue and engagement between SOLAS and GRETB, with independent input and validation from a panel of experts with an understanding of Irish and international good practice in further education and training systems. A set of high-level priorities were set in 2018.

Future FET: Transforming Learning 2020-2024

GRETB continues to engage with SOLAS to deliver upon the aims and objectives of the current national FET strategy. The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted progress and implementation of the strategy, nationally. The appointment of a new Director of Further Education and Training in GRETB in September 2021 is bringing changes in the FET management structure which will reflect the need to continue to create and strengthen pathways through FET provision by building skills from foundation unaccredited learning, through the six levels of learning and establishing clear, objectives to ensure inclusive provision. This will be underpinned by addressing staffing needs across units and departments to ensure consistent, quality assured provision.

1.4 Self-Evaluation Report - GRETB's Engagement with the Inaugural Review Process

GRETB followed all QQI guidelines in the planning and preparation for the Inaugural Review including adopting the proposed approach to the Self Evaluation Report as contained in the **Inaugural Review of Quality Assurance in Education and Training Boards Review Handbook**. A Self-Evaluation Oversight Group was established to oversee the progress of the review. The proposed structure in the handbook has been adopted in the Self Evaluation Report under the three objectives:

Objective 1: Governance and Management of Quality
Objective 2: Teaching, Learning and Assessment
Objective 3: Self Evaluation, Monitoring and Review

Each section of the report addresses the self-evaluation using the following subheadings: **Description – Evaluation - Conclusion**

Figure 2: Planning and Review Timelines

The QA department delivered several presentations to update and **inform staff** of the Inaugural Review process. Information was also communicated to all staff by email by the CE.

2019	QQI INAUGURAL REVIEW PROCESS BEGINS WITH ETBS
2020 July	Quality Assurance Administrator appointed
2020 Sept	Desk Based Review & Scoping commences
2020 Sept	Timelines established
2020 Oct	Presentation on Inaugural Review to SMT and Directors
2020 Dec	Presentation on Inaugural Review to GRETB Board
2021 Jan	CE communicates messaging to all GRETB staff
2021 Feb	AONTAS Virtual Forum
2021 March	Questionnaire to GRETB Staff
2021 April	Questionnaire to FET Learners
2021 May	Focus Groups
2021 June	Drafting Self Evaluation
2021 Sept	Submission of Provider Profile
2021 Oct	Drafting of final version of SE Report
2021 Oct	Meeting of Self Evaluation Oversight Group to approve SE Report
2021 Oct	Meeting of QA Council to approve SE Report
2021 Nov	Submission of Self Evaluation Report to QQI

1.5 Self Evaluation Oversight Group

A Self-Evaluation Oversight Group was established to oversee and guide the self-evaluation process and comment on GRETB's approach to quality assurance and enhancement as required for the review by QQI. It fulfils the role and responsibilities delegated to it by GRETB's FET Quality Council. The *Self-evaluation Oversight Group Terms of Reference and Responsibilities are outlined in Appendix 5*.

Membership of the GRETB Self-Evaluation Oversight Group
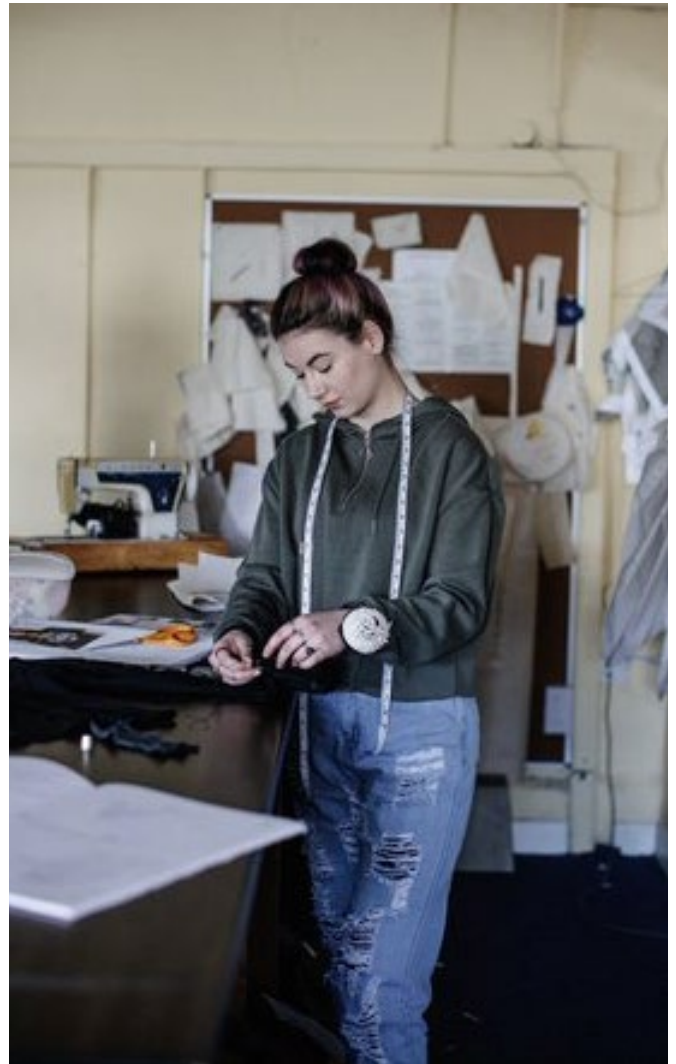**Chair:** Head of Corporate Services
Secretary: QA Administrator
Ordinary Members include:
Training Centre Manager, QA Officer, Adult Education Officers, Compliance Officer, Director of Further Education and Training (since Sept 2021).
The Self Evaluation Oversight Group held 18 meetings between 26th January and 11th November 2021.

1.6 Internal and External Stakeholder Evaluations

A **desk-based review** of all GRETB policies and procedures was undertaken by the QA Co-Ordinator and Administrator in 2020. A series of **stakeholder engagements** was then planned which were naturally influenced by the restrictions imposed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. A variety of mechanisms were employed in engaging with GRETB's key stakeholders such as **questionnaires** and **focus groups**.

GRETB Individual Staff Questionnaire- GRETB staff members were invited to participate in the self-evaluation process by completing an Individual Staff Questionnaire. Feedback on the effectiveness of GRETB's quality improvement/quality assurance systems, approach to blended learning, working remotely and Professional Development was sought. There were 310 responses.

GRETB Learner Questionnaire- Learners were invited to complete a questionnaire in Quarter 2 of 2021 with 473 responses collated. The questionnaire asked learners to respond to a series of statements based on their experiences in FET.

AONTAS Virtual Learner Forum Event — GRETB has, for many years, worked in partnership with AONTAS to deliver the annual National Learner Forum. An example of this was in June 2020. GRETB identified learners and AONTAS facilitated consultation aimed at establishing learner feedback from those participating in GRETB programmes. A virtual forum and an online questionnaire, that included questions on the impact of COVID-19, were completed.

Focus Groups Twelve focus groups were carried out online. The groups consulted are highlighted below in Figure 3 . After each online meeting, participants received a follow-up email. This was to allow further written feedback via MS Forms.

External Stakeholder Questionnaire– One focus group was held with external groups including Family Resource Centres, Local Community Development Companies, NGOs; Disability Groups and a group working with the DEAF Community. These community & Voluntary organisations work with the Community Education and Cooperation Hours services of GRETB.

Employer Engagement Questionnaire – 140 businesses in the region were questioned in September 2021 to ascertain their potential skills shortages and how best GRETB could respond. There was feedback from a range of employers from multinationals, SMEs and national groups such as Ashford Castle, Éire Composites, Intuity Technologies, Joyce's Supermarkets, Kevin Burke Tyres, Pure Flowers and Supermacs.

Internal Stakeholder Evaluations - All GRETB FET centres regularly conduct learner and course evaluations as standard practice. As part of the self-evaluation process, QQl registered centres were invited to submit examples of evaluations and learner feedback. A sample of the responses were consulted for the SER.

In 2020, Galway Technical Institute (GTI) carried out an internal questionnaire with learners, receiving 480 responses on their experiences in FET. GTI shared the results with the QA department.

The Community Education Service conducted a survey amongst community groups in April 2020 regarding their ongoing participation and experience of online learning. Seventy community groups responded, and this informs the work of the Community Education Service, particularly during COVID-19 restrictions.

Figure 3: Composition of Focus Groups

FOCUS GROUPS (INTERNAL):	
FET Practitioners Level 1 – 4	FET Practitioners Level 5-6
Learners (non-accredited)	Learners Level 1 – 4
Learners Level 5 – 6	Employer Engagement
Learner Support	Staff Recruitment/Development/Staff Management
IT/Finance/Buildings	Community Education
FOCUS GROUPS (EXTERNAL)	
Second Providers / Community Training	FRCs
NGOs	

2

Objective 1:
Governance and
Management of
Quality

2.1 GRETB's Mission and Strategy

In 2017, GRETB approved the *GRETB Strategy Statement 2017-2021*, which states the organisation's vision, mission, and core values. The Strategy's vision is to respond to learners' and society's needs by delivering high-quality education and training programmes and services. GRETB aims to provide programmes that are transformative for the learners thus enabling them to realise their full potential. GRETB values the diversity of community-wide, lifelong learning opportunities across the region.

2.1.1 Description

The Strategy Statement describes the core values which guide GRETB's interactions with learners, staff, stakeholders, and the wider community. The goals set out in the Strategy Statement have corresponding priorities which are met through supporting actions.

GRETB's Vision and Mission are as follows:

Vision

To actively lead the provision of high-quality education and training programmes and services that respond to the changing needs of learners and society.

Mission

To support individuals through learning, to achieve their full potential and contribute to social, cultural, and economic development.
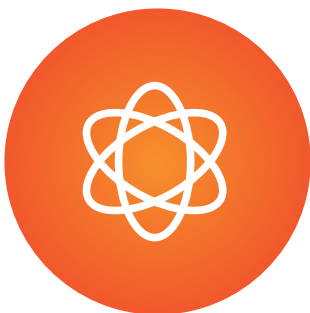
Core Values

Leadership – Actively leading in the provision of education and training in the region and influencing the future direction of the sector.
Inclusivity – Openness, respectful and inclusive in the treatment of our learners, stakeholders, and staff. A culture where diversity is welcomed and valued.
Collaboration- Strong, mutually beneficial partnerships and teamwork, facilitating the sharing of knowledge, ideas, expertise, and skills.
Innovation – Creative and innovative thinking by encouraging new ideas, trying out different approaches and responding to change.
Accountability – Responsible decision-making, open, honest, and transparent in all activities.

The work of the FET service is driven by a set of high-level objectives as set out in the *GRETB Strategy Statement 2017-2021*, under four strategic goals, which are in line with national strategies on education:

1. Improve the learning experience and success of learners.
2. Improve the progress of learners at risk of disadvantage, those with special needs or with language, cultural and social differences.
3. Provide high quality education and training programmes.
4. Ensure our organisational infrastructure (people, process, and structure) is efficient and effective.

GRETB is committed 'to actively lead(ing) the provision of high-quality education and training programmes and services that respond to the changing needs of learners and society' as envisioned in the *GRETB Strategy Statement 2017-2021*. Strategic goals include the provision of high-quality education and training programmes.

GRETB's approach to quality is guided by QQI's statutory guidelines for the following areas:

• *Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines (2016)*

• *Sector-Specific Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Education and Training Boards (ETBs) (2017)*

• *Topic-Specific Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Statutory Apprenticeship Programmes (2016)*

• *Topic-Specific Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Blended Learning Programmes (2018)*

High Level Priorities

- Literacy Integration
- Guidance and Course Recruitment Service
- Technology Enhanced Learning
- Employer and Employee Engagement
- Enhanced Higher Education Links
- Increasing the Retention of Learners
- Traineeships
- Development of New Apprenticeships
- Professional Development
- Development of Tourism and Hospitality Provision

The primary responsibility for its quality assurance lies with GRETB. The organisation is in the process of establishing a quality system composed of all internal quality assurance policies and procedures. This framework of policies and their management will provide the structure for GRETB to ensure the maintenance and enhancement of a quality service. To further ensure continuous improvement GRETB FET provision is subject to the submission of annual **Quality Improvement Plans** to QQI and periodic review by QQI.

GRETB staff are members of National Fora and working groups such as the **Quality Strategy Group** and the **QA Network** and the work in developing the national assessment procedures handbooks.

GRETB is committed to using the **European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training (EQARF)** and deploys the four-stage quality cycle process of the EQARF. This process involved ongoing review, research and development, continuous improvement of standards and the advancement of culture of quality enhancement.

GRETB's re-engagement with QQI in **2018** led to a submission of an **Executive Self Evaluation Report** reviewing its quality assurance processes across all FET provision. Since then, a quality improvement plan (QIP) is submitted to QQI annually. The key quality improvement areas were documented in GRETB's **Progress Report 2019**. The key priority areas are set out in the table below.

PRIORITY AREA	Implemented and Delivered
Operationalise a QA governance structure	GRETB set up a robust governance structure including a FET Quality Council, QA Steering Group, FET Programme Board and Apprenticeship Quality Council.
NLN, LTIs and CTCs transfer from TQAS to GRETB's QA system	GRETB successfully completed the merge of the three Department of Justice projects with GRETB's QA system. The process of moving NLN, LTI and CTC programmes from TQAS to GRETB's QA system is complete.
Establish a QA department	The appointment of additional staff was fulfilled i.e., Administration support of ten hours per week (academic year) was allocated to the QA department during 2019 and a Quality Assurance Administrator was appointed in 2020 on a full-time basis.
Improve Communications	Improvements to website specification have been agreed with the IT Dept. and are in development, including the utilisation of GRETB Connect.

FET QA Governance Structure

The GRETB Strategy Statement 2017 – 2021 states the organisation's aim is to deliver a high-quality learning experience and support to individuals. The core values outlined within this statement, motivate the work of all staff, with a vision to actively lead the provision of high-quality education and training programmes and services that respond to the changing needs of learners and society.

GRETB established a governance structure to oversee the operation of a quality system for its FET provision. The governance structure also meets GRETB's statutory obligations, as a registered FET provider, to Quality & Qualifications Ireland (QQI).

The FET Quality Council oversees the planning, co-ordination, quality, development, and improvement of all aspects of GRETB's further education and training provision. The Quality Assurance (QA) Steering Group, the Programme Board, and the newly created Apprenticeship Quality Council report to the FET Quality Council.

Figure 4: GRETB QA Governance Structure
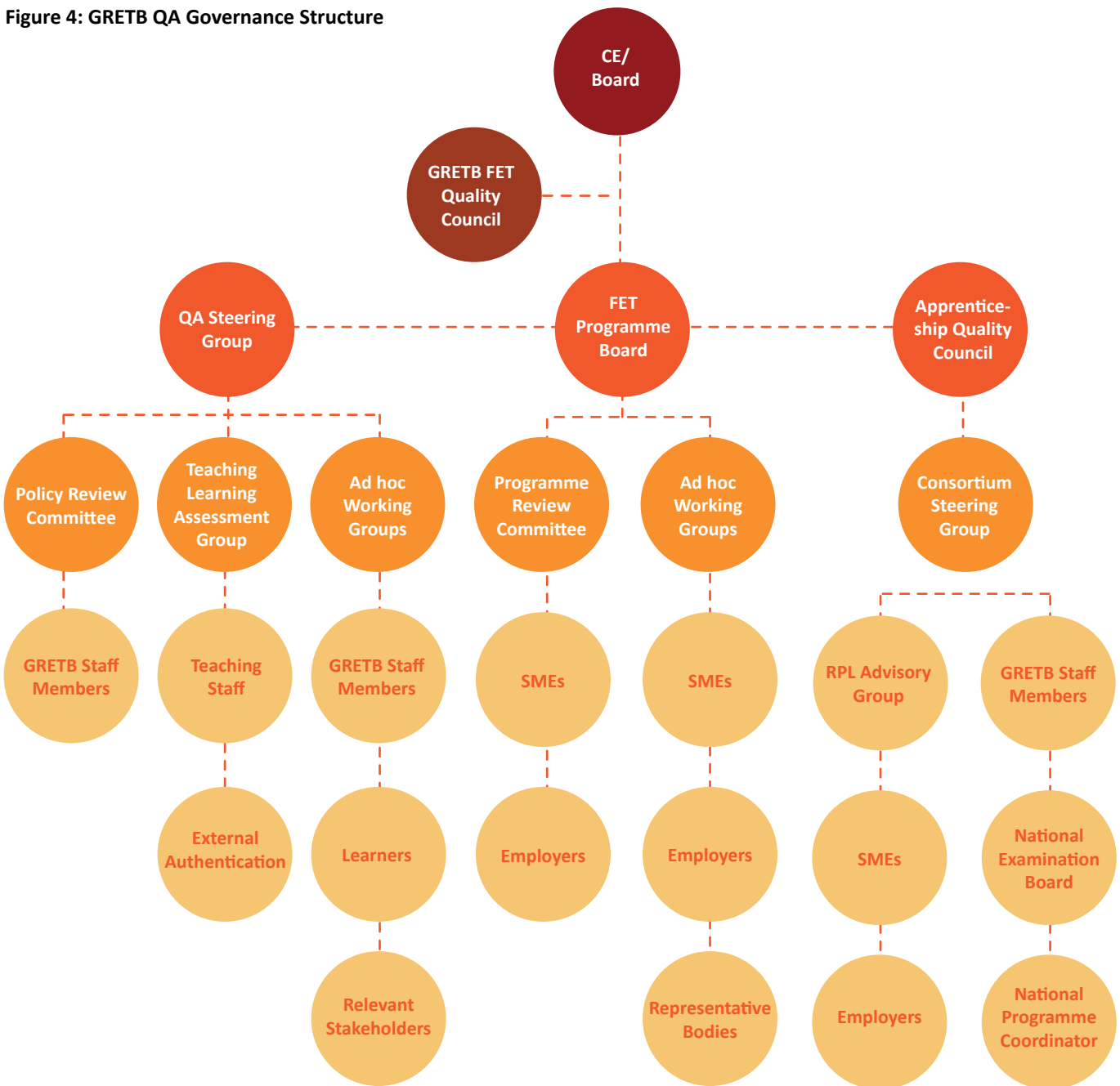
2.1.2 Evaluation

The results from the staff questionnaire, suggest that there is a high level of awareness of the Vision, Mission and Values and the Strategy Statement 2017-2021 amongst employees. The consultation on the development of the strategy alongside the promotion of the strategy in Schools and centres has increased this awareness.

Analysis from the focus groups carried out for the self-evaluation review, appear to indicate that the core values may differ in priority across some of the programmes in GRETB, but the overall mission and vision were maintained. The Training Centre identified in one focus group that 'quality' and 'professionalism' were very important while the community education participants identified 'community', 'confidence' and 'respect'. It is not unusual for core values to change and adapt over time and the new strategy statement currently being prepared is seeking input on what the values of GRETB should be in 2021.

Analysis of staff and learner questionnaires and focus groups identified a variance in understanding of GRETB's core values. In the case of GRETB staff, this may indicate a deficit in understanding of the work and responsibilities across the full remit of programmes and services.

There are also gaps in documented evidence that the key pillars of the organisation consult and collaborate in ensuring the values of the organisation are communicated, understood, and upheld consistently.

The current management structures in place within FET and the QA Governance structure are robust. There is a senior manager with line management responsible for QA. The FET Quality Council has a diverse membership with both internal and external members providing expertise in the oversight of Quality Assurance.

2.1.3 Conclusion and recommendations

It is important to note that there are governance structures in place that are both robust and vigorous across GRETB. There is a clear management structure in place within the organisation which ensures clear lines of responsibility and communication. The governance of quality is robust with a strong expertise on the Quality Council from both internal and external stakeholders. GRETB has a Strategy Statement in place and an extensive consultation on a new Strategy Statement from 2022 – 2026 is underway. The completion date is the end of December 2021. The Strategy Statement 2022 – 2026 will be published in early 2022.

There is a very high level of awareness amongst GRETB staff regarding GRETB's Missions and Values, and these are reflected in the *Performance Agreements with SOLAS*. These agreements bind the organisation to the delivery of agreed high-level actions which are based on national targets but the actions and strategies to meet these targets are developed locally to ensure regional, local and organisational priorities are met.

GRETB should consider the establishment of a Strategy Statement implementation team to ensure consistent communication of the statement to all staff. The team should also monitor and evaluate progress in implementing the strategy. It may be beneficial for the organisation to host a series of briefings and workshops to communicate and develop a shared understanding of the new Strategy Statement upon publication.

The design and implementation of a mechanism for internal geographic area networks is also recommended. These could facilitate ongoing cross-organisational review, consultation, and programme planning.

An internal communications mechanism, used effectively, would ensure staff are aware of the full scope of GRETB provision, services and responsibilities.

'I am aware of GRETB's mission statement'

79%
of staff agreed

'I am aware of GRETB's Strategy Statement 2017-2021'.

62%
of staff agreed

'I am familiar with the ethos in my workplace'.

86%
of staff agreed

Photo: Chaosheng Zhang

Learner Testimonial

"I attended two java courses at GRETB delivered by Compupac Training Solutions. Both were very professionally taught and enabled me to pass exams in Java 1(1ZO-808) and Java 2(1ZO-809).

I enjoyed the whole experience greatly and the certifications acquired helped me secure a place in UL to continue further studies in Software Development. I can highly recommend both GRETB and Compupac Training Solutions to anyone considering taking a course in this area".

- GRETB Learner

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

2.2.1 Description

Vision

To actively lead the provision of high-quality education and training programmes and services that respond to the changing needs of learners and society.

GRETB's vision, expressed in the *Strategy Statement*, is to provide high quality education and training. In compliance with the *Sector Specific Guidelines* , published by QQI, GRETB began the process of establishing a **governance structure** to oversee the quality assurance of its FET provision. Prior to creating a formalised structure, management of the implementation of quality assurance was carried out by the **Quality Assurance (QA) Steering Group**, supported by ad-hoc working groups. These groups became part of the of the newly created FET governance structure (Figure 5). Decisions on the structure of governance and Terms of Reference (ToR) were informed by the *Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines*, published by QQI, the **Shared Quality Assurance Enhancement Project**, supported by ETBI, and briefings in FET governance attended by GRETB management. In 2020, the main structure was agreed and ToR for all groups were agreed by 2021.

The historical lack of clearly defined governance structures in GRETB created an urgency for the QA Department to establish a governance structure with associated Terms of Reference (ToR). By utilising the informal resources already in place, in tandem with learning from the briefings, a governance structure was established. Each of the main governance groups considered and amended the ToR from the Shared Quality Assurance Enhancement Project. Amendments were made to account for the context of existing FET operations. The ToR for the Working Groups are determined by the purpose of the group. Membership of the QA governance groups includes representation from across GRETB's FET services, stakeholders, subject matter experts and external authenticators. It is intended to have learner representation on the various groups but that has not happened to date.

Membership and ToR are currently available on the relevant Microsoft Teams space. The QA department recognises that this is unsatisfactory from the perspective of communication and transparency. Staff are currently in discussions with the IT department to set up a Quality Assurance section on GRETB Connect where all relevant documentation will be published.

The Staff Questionnaire reported the following in relation to the quality culture and communications:

'A culture of quality is promoted in my workplace'

83% of staff agreed *(13% neutral)*

My awareness of the importance of Quality Assurance has improved in the last 3 years'

92% of staff agreed

'...communications needs to have a cohesive and unified approach through a dedicated person/team'

'Access to staff information is limited and could be improved'

The majority of FET practitioners in the focus groups felt 'communication' as a core value was missing.

Internal CPD on all systems relating to GRETB from QA, policies and procedures, defined roles and responsibilities of staff

Management of Quality Assurance

Quality assurance is managed across a number of levels from Centre/Programme manager to the authentication and approvals process and up through the levels of governance, ultimately resting with the FET Quality Council and the Director of FET and CE.

FET Centre/Programme managers and **Training Standards Officers** report directly to their line manager i.e. AEO or Training Centre Manager, whilst PLC Principals report to the Director of FET. The QA department supports the Centre/Programme managers and the school principals in their QA responsibilities.

Quality assurance of assessments leading to QQI awards is managed by **internal verification (IV)**, **external authentication (EA)** and **results approval processes(RAP)**. While centres are responsible for their own IV, the IV reports are presented at the Results Approval Panel (RAP) meetings for discussion. The EA and RAP processes are managed through the QA department. Any QA issues which arise during the assessment process for a centre are discussed with the Centre/Programme manager during his/her individual RAP meeting. Any recommendations for **corrective action** are made and monitored for implementation at the following RAP meeting. The QA department reports on the outcomes of the assessment process to the QA Steering Group and the Quality Council.

The **FET Quality Council** held its inaugural meeting on the 9th April 2020. The purpose of the Quality Council is to oversee the planning, co-ordination, quality, development and improvement of all aspects of the further education and training offering of the ETB. It protects, maintains and develops the standards of education and training programmes and related activities. The Council met regularly throughout 2020 to ensure that the contingency assessment arrangements, resulting from COVID-19 restrictions, proposed by centres adhered to QQI standards.

2.2.2 Evaluation

A FET governance structure has been put in place which is beginning to give a coherence to the management of a system to assure the quality of our FET services and provision. The role of the governance structure was particularly important during the initial stages of the COVID-19 restrictions. FET centres had to rapidly change their assessment practices at a time when assessments were a priority in programme delivery. Centres implemented contingency assessment arrangements, with the support of the QA department, and approval of the Quality Council.

The various governance groups have terms of membership of 2 to 2.5 years. This will ensure freshness of expertise and insights, and a broadening of experience for participants. The experience of being a member of a governance group can be transferred to local situations. When group membership changes the QA department plans to provide induction/training for new members.

It has been challenging to populate the various governance groups with the broad range of stakeholders that would offer full representation of interests. Currently, group composition is satisfactory except for the **lack of learner representation**. This is recognised as a key issue for resolution and the QA department is liaising with AONTAS for advice/support in giving learners meaningful representation on the relevant governance oversight groups.

The **QA Steering Group** meets regularly, approximately 6 times a year. It was operating before the formalisation of a governance structure and is therefore the most established of the governance groups.

The **Programme Board** (see Section 2.5.1) meets on a needs-basis, as centres apply to deliver new, validated programmes. The speed at which the Programme Board approves requests is hampered by the staffing capacity in the QA department, which receives, reviews, and processes the application as the first step in the request process.

Each of the working groups is chaired by a member of the QA Steering Group or Programme Board to ensure transparency in reporting and accountability. Reports from the working groups are standing items on the agenda of both governance groups. Each of the working groups has proved to be an effective means of progressing issues of quality and quality governance. Each working group is created for a specific purpose and every effort is made when asking staff to join these groups to spread the learning opportunities arising from membership of the group across all FET staff.

Feedback from the **staff questionnaire** indicates that staff have an increasing awareness of quality assurance (92%) and that a culture of quality is being promoted in their centre (83%). The establishment of a QA department in 2018 and a governance structure in 2020 will have contributed to the creation of a quality culture within FET.

Feedback from the staff questionnaire and focus groups indicates that communication within GRETB is less than effective. From a QA perspective, there is **no central repository** for all QA documents and resources. This is currently being addressed between the QA and IT departments. A respondent to the questionnaire recommended 'internal CPD on all systems relating to GRETB from QA, policies and procedures, defined roles and responsibilities of staff'. A multi-pronged approach to communications by the QA department and the wider organisation needs to be implemented to ensure that staff are informed of all quality assurance processes as well as other relevant information.

2.2.3 Conclusion and Recommendations

It is clear that the establishment of a FET governance system has given a necessary coherence to the management of the QA system. There is also evidence of **good governance practices** in the establishment and population of the various governance groups. Since 2018, there is evidence of the **promotion of a culture of quality** across FET services and provision. However, at time of writing, insufficient staffing levels in the QA department is impacting on the work of the Programme Board, for example, and slowing progress across proactive areas of quality culture promotion.

GRETB should continue communications with AONTAS for advice/support in giving learners meaningful representation on the various governance and oversight groups. However, the issue of learners engaging in executive working groups needs to be resolved.

Work on the creation of a **central repository** on GRETB Connect for all QA documentation and resources should be supported and progressed. A commitment and establishment of processes for the publication of all relevant communication to GRETB's website should be identified and agreed.

An established induction procedure for new governance group members should be implemented as standard.

The newly appointed FET Director should continue to vigorously pursue the addressing of staffing needs across the QA department.

Learner Testimonial

"When I started my CISCO CCNA journey last year it had been eighteen years since I had last studied networking and I was facing a steep learning curve

From the outset this course was very well organised, and the instructor made it very clear the level of commitment required to become CCNA certified."

- GRETB Learner

2.3 The Documentation of Quality Assurance Policy and Procedures

2.3.1 Description

GRETB's approach to quality is guided by **QQI's Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines** and **Sector-Specific Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines** for Education and Training Boards (ETBs).

All policies relating to GRETB's operations are now published on https://gretb.ie/document-category/policy-documents/. Policies relating to quality assurance will be published on **GRETB Connect** (under development).

The development of policies and associated procedures is an ongoing process. The QA depart-ment began a scoping exercise in 2020 to determine the status of policies being implemented in FET. It was found that many legacy policies from the three former VECs, individual FE centres and Transition Quality Assurance System (TQAS) were in use. The Senior Management Team (SMT) agreed with the

QA department that standardised policies needed to be developed for the FET sector. The QA department is in the process of creating a system which will document all internal quality assurance policies and procedures. This **policy management framework** will provide the structure for FET to ensure the maintenance and enhancement of a quality service through up-to-date policies and procedures. In addition, a standard policy document template is being developed which will be used for all QA policies thus ensuring consistency across the content of policies. In the meantime, policies presented for approval are interim policies.

The policy development and approval process is shown in Figure 6.

"Policies and procedures in my workplace are clear and accessible"
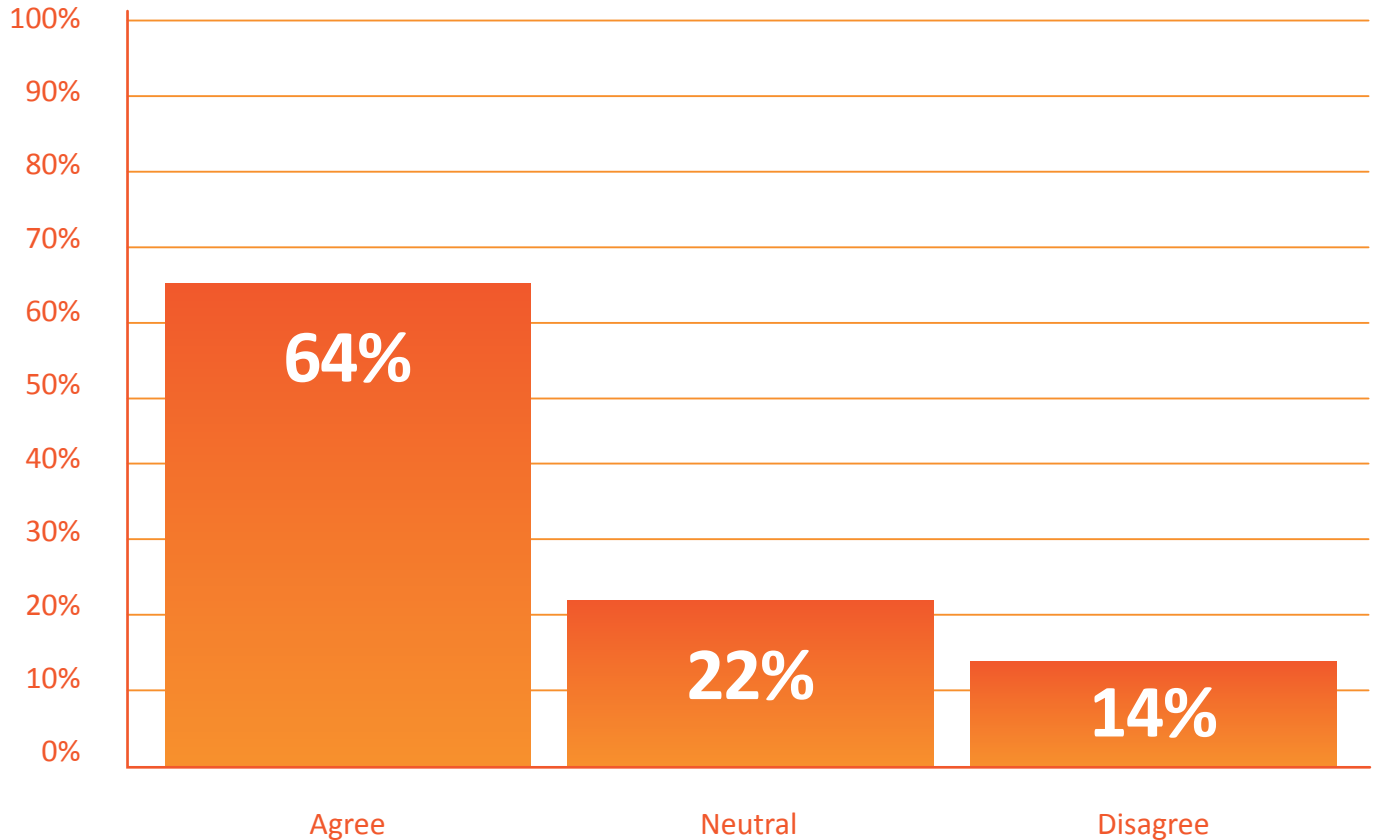
Figure 5: Policy Development and Approval Process

To date the FET Quality Council has adopted the following QA policies:

1. *Assessment Results Appeals*
2. *Assessment Process Appeals*
3. *Assessment Deadlines*
4. *Compassionate Consideration*
5. *Secure Storage of Assessment Evidence*
6. *Assessment Malpractice*
7. *Access, Transfer and Progression*
8. *Admissions*
9. *Blended Learning*

Interim policies for (ELC):

1. *Assessment*
2. *Professional Practice Placement*
3. *Repeat assessment*

Interim policies for FET:

1. *Learning Environments*
2. *Programme Development*

COVID-19 restrictions meant that the QA department had to manage the development of new contingency assessment procedures quickly, as the restrictions coincided with assessment deadlines. Changes to *internal verification, external authentication* and *work placement procedures*, informed by QQI's *Contingency Assessment Guidelines*, were documented and approved by the governance groups.

2.3.2 Evaluation

It was clear from the scoping exercise that the FET centres are implementing their relevant poli-cies and procedures. However, it was also clear that there is a lack of standardisation of the policies being implemented. There is no system in place to manage policy development, version control, and review for FET. The QA department recognises that reviewing and ongoing monitoring of all FET policies and procedures is a significant project which is beyond the current staffing capacity of the department. Nevertheless, work has begun on the policy management framework and a policy template. The framework will provide clear direction to staff on the scheduling of maintenance and enhancement for all policies.

Policy development working groups comprise of staff who carry out policy development external to their daily role. This is a slow process as policy development is not always a priority for group members, where other demands in their substantive roles are given priority.

Currently, policies for FET are developed on a needs basis, for example the Early Learning and Care policies, and have interim status until the content of the template is agreed. Interim policies will be reviewed and amended as necessary when the template is available. The interim policies follow the policy development and approval process (Figure 6) but the appearance of the document may change to comply with the template.

The lack of a **central repository for policies** meant that it was difficult for some staff to access policies (14%). As a result of this finding from the staff questionnaire and other internal communications the QA and IT departments are working to create a central repository for policies. This work is ongoing.

2.3.3 Conclusion and Recommendations

Whilst GRETB has a robust policy development and approval process in place, the pace of devel-opment is hampered by lack of staff solely dedicated to this function.

The QA department acted swiftly to meet the demand to change assessment procedures arising from COVID-19 restrictions despite staffing limitations. There is also evidence that GRETB's governance structure was able to react swiftly to the regular meetings required to approve assessment procedural changes arising from COVID-19 restrictions.

GRETB should continue with the development of a policy management framework and create a central repository on GRETB Connect for all FET policies and procedures to ensure access to all necessary documentation to all staff.

Learner Testimonial

"I was very pleased with how this course was laid out. It gave me the confidence in not only education but also in myself as well. Between the staff and the students, it was a great blend of people and everyone got on well and that made for a very nice environment. By gaining all this confidence in the course I carried it on into my placement for the work experience module and from that I was actually asked to come and work for the company so that was a job I couldn't refuse."

- GRETB Learner

2.4 Staff Recruitment, Management and Development

2.4.1 Description

GRETB is committed to the recruitment and retention of staff of the highest calibre, who will provide the best quality teaching and learning opportunities and support services for all its learners in the fulfilment of their individual aspirations and objectives. The purpose is to ensure that GRETB recruits, inducts and retains the most suitable candidates to match its culture and strategic operational requirements in terms of learning and personal development.

The role of the Human Resources (HR) department is to ensure that GRETB's mission, vision and values are supported in the recruitment and selection process. The process is aligned to best practice and meets all legislative requirements **(Employment Equality Acts 1998-2015 and Disability Act 2005)**, including Garda vetting. GRETB is bound by several specific circular letters in relation to the recruitment/promotion of staff, i.e., **Circular Letters 44/2019, 03/2018 & 08/2017**. The Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS) and SOLAS sanction recognised posts, and vacancies are filled through a formal recruitment and selection process.

The recruitment process is outlined below.

GRETB Recruitment Process

Vacancy	• New role available or existing role vacant.
Job description	• Outlines the purpose of the vacancy. • Reflect the main functions and tasks of role. • Reflect essential and desirable criteria necessary to fulfil requirements of post.
Person specification	• Outlining the details to which an ideal person to fulfil the post would possess. • Should include qualifications, knowledge, skills, experience, etc.
Advertising post	• Important element in the recruitment process. • All posts advertised in a manner suitable for the post. • Posts may be advertised on GRETB website, professional websites, national/local press, and/or social media.
Conflict of interest	• Application forms shared with each member of selection board to ensure there are no relationships, either positive or negative, with any of the applicants.
Shortlist	• Shortlisting is a process whereby candidates are assessed against agreed criteria, in order to eliminate less suitable candidates.
Interview	• Interview board consists of individuals nominated by GRETB to assess the skills, abilities and knowledge of applicants and to make recommendations based on their assessment. • The interview board should be a diverse mix of genders and disciplines.
Referee reports	• Written referree reports are required as well as Garda vetting for posts within GRETB.
Formal offer	• All offers of employment represent a contract of employment between GRETB and the employee. • If an offer is rejected, the post is then offered to the next highest scoring candidate on the panel (where applicable).

Training for **selection board Chairpersons** is provided by the HR department to ensure that each selection board Chairperson understands the role during the selection process. The role of the Chairperson during remote interviews remains the same, with the additional responsibility of managing the remote interview process and completion of documentation.

Comprehensive **training for new interview board members** is provided by the HR department. This training includes competency-based interview techniques; interview structure; role of the Chair at interview; appropriate questioning; the law and selection interviews; avoiding unconscious bias and discrimination; and how to evaluate candidates scores. The provision of this training ensures that the interview board is well prepared and allows all candidates the best opportunity to perform at interview.

GRETB's **annual induction programme** welcomes newly recruited employees in a supportive environment to facilitate adjusting to the new role and working environment, to understand more about GRETB and to meet new colleagues.

In August 2021, GRETB carried out a virtual induction day on Moodle and Zoom where all new employees were welcomed by the CE and heads of department. Presentations were provided on GRETB's policies and operational procedures. Presentations were also provided on Child Protection, GDPR and Health & Safety. To successfully complete the induction, new employees were required to complete a question-and-answer section on each topic. One hundred new employees attended the virtual event and links were provided with access to practical and valuable information.

As set out in the _Probation Policy 2017_, GRETB is committed to supporting new staff and considers induction and probation a vital part of staff recruitment. The aim of the process is to provide a positive experience at the outset which enables new staff to settle into a safe working environment in GRETB and quickly become productive and efficient members of staff to the benefit of the organisation and employee.

GRETB has a strong history of supporting staff who undertake educational programmes and encourages all staff to enhance their **professional and personal development**. The _Professional Learning and Development (PL&D) Policy_, allows for the provision of financial support towards training and course fees. The organisation fully engaged with the SOLAS national _Professional Learning and Development Strategy 2016-2019_ and as part of that, undertook pilot programmes in Technology Enhanced Learning (levels 6, 7, 8) and Change Management (level 8). GRETB appointed a **Professional Development Coordinator** in 2020, who is carrying out a training needs analysis and skills audit of staff with a view to collecting the information by the end of 2021. The results of this survey will help to identify the key areas of professional development that need to be prioritised and an action plan is being progressed to reflect the identified priorities.

Table 1 below gives a flavour of the engagement in professional learning and development by staff over the last two years.

Table 1 : GRETB PL&D Engagement 2020/2021

LEADERSHIP & MANAGEMENT
NUIG L8 Diploma in Change Management
Mediator Course – Mediation Foundation of Ireland
Managing Employee Relations QQI L6 – IBEC
Coaching – DCM Learning
Lean Six Sigma White Belt – DCM Learning
Employment Law - Legal Island
LLM Employment Law – Law Society of Ireland
MBTI Psychological Testing – The Myers Briggs Company
NUIG L9 MSc Technology Management
Resilience in the Workplace
UCD Professional Diploma in HR Management
IPA Certificate in Public Procurement

ICT
L8 Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL) – NUIG
L7 TEL – National College of Ireland (NCIRL)
L6 TEL – NCIRL
Microsoft EDU Teams

LITERACY
WIT Integrating Literacy
WIT Curriculum Development
WIT Literacy & Society
WIT Equality & Diversity

FESS PROGRAMMES/WORKSHOPS/WEBINARS

Online clinic to support FET practitioners with blended learning

Uncertainty & upheaval

Reimagining your Course – The Move to Blended Learning

Online Clinic to support FET practitioners with blended learning & remote assessment of learners

Your precious life, how to live it well

The Psychology of Bouncibility: How to Build Resilience within Ourselves

Festive Online Zoomergisers Workshop

WELL-BEING SEMINARS/CONFERENCE/PROGRAMMES

Nurturing a sense of well-being in challenging times

Alcohol and other drugs: Let's start a conversation

Dignity at Work

Yoga & Mindfulness lunchtime sessions (in-house)

IN-HOUSE PROGRAMMES/WORKSHOPS PROGRAMME

Training, Delivery & Evaluation

QQI Level 5 Community Addiction Studies

Celebrating Equality and Diversity in GRETB lunch time sessions

OTHER TRAINING/CONFERENCE/PROGRAMMES/WORKSHOPS

Autism Awareness Training - AsIAm

Autism International Conference – AsIAm

eCollege Programmes (various)

Gaeilge programmes (various)

UDL Badges

IPA Programmes (various)

DCM Programmes (various)

Pension Training

Relevant Contract Tax

Brexit/Tax Compliance

VAT Treatment of Goods

IBEC Workshops (various)

FET Teachers/Tutors enrolled in various post-graduate programmes

Role of Governance, Risk and Compliance Training

Charities Regulator Governance Code & Charities Act Training

IPB Risk Management

Public Access to Information Training

Erasmus+ (various)

ICT Ransomware & Cybersecurity Conferences

Remote Working a Changing Environment

Health & Safety Training (various)

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on teaching and learning was immediate. In response to the need to quickly move to an online teaching and learning environment, the TEL department organised and, in most instances, delivered the training detailed below in Table 2. The training was very well received by FET practitioners as evidenced by the levels of engagement captured.

Table 2: GRETB TEL Training Programmes for FET Staff June 2020-June 2021

PROGRAMME	NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS
Getting Ready to Teach Online x 3	567
Etivities workshop with Educational Alchemists: Professor Gilly Salmon	22
Tea with TEL Champions May Webinar series x 4 (Padlet, Screencast, e-portfolio, visualiser training)	130
Tea with TEL x 4	140
Assistive Technology in the Online Classroom Microsoft 365	64
TEL hour in 11 centres: e-portfolio, Teams, Forms, Moodle, OneNote	102
Wriggle Connect Training for staff: Teams and Immersive Reader	58
Wriggle Connect 365 online platform (see analytics below)	284
Online Demonstrations Moodle course	50
Zoom training to ABE, Community Education, Petersburg, GRETB Training Centre, EROC centre	147
TEL Champion training	10
Teachers' Toolkit Moodle course	815
SharePoint site Teams and One Note integration in classes: videos and handouts	403
SharePoint site Zoom course: videos and handouts	182
TEL SharePoint information and Resources (see analytics image below)	643
TEL Online Teambuilding for staff x 2	150
TEL Online Teambuilding for TEL Champions	12
Online Padlet community of practice: Getting Ready to Teach Online FET	170
TEL YouTube Channel videos	9,190 views
TEL for All newsletters x 9	700 per newsletter

'My workplace is a positive environment'.

73% of staff agreed *(13% neutral)*

'I understand my professional obligations with respect to GDPR, Child Protection and Health and Safety'.

95% of staff agreed

'I have opportunities to be involved in working groups that broaden my range of skills'.

68% of staff agreed *(13% neutral)*

Figure 6: Staff Professional Development 2018-2021

'I have availed of PD events/courses in the past 3 years'.

- 10% None
- 18% One event/course
- 24% Two events/courses
- 48% Three or more events/courses

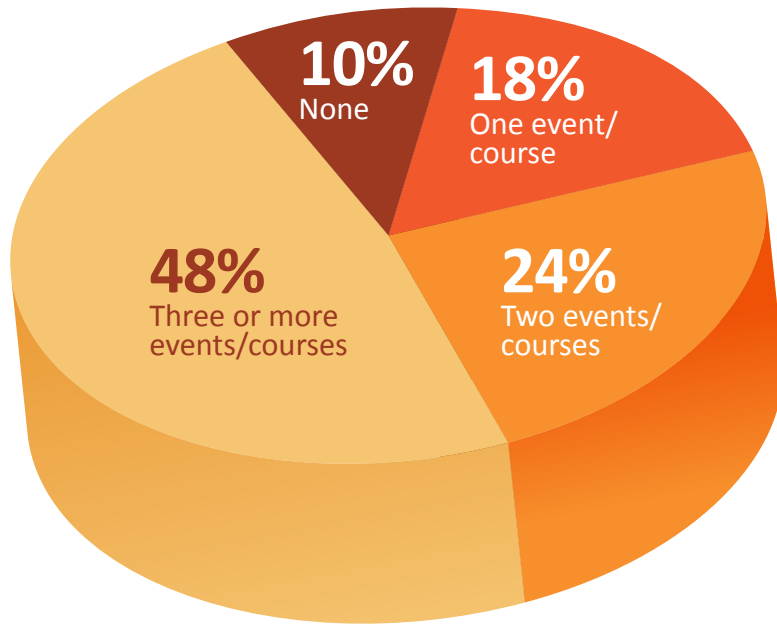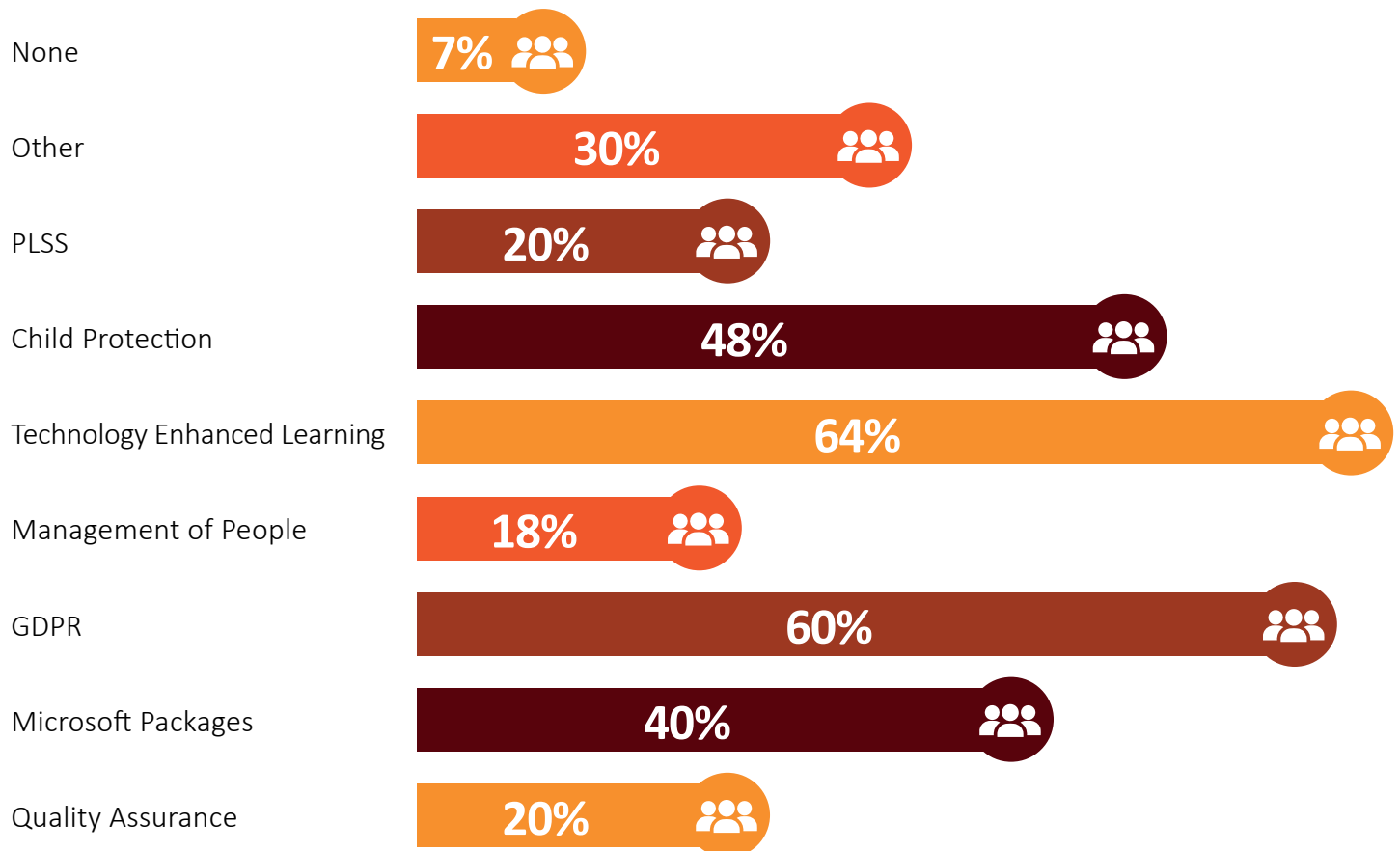**Figure 7: Professional Development Areas 2018-2021**

'I have participated in the following PD areas in the past 3 years'.

Area	%
None	7%
Other	30%
PLSS	20%
Child Protection	48%
Technology Enhanced Learning	64%
Management of People	18%
GDPR	60%
Microsoft Packages	40%
Quality Assurance	20%

Staff health and well-being are important to GRETB. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the critical role that supporting and promoting staff wellness and self-care has in the management of an effective, highly functioning, teaching and learning environment. A series of **online events** and **webinars** were designed and delivered as outlined in Table 1 above. This programme of events is continuing as an online offering to all staff as a result of its success during the crisis.

In 2020, GRETB agreed its **Public Sector Duty Values**. This was overseen by a Public Sector Duty Working group. This work built on initial work by Galway City LCDC where GRETB is an active member. An assessment and validation of equality and human rights issues was completed and an action plan for implementation of GRETB's Public Sector Duty is now in place. *GRETB Public Sector Duty Resources*.

GRETB engaged, in early 2020, with the **KeepWell Mark** which is an IBEC initiative. This is an evidence-based accreditation programme that recognises and celebrates organisations that

put and keep the wellbeing of employees to the forefront. Within GRETB, a 'Team Wellbeing' group was set up to revise policies and procedures and organised a successful well-being week for OSD staff in November 2020. As a result of engagement with IBEC, GRETB, when examined on nine distinct pillars, was awarded 'The KeepWell Organisation' status. Plans are underway to widen this initiative across FET also.

The **Employee Assistance Service (EAS)** is an important support service to all GRETB staff. It is delivered by a private provider, 'Spectrum Life,' which is engaged by GRETB for staff support. This EAS is a 24/7 free and confidential support service designed to assist individuals in dealing more effectively with any personal or work-related problems, providing immediate access to counselling support.

In the Staff Questionnaire, employees were asked a number of questions relating to the quality of their work life.

'I am proud of the work that I do'.

96%
of staff agreed

'I take responsibility for ensuring I have a good work/life balance'.

79%
of staff agreed

'I am aware of GRETB's employee assistance programme'.

57%
of staff agreed

2.4.2 Evaluation

There is a clear process for staff recruitment in GRETB. There is also evidence that training is given to selection boards specifically related to competency-based interview skills, disability awareness and all relevant legislation pertinent to GRETB's operations.

There is evidence of strong commitment on behalf of GRETB management and staff to continuing personal and professional development with critical areas such as child protection and GDPR indicating a high level of engagement by all staff. GRETB reacted positively throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, delivering professional development opportunities that responded to the needs of staff identified in the survey conducted in May 2020, *Working from Home Staff Survey 2020*. The TEL department delivered upon all actions required to ensure staff members were prepared to deliver and teach programmes online. The Community Education Service organised courses that were requested, such as Health & Fitness, Yoga and Meditation to enhance staff wellbeing.

The introduction of GRETB's probation management system in 2016 shows a commitment to en-suring both the competence of staff appointed to the organisation and to providing a mechanism to identify specific training needs that an individual staff member may need or additional sup-ports that may enhance the employee's performance. However, participants in the management focus group, which included HR representation, concluded that the **probation process requires improvement** to ensure its effectiveness. It was agreed that line managers need further training to ensure that they can identify skills deficits in new staff members and support staff to address these deficits during their probation. That focus group also identified the considerable **deficit in staff competent in the use of Gaeilge** including both existing staff and across applications for po-sitions in all departments across all levels.

2.4.3 Conclusion and Recommendations

There is a strong interest and uptake in continuing learning and personal and professional development amongst all staff in GRETB. The ETB has been proactive in engaging with new and innovative programmes such as the SOLAS/NUIG Galway tailored programmes suited to the needs of staff, such as Change Management Diploma (NFQ Level 8) and Diploma in Technology Enhanced Learning (NFQ Level 8).

The appointment of a dedicated PD co-ordinator in 2020 has facilitated GRETB to further enhance and develop its activity in this area by way of identifying training needs and skills deficits within the organisation and by developing processes and frameworks for greater access both internally and externally to training and education opportunities.

One area of concern is that **43% of staff reported being unaware of the Employee Assistance Programme**. This will be further investigated by the newly established Inclusion Unit and the HR department but is also likely linked to gaps in internal communication in the organisation.

A review of the implementation of the probation process should be considered. GRETB should continue to actively encourage its staff to engage in opportunities to improve their Irish language skills. It should also agree a strategy to aid the recruitment of staff competent trí Gaeilge should be considered in line with the provisions set out in the Official Languages Act 2003 and GRETB's Scéim Teanga.

Despite the evidence of strong engagement with PD opportunities, only 54% of staff agreed that they 'have opportunities to develop [their] career at GRETB'. It is acknowledged that overall staffing levels and grades are sanctioned via DFHERIS and SOLAS. However, mechanisms to encourage and communicate internal opportunities for staff should be explored as a result of this process.

Learner Testimonial

"I started my re-training with GRETB as a mature student after I was made redundant. Firstly I did the 2D AutoCAD course and then completed the 3D AutoCAD course in Galway. This led to Arc Welding also with GRETB and progresses to TIG welding in the Athlone training center.   From these courses I was accepted on to a Job bridge scheme for 9 months in a Toolroom which led to a permanent job. Shortly after an opportunity came up at work to return to GRETB and train as an apprentice Toolmaker for 4 years.   I completed the course and qualified with the help and support from GRETB and Sligo IT Staff and Tutors.

No matter what age you are or how daunting it may feel to return to education, if you are interested in the course and put in the hard work to learn there are people here who go above and beyond to help you get through it."

- GRETB Learner

2.5 Programme Development, Approval and Submission for Validation

2.5.1 Description

The process for **programme development and approval** was agreed by the Quality Council in June 2021. Prior to this, an informal process was in place whereby Centre/Programme managers requested permission from the FET Director or AEO to offer a new module(s) or programmes. This informal process was not documented and no formal rationale was sought, leading to a lack of evidence that local needs were being met. It could also lead to duplication of service within the ETB.

In 2020 work commenced on the design of a **formal programme development**, approval, and submission for validation process. Centre/Programme managers now apply

to the **Programme Board** (PB) to offer new (to that Centre) validated modules or awards, modules or awards that have not been delivered by the Centre for three years or more, or to develop a new programme. The chart below outlines the process for all applications made to the Programme Board. GRETB's Programme Board comprises membership from across FET: two AEOs, an Assistant Training Centre Manager, Adult Guidance Counsellor, two programme/service managers. The programme approval process captures where specific validation requirements arise. A centre will not be approved until it is confirmed that it can meet any specific validation requirements.

Figure 8: Programme Approval Flow Chart
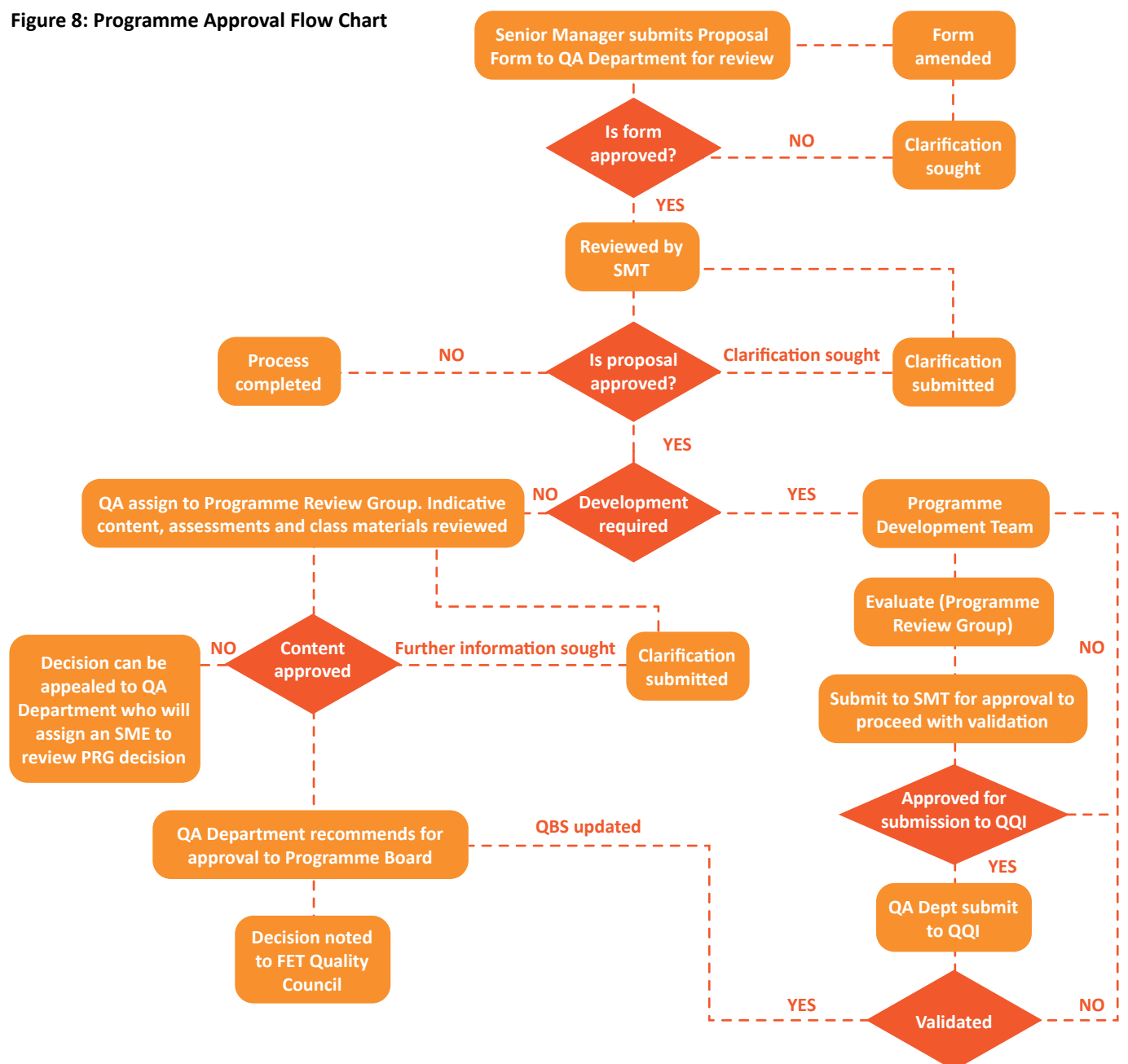
GRETB has a long history of **collaboration** in the development of new programmes having worked closely with WWETB, MSLETB, DDLETB, KETB, TEAGASC, BIM, and employers. Examples of the programmes GRETB has collaborated on include:

Agriculture awards	Apprenticeship in Arboriculture	Digital Media Production Traineeship	Butchery Apprenticeship
Early Learning and Care Awards	Microcredentials for Aquaculture	Commis Chef Apprenticeship	Penn Engineering Traineeship
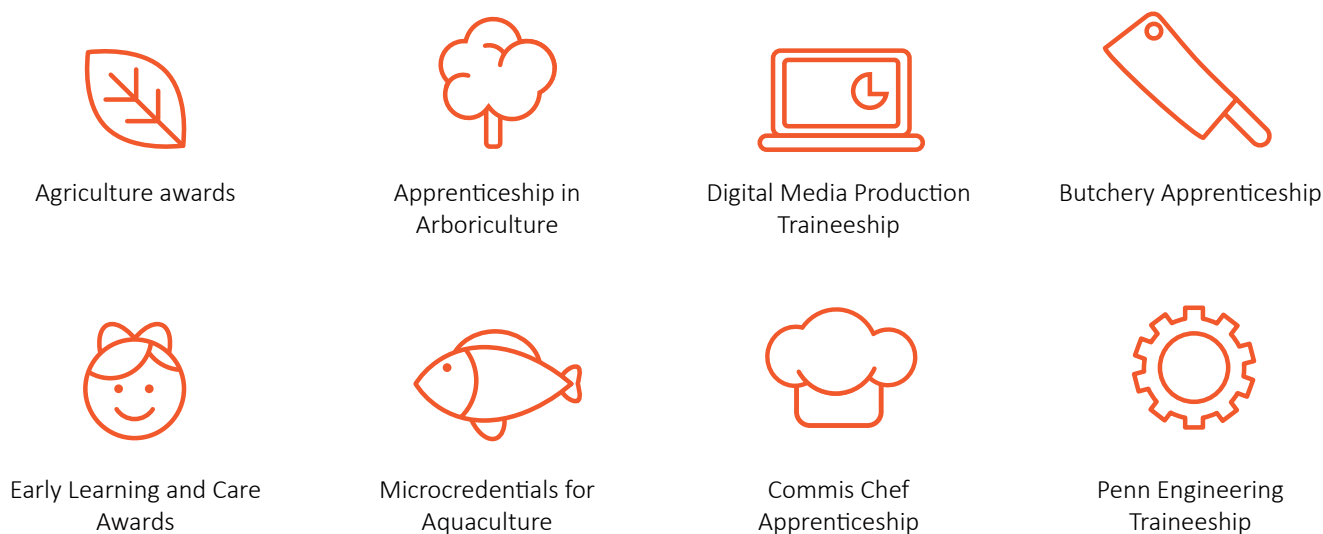
The development of the **Apprenticeship in Arboriculture** was GRETB's first experience as co-ordinating provider in developing new apprenticeship programmes for validation by QQI. The Consortium Steering Group (CSG) applied QQI's *QA Guidelines for Statutory Apprenticeship Programmes* and the framework quality assurance procedures for new apprenticeship programmes, throughout the process.

Figure 9: Apprenticeship QA Governance Structures
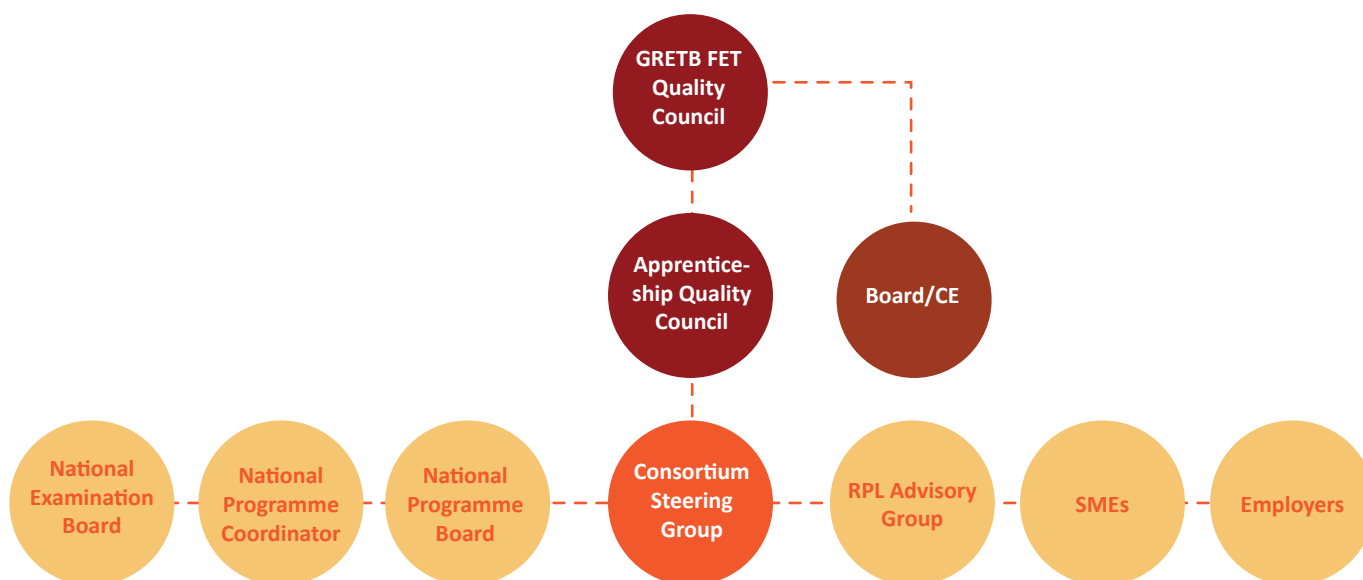
The QQI Validation Panel for the apprenticeship programme met with representatives from the CSG, industry, and GRETB in March 2020. The Apprenticeship in Arboriculture was granted approval by the PAEC in September 2020.

Many programmes delivered by GRETB's FET centres were developed under an **agreement between VECs in the West of Ireland (City of Galway, counties Galway, Mayo, Sligo, and Leitrim)**, using a Shared Programme Development process. GRETB is validated to deliver programmes from Level 1 to Level 6.

2.5.2 Evaluation

This is the first year of the implementation of the programme development and approval process therefore there is limited experience to comment upon. However, there is evidence at this early stage that having a formal, structured, process has led to improvements for GRETB. The approval process to deliver new awards in centres has generated comments from centre staff and senior management. Centre managers initially found the process challenging leading to intensive engagement from the QA department to support engagement with the process at screening stage. As the process develops, Centre/Programme managers now value the process as it requires greater collaboration with colleagues and stakeholders, resulting in a high level of preparation for all new course offerings. The **FET SMT has better oversight now** across the scheme of new programmes planned for delivery in centres and this has reduced the overlap in provision and aids annual planning. However, delays have been experienced in engaging **subject matter experts** (SMEs) to review the applications and programme materials.

GRETB staff involved have found the process of preparing and submitting new programmes for validation both rewarding and labour intensive. Staff felt that they have improved their skills in both programme development and assuring the quality of programme development during the process. They valued the opportunity to build internal and external relationships. This has greatly enhanced programme writing and evaluation skills across those involved in these processes.

The report on the Agriculture Awards pilot project and the review of the Arboriculture Apprenticeship development process both found that the **development of new programmes for validation is resource intensive**. It was estimated that module development alone for the Agriculture Awards accounted for 5000 hours (7 months approximately), which is unsustainable under current programme development structures. This is an issue that needs to be addressed both internally within GRETB and externally across the FET sector.

A review of the development process for the Apprenticeship in Arboriculture found that **programme development needs to be managed by a dedicated project manager** with the necessary expertise and autonomy to drive the project. Another finding was the need for curriculum development expertise, and administration dedicated to the project. Without a dedicated programme development team, led by a project manager, staff struggle to give the development work the commitment it requires as they try to meet conflicting demands, many of which will take precedence over the development of a new programme.

The lack of established structures around curriculum development is a concern, with the terms and conditions of different staff reducing the opportunities for flexibility, which is a barrier to maintaining consistent support in curriculum development.

2.5.3 Conclusion and recommendations

The Programme Approval Board, at GRETB level, can respond to programme changes in an efficient and timely manner. There is evidence of a strong willingness amongst FET staff to work on the development and delivery of new programmes, responding to employer needs, and based on recommendations by stakeholders and research presented by SOLAS. The links between the FET department and local industry and employers has led to the creation of programmes linked directly to market needs.

The Programme Approval process ensures the needs of a diverse learner population (new entrants to the industry, mature learners, learners with additional needs) are considered when planning and providing learning resources and supports. Whilst programme monitoring allows for the identification of needs and the modification and adjustment of a course. Feedback is collated from the consortium (in case of apprenticeship), EA Reports, RAP meetings, employers, mentors, teachers, learners, and the programme team, to inform ongoing development and improvement of programme.

The need for some blended learning/delivery necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic and associated lockdowns led to the development of a **Blended Learning Policy** that was put into practice during COVID-19. This in turn has highlighted significant areas that need to be addressed in the definition of need within the FET sector – **blended learning or blended delivery**.

A particular identified challenge by Centre/Programme Managers is the securing of **subject experts** to teach particular modules. GRETB should explore methods of encouraging and developing recently qualified learners to become involved as FET practitioners on course provision.

The establishment of **communities of practice** within subject areas across the FET sector could also enhance collaboration amongst FET practitioners and aid in upskilling.

GRETB should develop a **register of SMEs** available to assist with reviewing materials submitted as part of programme approval process. The establishment of a **curriculum development function** for the ETB will be critical in supporting module, programme, and award development into the future.
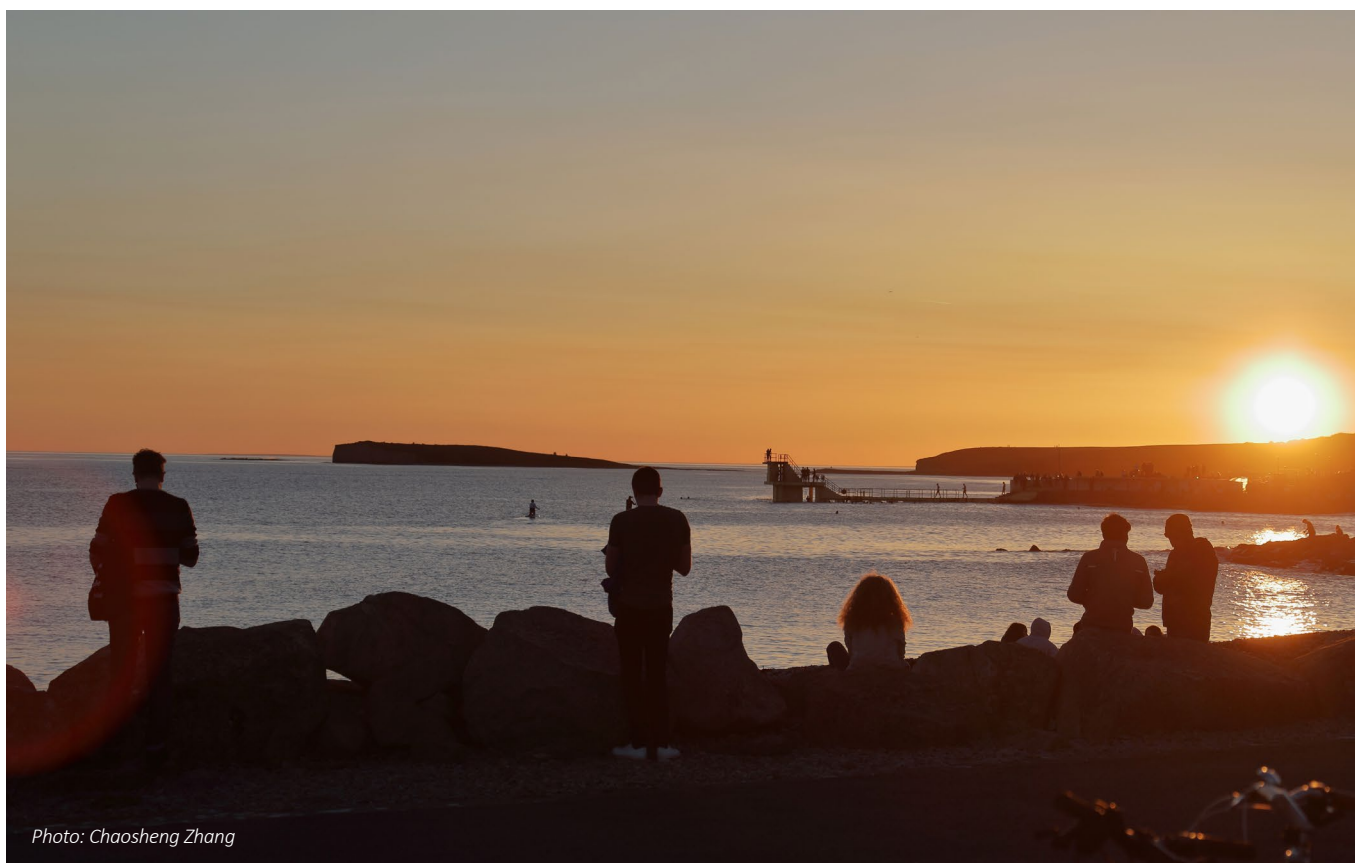
Photo: Chaosheng Zhang

Learner Testimonial

"I chose to study Business in Galway Community College, since I gained a lot of knowledge in the areas of Marketing, Human Resource and Manual and Computerised Accounting as well as improving my interpersonal skills in modules such as Communication Skills and Team Leadership Skills, whilst also discovering my own interests. I was very lucky to get a part time job from my Work Experience that I did as part of my Work Experience module. I am also hoping to go into NUIG to study International Commerce in September.

The course had a lot of challenges; however, I was very glad that I overcame them. For me the biggest challenge was presenting and taking part in teamwork projects. However, the teachers and regular practice greatly helped me to overcome this challenge, and I am now very confident when I present and I look forward to take part in teamwork projects.

If you are a student that is passionate about business, but is unsure about what course or higher-level institution to go to, then I would highly recommend this course. This 1-year course allows you to explore the world of business and opens up new interests and opportunities. I was very pleasantly surprised with the support and help that the college provides with choosing a course and higher-level institution for the following year."

- GRETB Learner

2.6 Access, Transfer and Progression

2.6.1 Description

GRETB's Director of FET has overall responsibility to ensure that the policy on access, transfer and progression is embedded within the organisation's structures.

Each FET Centre/Programme manager ensures that applicants and enrolled learners are informed about **access, transfer, and progression** opportunities. This work is supported by GRETB's Adult Guidance Information Service.

Learners can register for a GRETB course in a variety of ways, including:

• In person using paper-based application forms
• Online for PLC provision
• Using the National Further Education and Training Course Hub – FETCH
• Registration directly with Senior Training Advisors for Apprentices and employers using the Apprentice Client Services System (ACSS)
• Via the national FET-CAO pilot whereby almost 30 fulltime courses are now accessible through the CAO application process. This increases awareness among school leavers of the opportunities available to them via further education and training.

It is the aim of GRETB to ensure that a **Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)** service is available to learners where they have previous certified or experiential learning accumulated. This may allow a learner to gain admission to a programme or to **gain exemptions/ credit** from some parts of a programme.

The Quality Assurance Steering Group established a RPL working group to develop a RPL policy. This group met throughout 2020 and 2021 to develop the policy, culminating in the draft **Recognition of Prior Learning Policy** which will be presented to the FET Senior Management Team for review and approval in December 2021. The SMT review will also have a role in identifying the additional resources needed to implement the policy at operational level.

For learners who wish to **transfer** between GRETB programmes this request is initially facilitated at centre level. If the required programme is not available within the centre other GRETB centres are identified. This work is supported by the AGIS.

Within GRETB FET provision there are many **progression pathways** available to learners. Where appropriate, learners are encouraged to progress to programmes at a higher level. Centre/Programme managers work closely with centre staff and the AGIS to communicate these pathways to learners.

GRETB has a long tradition of supporting learners to progress to **Higher Education** and has established close working relationships with **GMIT** and **NUI Galway** (specifically the Access Offices at both institutions). Regular meetings are held throughout the year with each institution. These meetings have enabled the identification of a range of advanced entry programmes and also some GRETB programmes have been adapted to better meet HE needs. Learners are encouraged to use the **Higher Links Scheme through the Central Applications Office (CAO)** to secure a place at GMIT, NUI Galway or other Higher Education Colleges. A sample of courses where specific MOUs exist with PLC are as follows:

• **GMIT:** Programmes agreed for advanced entry to GMIT, are available on *https://www.gmit.ie/apply/further-education-students*. and *https://www.gmit.ie/sites/default/files/public/apply/docs/fe-mapping-june-2021-1.pdf*.
• **NUI Galway** have several places allocated each year to learners that achieve level 5 and/or 6 QQI certification, a sample of the courses on offer and the number of places is on *https://www.nuigalway.ie/undergrad-admissions/non-schoolleavers/qqifetacplc/*

Learners are also encouraged to progress into the labour market with interview and CV workshops regularly provided on their courses. Furthermore, FET centres publicise job vacancies in their locality using word of mouth, notice boards and social media.

Using the PLSS system, the main data recording system for GRETB FET services, progression can be recorded for learners when they have finished a course. The initial data can be recorded for only four weeks after the course has ceased. PLSS allows for late outcome data to be recorded, this can be inputted up to 36 weeks after the course ends. Monitoring takes place at local level by management and staff. The table below show progression and outcome data for FET learners in 2019 (this does not include night classes or apprenticeships).

Progression and Outcomes for Learners 2019 available in Appendix 7.

2.6.2 Evaluation

Historically, the FET sector has not enjoyed the same level of recognition as an option for school-leavers and those wishing to continue their education. However, there are concerted efforts to address this imbalance as evidenced in the FET-CAO pilot for 2022-23. Internally, GRETB has consistently engaged with its HEA partners in the West of Ireland. At a local level, GRETB has entered memorandums of understanding for advanced entry into courses with both GMIT and NUIG.

Work is ongoing in the establishment of a learner support structure with the establishment of the Inclusion Unit in November 2021. An application for dedicated staff for this function has been submitted to the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science and SOLAS. This will further enable GRETB to provide the necessary supports for learners to access and progress through its FET services.

AGIS Guidance Counsellors provide workshops on QQI Progression routes and opportunities, both locally and nationally, available in Further Education and Training from Levels 1 to 6, including Apprenticeships and Traineeships, information on all courses in Higher Education, and all employment opportunities, schemes and programmes and follow up 1:1 appointment as required.

The impact of this work and the ongoing involvement of the AGIS across GRETB's FET provision is evidenced in the feedback from learners through the Learner Questionnaire.

The sub-committee of the Learner Support Working Group is currently developing a GRETB FET Learner Handbook. This will ensure an overall admissions policy for all FET provision. This will also provide a homogeneous admissions procedure across all centres. This handbook will be available to all FET learners in September 2022. Links to QA policies, GRETB policies relevant to learners and support services will also be contained in this handbook.

In the Learner Questionnaire, learners were asked to consider the following statements by selecting agree, unsure, disagree or in some cases not applicable.

'I was placed on the right course for my level'

- 91% learners agreed

'It [higher education] was a strong interest of mine, but I didn't know how to go about it'

- the intervention of the guidance counsellor as a 'consistent support' enabled this learner to progress in education.

Table 3: Learner Experiences

Thinking about your experience, please read the following statements and tick if you agree or disagree.

	AGREE	UNSURE	DISAGREE	N/A
I was placed on the right course for my level.	91%	4%	1%	4%
I know the assignments and exams that are required on my course.	82%	9%	1%	8%
I receive feedback on my course work.	90%	4%	1%	5%
Assignments and class activities are clearly explained.	92%	4%	1%	3%
Work placement is well organised on my course.	49%	16%	4%	31%
Learning materials on the course (handout, online materials) are useful and up to date	90%	5%	2%	3%

Learners were asked to respond to a series of statements on their awareness of supports available to them at GRETB

Table 4: Learner Supports

I am aware of the following supports:

	AGREE	UNSURE	DISAGREE
Literacy	72%	25%	3%
Language Classes	56%	38%	6%
Study Support	69%	28%	3%
Career Guidance/Counselling	73%	24%	3%
Mentoring	64%	32%	4%
Technology to help	82%	16%	2%
Disability Support	62%	33%	5%

Results of the Learner Questionnaire evidence a very positive response rate to course placement level, support in preparation for assignments and exams, the giving and receiving of feedback and the quality of learning materials provided. This is consistent across the responses from all services.

With **less than 50%** of respondents **agreeing that work placement is well organised** as part of the course, this is an area that may require review and reflection. However, it should be noted that the Learner Questionnaire was undertaken at a time when the negative impact of COVID-19 was very much felt in the workplace, particularly in terms of taking in individuals for work experience and the additional risk measures this entailed on behalf of host employers. This may be a significant factor in this response rate. There is also scope to **review how disability supports are communicated** across all provision given the response rate to this element of the questionnaire, also.

2.6.3 Conclusion and recommendations

GRETB continues to address barriers to access, transfer and progression through a variety of supports and mechanisms. In some instances, learners are assigned personal aids and assistants to support their learning. The provision of Irish Sign Language Interpreting (ISL) is available to learners from the Deaf Community in many services, particularly Community Education.

The role of AGIS is central to this work. The **Inclusion Unit** (established November 2021) will be **responsible for identifying barriers to access**, supporting the provision of solutions to address these barriers, and for working across all FET programmes and services to ensure consistency of provision, information, and experience to all GRETB learners. The establishment of this Unit will be pivotal in the consolidation of consistent and accessible learner access, transfer and progression across GRETB services. Further reconfiguration of the FET department under the new FET

Director will also provide a positive focus in this area with an **AEO with responsibility for Provision and Pathways** appointed in November 2021.

The good work promoting the Adult Guidance Information Service to learners and potential learners should continue, and the integrating of the support into existing programmes. The ETB should also continue to build on existing relationships with HE institutions and the identification of further opportunities for entry and advanced entry to specific programmes.

GRETB should also proceed without delay in identifying the resources required to support the implementation of the RPL policy.   Once this is identified, appropriate planning should be undertaken to resource this function adequately across FET services, subject to adequate funding.

The appointment of staff to the Inclusion Unit should begin as soon as sanction for staffing has been approved by both DFHERIS and SOLAS.

Learner Testimonial

"I found out about the maths for trades first at my induction day in GRETB two years ago directly from Thelma she also spoke about the literacy and numeracy services which were available for apprentices. I had struggled with maths previously for my leaving cert so this was a great help for me. I found the class times very good as they didn't clash with any of my practical or theory class time.

I found the quality of the content available to my class was very helpful as I found some of the maths at the start very tricky and could not get used to the formulas but in partaking in these classes really helped me better my understanding and over time, I finally learned how to use the formulas correctly. Thelma also showed us different study skills and things we could be doing to use our time more efficiently in the exam such as being able to use the calculator to figure out resistors in parallel which I found very helpful. The class was also offered 1 to 1 classes with Thelma if we needed any help with the maths over lockdown she would also answer any questions over email which was a great help to my class. We also used I.T to study. We used Kahoot and quizlet in the class. We revised topics for the t1 through these apps. I found doing these classes were a huge benefit to the class and would highly recommend any other students coming in to GRETB to partake in them".

- GRETB Learner

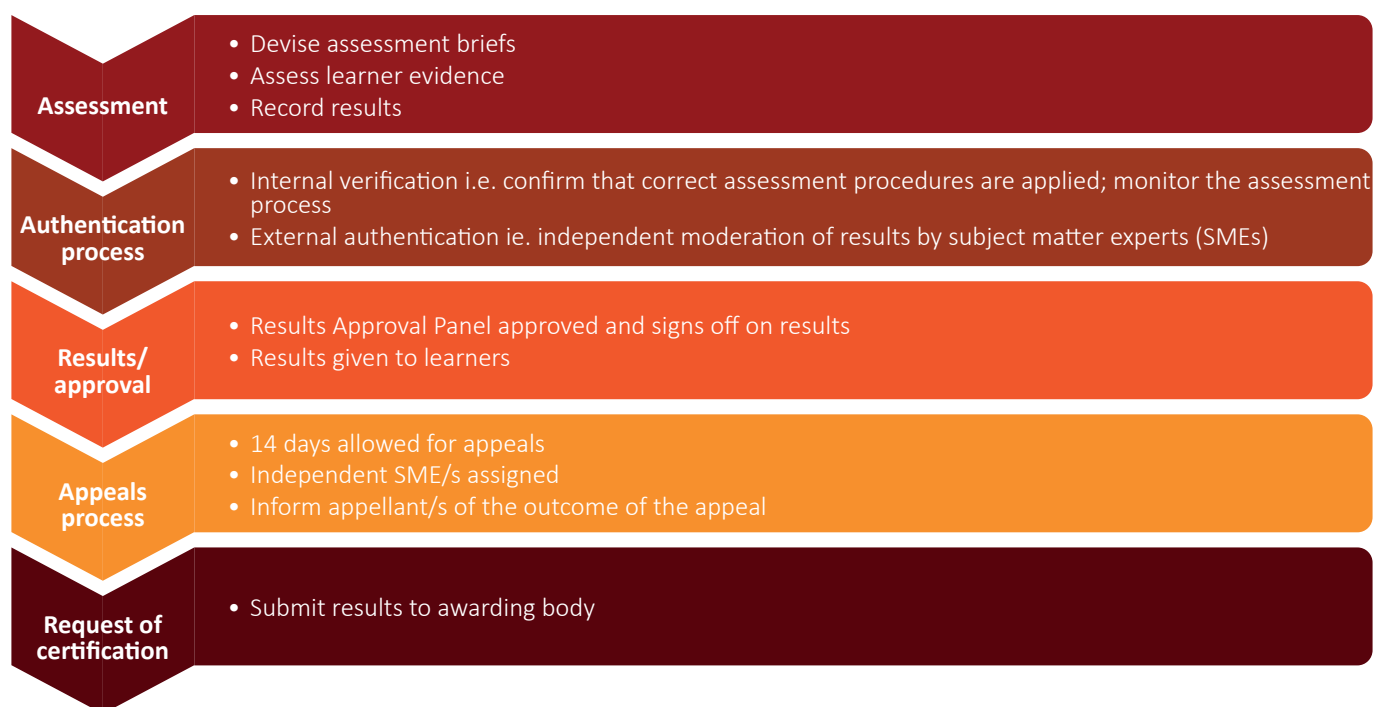# 2.7 Integrity and Approval of Assessment Results

2.7.1 Description

GRETB is committed to the integrity of assessment across all centres. The Quality Assurance Steering Group adopted the assessment documents developed by the ETBI Assessment Procedures Working Group, which includes Assessment Deadlines, **Assessment Malpractice, Compassionate Consideration, Reasonable Accommodation, Assessment Results Appeals, and Assessment Process Appeals**.

Centres follow the five key stages in the assessment process as described in **QQI's Quality Assuring Assessment Guidelines for Providers**.

Assessment process: Figure 11

Figure 10: Assessment Process

Assessment	• Devise assessment briefs • Assess learner evidence • Record results
Authentication process	• Internal verification i.e. confirm that correct assessment procedures are applied; monitor the assessment process • External authentication ie. independent moderation of results by subject matter experts (SMEs)
Results/approval	• Results Approval Panel approved and signs off on results • Results given to learners
Appeals process	• 14 days allowed for appeals • Independent SME/s assigned • Inform appellant/s of the outcome of the appeal
Request of certification	• Submit results to awarding body

For QQI awards, FET centres devise their **own assessment briefs** whilst most programmes in the Training Centre use **Assessment Instrument Specifications (AIS)**. Other awarding bodies manage their own assessment instruments. The remaining four stages operate the same for all FET assessments. Centres co-ordinate the running of assessments internally. Examination invigilators cannot be the subject teacher or assessor (if different).

The **integrity of the assessment process** is monitored by internal verification (IV), external authentication (EA) and results approval panels (RAP). **Internal verification** is an audit which confirms that the correct assessment techniques have been applied, marks are added correctly and inputted on the Quality Business System (QBS), and all documentation is signed, including an authenticity statement by each learner. Errors and corrections are noted on the IV Report. **The Results Approval Panel (RAP)** meetings have seen on occasion that commentary on the IV Report strays into commentary on the teacher's work. The QA department

follows up with the relevant centre and provides additional briefing on the IV process.

In 2018 the assignment of **External Authenticators (EAs)** was centralised to the QA department, as previously each centre appointed their own EAs. The QA department selects EAs from the ETBI panel of authenticators. EAs on this panel have undergone the most up-to-date training delivered by the Further Education Support Service (FESS). Every effort is made to appoint experts in the relevant fields of learning as authenticators. The centralised approach manages sampling external to the centres and rotates EAs to ensure objectivity and prevent complacency. It supports better monitoring of the assessment process across all centres. It is evidenced at RAP meetings that staff in centres prefer this system as it affords greater opportunities for gaining wider feedback and insights from SMEs. FET Practitioners and Centre/Programme Managers report that the process is both constructive and worthwhile.

The organisation of the RAP and schedule of meetings is carried out by the QA department. All documentation is circulated to the RAP members in advance of the panel meeting. The panel is chaired by a member of management. The **RAP meets each centre individually** to discuss their IV and EA Reports, and assessment results. **Good practices and issues to be addressed are recorded** for each centre in their individual RAP Report. Reports are sent to the centres after the panel meetings with follow-up on **corrective actions identified**. An **annual review of External Authentication** reports is compiled and shared with FET senior management highlighting areas of good practice and areas for improvement across programmes and services. A record of experience is also kept which is based on the Centre/Progamme manager's experience of the EA involved, and the RAP members' feedback on the quality and authenticity of the EA reports submitted.

2.7.2 Evaluation

The integrity of the assessment process is critical to all GRETB's teaching and learning activities. Centralising the assignment of EAs and managing the RAP meetings in the QA department is resource intensive, however, it is agreed at management level that commitment to the integrity and improvement of the assessment process is a priority, thus justifying the internal resources required. A process exists whereby all FET centres are contacted after their RAP meeting to provide feedback on potential areas of improvement and development or to give positive commentary on what is working well. Despite this however, the numbers of practitioners reporting feedback from the process is not at an adequate level as evidenced below in results from the recent Staff Questionnaire.

The **EA/RAP Working Group** was established, with the approval of the QA Steering Group, to review processes of the External Authentication and Results Approval Panel within GRETB and to put forward proposals/recommendations on standardisation of these processes to the QA Steering Group. The Working Group is chaired by a member of the QA Steering Group and has representation from FET, PLC, QA, Youthreach, HR, Data Protection and Administration. A streamlined payment system for EAs and results appeals has been approved and implemented, and a contract for the employment of EAs is in development. This has all given rise to a more co-ordinated approach and is a positive development. This group will need to address the deficits in feedback from these processes to staff at operational level.

The FET QA Quality Council receives updates from the RAP meetings regarding certification and outcomes. This ensures that information is being communicated and the Council is kept up to date on all matters relating to certification. It ensures high-level oversight of any emerging trends in the assessment and authentication processes.

Feedback from FET centre staff indicates that there is a general sense of satisfaction with the Internal Verification system, however learnings from modifications to work practices in this area as a result of COVID-19 will be reviewed after the contingency period is concluded. This will allow for the continuation of those practices which made the IV process more streamlined and time efficient. Qualitative feedback on QA processes and procedures point to the **need for ongoing training and development opportunities via the QA department**. Despite the increase in engagement with QA updates and training days, it is recognised that limited staffing in the QA department has been a prohibiting factor in the provision of frequent briefing and training opportunities. The establishment of the FET Support and Development Unit (November 2021) will seek to address this.

Whilst an annual report on External Authenticators is compiled, there remains a missing element in the cycle of review at this point. Areas of concern with the External Authenticators themselves, and/or their understanding of GRETB's requirements are not addressed in an official, documented manner.

Table 5: Practitioner Feedback External Authentication

I am aware of the following supports:

	AGREE	UNSURE	DISAGREE	N/A
I receive feedback from the External Authenticator (EA) for my module(s) in my Centre.	52%	7%	5%	36%
Areas outlined as best practice in the External Authenticator (EA) report are shared in my Centre.	57%	8%	5%	30%
Areas outlined for improvement in the External Authenticator (EA) report are addressed in my Centre.	55%	10%	5%	31%

Recent comments from External Authenticators

'Well done on devising and invigilating many alternative teaching methods and assessments during this particularly challenging period in Further Education and Training with COVID-19'.

'Access and organisation of evidence was excellent'.

Figure 11: Internal Verification

Internal Verification (IV) processes require improvement and enhancement.
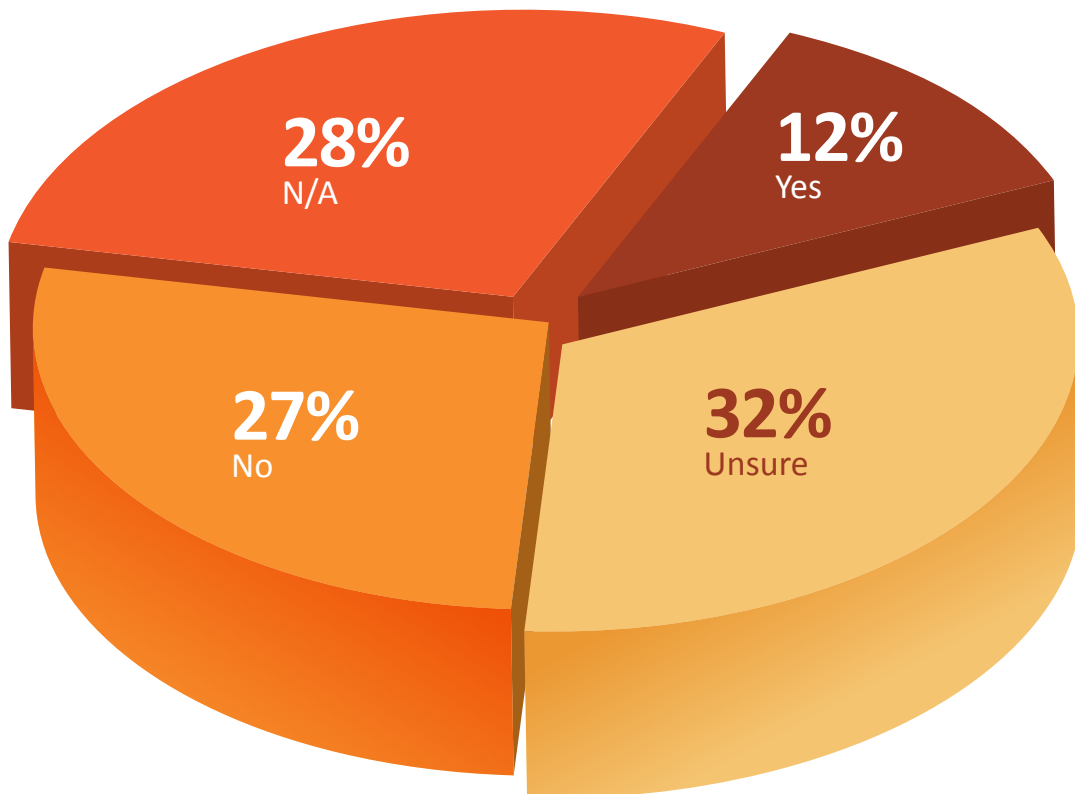
More feedback from the staff questionnaire relating to the IV/EA process can be found *here in Appendix 6*. In the event of learners being unhappy with their assessment/exam grade, 82% know who to contact in their centre.

2.7.3 Conclusion and recommendations

All of the relevant FET services were able to react rapidly to the challenges arising from the COVID-19 restrictions by putting measures in place to reduce the impact on staff and learners. Measures and supports included ongoing support from the QA department and ongoing support and regular communications with centres regarding contingency arrangements for assessments. Communication of EA feedback to FET Practitioners does not appear to be adequate or consistent enough based on staff feedback.

Assessment results approval processes and procedures are fundamentally sound and have been improved upon since 2019 with the centralisation of the processes and procedures to the QA department. Some gaps still exist, however, which can be improved upon with the implementation of some recommendations.

Staff involved in teaching and learning should be regularly briefed on any changes to IV/EA processes with refresher training/updates schedule implemented with support from the PL&D Co-ordinator. This should be prioritised upon establishment of the FET Support and Development unit (November 2021).

GRETB should review the successful changes to the IV/EA processes implemented as a result of COVID-19 and consider their implementation as standard. This will reduce 'the paper heavy' trail which can be burdensome to both learner and staff.

The EA/RAP working group should consider devising training/ briefing documents which are provided to all EAs upon appointment to GRETB. These should clearly state the requirements and expectations of GRETB.

Learner Testimonial

"The level 5 Childcare Course in Youthreach in Roscommon was a great opportunity for me to get a qualification to allow me to work in childcare. I am a mum of 3 children and this gave me the opportunity to study while my children are still young. I was also able to improve my computer skills during the course and improve on my self-belief. It gave me the opportunity to meet new people in a friendly environment. Through this course I was encouraged to be the best that I can be and to believe in myself and what I am able to achieve. Throughout the duration of the course, I was encouraged and supported in everything. This course not only gets you a qualification but helps the person to grow within themselves."

- GRETB Learner

2.8 Information and Data Management

2.8.1 Description

The FET Service uses several data management systems including PLSS, QBS and The Walled Garden. Some centres operate localised systems such as MIT and Proman. These systems are used to capture data and information to monitor learner attendance, results, and progression.

PLSS is a system hosted centrally by SOLAS to store data on learners, programmes, and service provision nationally and is the main recording and reporting system used across all FET provision. This system is the main component of GRETB's management information system and is used as the primary repository to store and process course information, learner records, outcomes, and reports. PLSS provides a secure system for collecting, sharing, and using data through several portals:

- National Programme Database (NPD) is the national database of FET programmes being delivered by each ETB.

- National Course Calendar (NCC) – contains the schedule of all FET programmes. Data in the NCC may be transferred to the Further Education & Training Course Hub: (FETCH) website, fetchcourses.ie – allowing learners to search, view and apply for courses online

- Learner Database – Data from FETCH online applications is transferred into the Learner Database. Further data entered at ETB level for enrolled learners creates a secure learner record.

The learner database is operational across all centres. The PLSS system is also used to facilitate the annual planning cycle with SOLAS through the Funding Allocation Requests and Reporting System (FARR). The data in PLSS provides real-time oversight of current and planned provision and assists in monitoring progress for the Strategic Performance Agreements with SOLAS.

The QBS is the main on-line system supporting FET QQI certification data. The QBS is primarily used to request certification. This system is used at centre level and is facilitated by providing each centre with access to the QBS, using Multi-Factor Authentication. QBS functionality provides centres with a variety of reports on individual learner achievement and overall centre performance which supports data validation, QA monitoring and review, as well as supporting continuous development and improvement of provision at centre level.

The Walled Garden Registration system is used and accessed at centre level for the assessment and certification of awards offered through City and Guilds. The system provides centres with a variety of reports to support data validation, QA monitoring and review, as well as supporting continuous development and improvement at centre level.

The Results Capture and Certification Request System (RCCRS) is used in Training Centres to manage certification requests. The RCCRS certificate request functions are integrated with the QBS and the Apprenticeship Client Services Management System for apprenticeships. It is also used to capture results from other providers, for example, City & Guilds.

Data Protection ensures that people can trust an organisation to use their data fairly, transparently, and responsibly. In May 2018, the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) transposed into law. This legislation places additional responsibilities on GRETB as an organisation.

In response to this legislation GRETB appointed a Data Protection Officer and established a Data Protection Unit for GRETB. All information processed is done so lawfully, in accordance with the Data Protection Acts, 1988, 2003 and 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulation 2016/679 and/or such amending legislation or other applicable data protection legislation as may be adopted in Ireland from time to time.

GRETB has developed a range of GDPR related policies and procedures, which can be accessed on the website https://gretb.ie/corporate/data-protection/. GRETB continue to review and update policies as required. Currently, amendments and updates to the GRETB Data Protection Policy are awaiting legal approval. The GRETB Records Retention Schedule is currently undergoing review. All learners are advised of their GDPR rights as data subjects and of GRETB's related responsibilities as a data controller when they register for a programme at all FET centres.

At recruitment stage, all new staff are informed of the GDPR training. GDPR training is included in induction for all new staff. All GRETB staff are required to complete online GDPR Training, hosted by ETBI. The Data Protection Unit provides support for staff, learners, and stakeholders with general day to day queries relating to their work, assist with DPIA's, Data Breaches, Data Access Requests, additional training, advice, and guidance and the DPO is the contact point for Data Subjects and the Supervisory Authority, the Data Protection Commission.

GRETB's Data Protection Policy sets out the context for the security of learner and staff data. The PLSS, QBS and other data management systems have built in data protection mechanisms. GRETB operates a centralised IT Helpdesk where systems in Head Office control patch management using tools such as SCCM and Intune. Such systems help to provide like-for-like end-user experiences throughout GRETB FET Centres. It is planned to expand these centralised tools to enhance and improve end-user support via desktop remote monitoring and management.

In addition to the Data Protection Policy, the following documents have been developed:

CCTV Policy
CCTV Policy Privacy Notice
Data Breach Protocol
PLSS Data Protection Statement
Privacy Statement for Employees
Privacy Statement for Students
Records Management Policy
Records Retention Schedule
Protecting Personal Data When Working Remotely

Section 8 of the Freedom of Information Act 2014 requires Freedom of Information (FOI) bodies to prepare and publish as much information as possible in an open and accessible manner on a routine basis outside of FOI, having regard to the principles of openness, transparency and accountability as set out in Sections 8(5) and 11(3) of the Act.

2.8.2 Evaluation

The appointment of a Data Protection Officer and the establishment of a Data Protection Unit ensures centralised oversight of all data collection, processing, and storage within GRETB. There is one contact for any queries or concerns from learners, centres and stakeholders meaning people receive consistent messaging.

Staff questionnaire feedback evidenced very high engagement with GDPR training and reporting of understanding of GDPR obligations.

Regular training for new staff and refresher training for existing staff is offered on the certification data systems used by GRETB. The appointment of a PLSS Coordinator in 2019 allows for a dedicated point of contact for queries or issues with the ETB's largest learner database system.

2.8.3 Conclusion and recommendations

There is one centralised GRETB IT network thereby making its management more streamlined. However, staff shortages in the IT department and lack of sanction for increasing staffing across this function is a significant risk for GRETB in terms of its network's safety and security.

There is a high level of awareness of GDPR responsibilities amongst staff which can be attributed to the extensive face to face training carried out by the Data Protection Officer over the last number of years. This was supported by the provision of online GDPR training for all staff. GRETB should continue to engage positively with staff in the provision of GDPR training in tandem with Child Protection Training.

Issues with appropriate connectivity to some FET Centres is being addressed and this work should continue through collaboration with HEANET. In order to improve efficiency, it is recommended that IT Support requests are logged via a new centralised webform instead of the current email system as this will allow GRETB to capture all the required information and automate a response to common queries. This will not alleviate the issues caused as a result of chronic understaffing in this department, however.

'I understand my professional obligations with respect to GDPR, Child Protection and Health & Safety'

- 95% of staff agreed

Photo: Chaosheng Zhang

Learner Testimonial

"I recently completed a QQI Level 5 course in Healthcare Support at Ballinasloe College of Further Education.

After many years of wondering and maybe not having the confidence to look into a career change, I finally got in contact with Ballinasloe College after seeing an advertisement on social media about their Healthcare Support Course. I could not recommend the Teaching Staff and Management enough in this centre. They were the most fantastic group of people that I have ever come across and they made the whole transition and learning experience so enriching and true to life.

I had cared for family members in the past but decided that I needed to have 'something on paper' before applying for a job in Nursing Homes. After completing the part-time programme over two years and doing my placement I was thrilled to be offered a job in the Nursing Home where I completed my Work Experience Placement. I thoroughly enjoyed my time here and would recommend this course to people interested in a career in healthcare."

- GRETB Learner

2.9 Public Information and Communication

2.9.1 Description

In line with the Education and Training Boards Act 2013, GRETB is required to publish a five-year strategic plan, an annual operational plan, and an annual report. GRETB is required to make available key information with reference to programme delivery and QA policies, procedures, and governance in accordance with the QQI (2016) Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines.

The GRETB website is the main repository for this public information for all sections of the organisation. All QA policies, procedures, and governance requirements as well as publications such as annual reports, service level agreements and GRETB board minutes are published on the website. It provides information and links to its key publications, policies, and procedures in relation to capital and procurement, recruitment, governance structures, data protection, complaints and appeals, etc.

The use of social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube, are integral elements of communication with the public. GRETB has an IT Acceptable Usage Policy which outlines what is appropriate usage for staff and learners.

The Head of Corporate Services represents GRETB on the ETBI Communications Network which aims to address the sectoral communications needs. The objective is to develop a shared sectoral identity and voice for the benefit of member ETBs and to improve sectoral communications, and to develop and implement a campaign to promote the ETB brand locally and nationally. ETBI is currently finalising a sectoral Communication Strategy which GRETB will use as a base for its communications strategy into the future.

Centre/Programme Managers currently take responsibility for the advertising of all courses and publicising of centre activity, locally. This is undertaken across a range of media both traditional and non. Social media platforms report far higher engagement and return on application and enquiries than traditional newspaper and radio advertising right across the ETB.

'Information and Communication across GRETB is clear and easily accessible'.
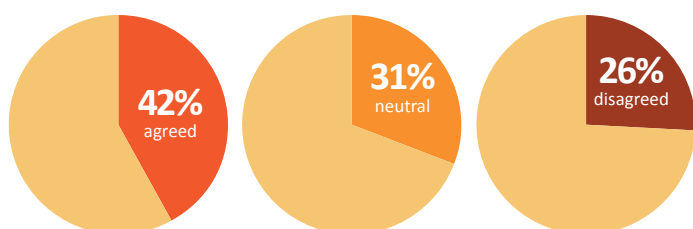
2.9.2 Evaluation

Management in GRETB recognise the need for a co-ordinated approach to communications and publications on behalf of the organisation. Attempts at sectoral level to have a Communications Officer role sanctioned have not progressed, leaving a considerable deficit in GRETB in this regard. Externally, this is a lack of consistency in branding and communication which leads to a dilution of the recognition and recall of GRETB and its services. Internally, the lack of a well-utilised staff Intranet has had a detrimental impact on the dissemination of communication with staff, in particular. Such gaps were evidenced in the recent Staff Survey where only 42% of staff agreed that 'Information and Communiations across GRETB is clear and easily accessible'. This was reinforced by the finding that 58% of staff felt they are 'kept informed of developments impacting GRETB'.

Further findings on GRETB communications includes feedback from the external stakeholders' group which concluded, 'GRETB as an organisation needs more promotion across all communities'.

Information from the Corporate Serivces department of GRETB is issued regularly by email to all staff via a dedicated communications@gretb email address. This communication relates to all activity across the ETB, from primary, post-primary and FET, through to Community and Youth Service engagements. The AGIS is also very active in attending open days, networking events, education fairs, jobs fairs, library talks and meetings

2.9.3 Conclusion and recommendations

There is a clear commitment across individual departments and centres to communicate effectively both internally and externally. However, in the absence of a dedicated function with specialist knowledge in both internal and external communication and brand strategy, there will continue to be a lack of consistency of message. The OSD staff focus group also reported that 'internal and external communications need to be strengthened,' indicating a cross-departmental recognition of need. The Support and Development Unit (established in November 2021) is envisaged to include a FET Communications function which would address the need for a dedicated staff member to this area of responsibility.

In the absence of sanction for a Communiations Officer or the ability to second a suitably qualified/experienced existing staff member, GRETB should outsource its Communicatons and marketing to an external agency to ensure consistency of message and brand.

3

Objective 2: Teaching, Learning and Assessment

3.1 The Learning Environment

3.1.1 Description

GRETB considers a positive learning environment to be integral to a good teaching and learning experience for our learners. Our commitment to providing a positive, inclusive learning environment is reflected in the *GRETB Strategy Statement 2017-2021*.

Promote positive learning experiences and environments

Goal 1.3

Provide technology enhanced learning environments

Goal 1.4

Promote equality and active inclusion

Goal 2.1

Ensure buildings are accessible to all based on resources

Goal 2.2.2

GRETB's Learning Environment Policy deems learners, FET Practitioners, learning supports, and resources including appropriately equipped classrooms, learner resource rooms, and learner social spaces to be central to each learning environment.

Learners participating in GRETB FET attend either full-time or part-time courses across a wide range of provision, as outlined in Section 1.1 and more fully in the Provider Profile. Prior to starting a course, learners receive an induction from the local Centre/Programme manager. At induction learners are briefed on the course, supports available, facilities, code of behaviour, and introduced to staff. The induction allows learners to become comfortable and familiar with the learning environment.

The Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS) provides funding to the ETB Sector through SOLAS for Buildings and Capital Equipment.

Together with DFHERIS, SOLAS, ETBI and the ETBs, a strategic approach is being developed for capital funding for ETBs to meet the requirements of the sector in the coming years, aligned with requirements under the Climate Action Plan, disability access requirements, strategic upgrade, and

expansion, etc.

GRETB has focused over the last number of years on the upgrade and replacement of life safety systems, fire safety upgrades, health and safety works, expansion of apprenticeship workshops and refurbishment of existing learning spaces. These works were funded through the devolved capital grant and the capital grant for large scale projects. A strategic plan of GRETB Capital requirements is under consideration. This includes:

- The proposed development of a flagship Further Education and Training Campus in Galway City – FET College of the Future

- Purchase of newly refurbished 30,000 sq ft building beside the GRETB Training Centre to initially cater for the anticipated increase in demand for apprenticeship places.

- Development of FET Centres in key locations in Galway and Roscommon and enhancing services provided.

- Refurbishment of existing facilities to meet the changing FET environment.

- Energy upgrades to meet GRETB Climate Action obligations.

Recent developments and building upgrades in GRETB FET buildings:
Installation of a New Training Kitchen at St. Brendan's FET Centre, Loughrea

Petersburg Outdoor Education Centre building received a full upgrade in line with fire compliance. Storage sheds were also refurbished, the boiler, windows and doors were all replaced.

The Carpentry Area at GRETB Training Centre had a full refurbishment.

A new Plumbing Workshop was installed at the GRETB Training Centre.

Ballaghadereen FET Centre, Co. Roscommon, the two-storey building houses the Youthreach service had an upgrade of emergency lighting and fire alarm. The single storey Adult Basic Education building had a full electrical upgrade
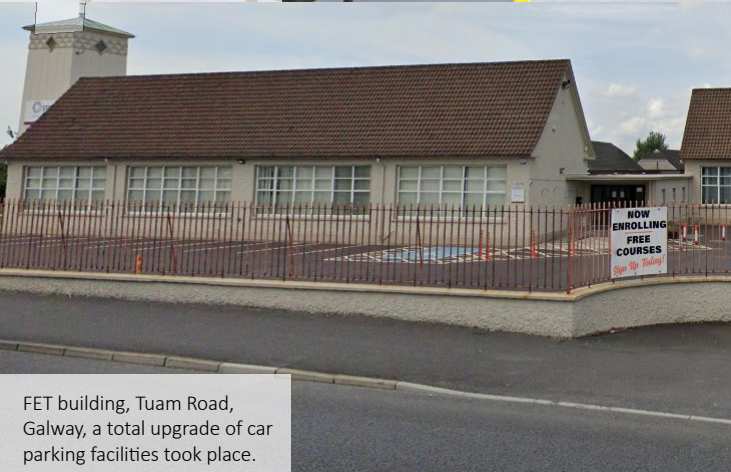
FET building, Tuam Road, Galway, a total upgrade of car parking facilities took place.

FET Centre Portumna, Co. Galway, there was an upgrade of car parking facilities.

Galway Technical Institute (GTI) had an upgrade of the heating centre which included replacing old oil boilers with new condensing gas boilers. A refurbishment of the existing roof was completed. An upgrade of fire alarm and emergency lighting to comply with current standards was installed. Universal access toilets and external ramps were completed.

The TEL team in GRETB works to support building the confidence and capacity of all FET practitioners across GRETB in the use of technology to enhance the range of teaching methodologies. The development of a digital learning environment focused on the upskilling of staff, increases their capacity and gives access to technological tools that, in turn, bring new life to the learning environment.

The TEL team has developed a variety of resources internally including: the Getting Ready to Teach Online course; training in a range of Apps and programmes such as, TEAMS, One Note, One Note ePortfolio, Screencast, Zoom, Visualiser Training, and ThingLink/Powtoon. GRETB FET staff also access external training with, Wriggle Connect Online Platform and TEL Level 6 & 7 Programmes with NCI and the Level 8 programme in NUI, Galway.

A key aspect of capacity building in this arena in GRETB is the TEL Champion Mentoring Programme. The Champions are timetabled for 2 hours per week to work within their centres to identify immediate skills gaps and support initial training. By providing one-to-one mentoring they support staff who need to develop their digital teaching skills. They also work with the TEL team in developing TEL training resources.

Procedures and processes have been implemented to ensure that delivery within a digital environment is underpinned by quality. Pedagogical frameworks have been developed and training provided. The importance of safe practice in a virtual environment was fast-tracked with the COVID-19 pandemic and the need to offer classes in a virtual or distance environment. Best practice for Moodle and 'netiquette' guidelines have been agreed and implemented. All resources are available on TEL SharePoint. An ePortfolio project was piloted in 2021 in two centres, to support the need for virtual External Authentication during restricted movement lockdowns. The approach was commended by the External Authenticator and is now available to any centre wishing to develop an ePortfolio approach as part of their assessment. GRETB recognises that a successful digital learning environment is reliant on the infrastructure which underpins it, and the partnerships which support it. As a result, it has submitted plans to SOLAS to fund a TEL training hub. This will allow staff to develop skills, media content and to host online workshops, in dedicated spaces and suites. Significant investment was made in WIFI upgrades in centres and the purchase of hardware and software to support a rich digital learning environment over the last three-five years. This includes a device for disadvantaged learner scheme, visualisers for centres, iPads, and microphones.

The success to date of the digital enhancement of GRETB's learning environment has been as a result of the internal partnerships with the TEL team including the IT, QA, PLD, and Learner Support functions alongside the Programme Approval Board. External partnerships include SOLAS, ETBI, NUI, Galway, GMIT, ILTA, NALA, National Forum of Teaching and Learning, Wriggle Connect, Erasmus and EU Digi Comp.

The organisation also recognises the significant role collaboration and sharing of high-quality learning experiences can have in the FET learner's development. To this end, GRETB engages in Erasmus+ Mobility projects to inform both staff and learners of best practice in other jurisdictions whilst also taking the opportunity to share the unique Irish FET experience with our European colleagues. GRETB's has experienced the impact of these projects on improving access and participation for its learners, whilst also validating the important partnership of formal and non-formal learning.
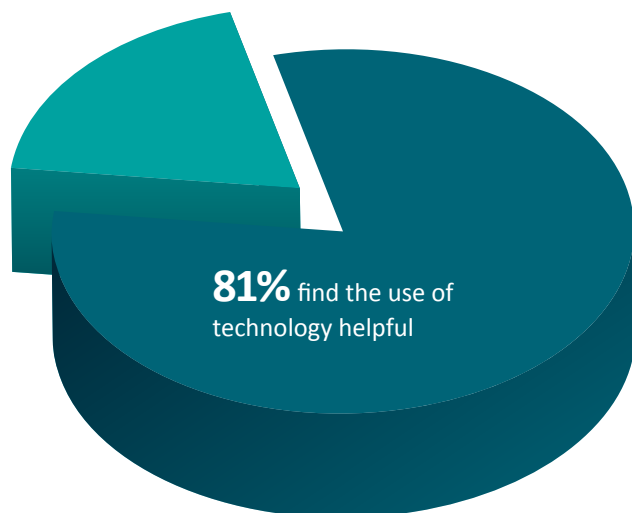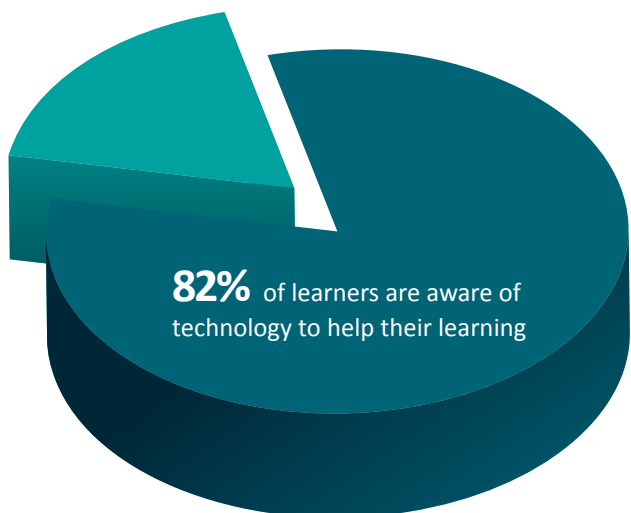
3.1.2 Evaluation

GRETB's Buildings department works continuously to improve the physical environments for both learners and staff within the limited capital budget allocation each year. GRETB, like most ETBs, operates out of buildings that are old and have suffered the ill-effects of under-investment throughout the decades when capital expenditure was not possible for the, then, VECs. The capital funding landscape continues to improve however, and GRETB will continue to work closely with SOLAS to address the need for both retrofitting and upgrades to its existing buildings and the development of a state-of-the-art purpose-built FET College in Galway City.

However, despite the historic underinvestment, GRETB has used its resources effectively to bring improvements to all its FET centres in recent years. The Staff Survey reported that 71% of staff agree that their 'workplace facilities are adequate'. Some respondents provided negative feedback regarding building facilities however, which is to be expected and accepted given the age profile of some buildings. Regular meetings between FET senior management and the Buildings' Officer will continue to identify priority needs in upgrading of facilitates across both counties.

The TEL department responded effectively and efficiently to support staff and their learners to continue their education and training online when the COVID-19 pandemic caused centre lockdowns. The Getting Ready to Teach Online module, developed by TEL, engaged high participation rates and as new innovations and opportunities are offered by the TEL team engagement levels remain high amongst learners and staff.

Staff / Learner Survey results

82% of learners are aware of technology to help their learning

81% find the use of technology helpful

Working from home (staff)

50% found it Easy/ Somewhat Easy

38% found it Challenging/ Somewhat Challenging

The figure below shows the various methods employed by staff to engage learners during centre closures as a result of COVID-19 pandemic. The mix reflects the unique and diverse nature of ETB learner cohorts.

Figure 12: Engagement with Learners

Method	Percentage
Microsoft Teams	42%
Email	60%
Resources digitally	45%
Resources post	30%
Zoom	40%
Moodle	13%
Phonecalls	40%
Text messages	32%
Other	13%
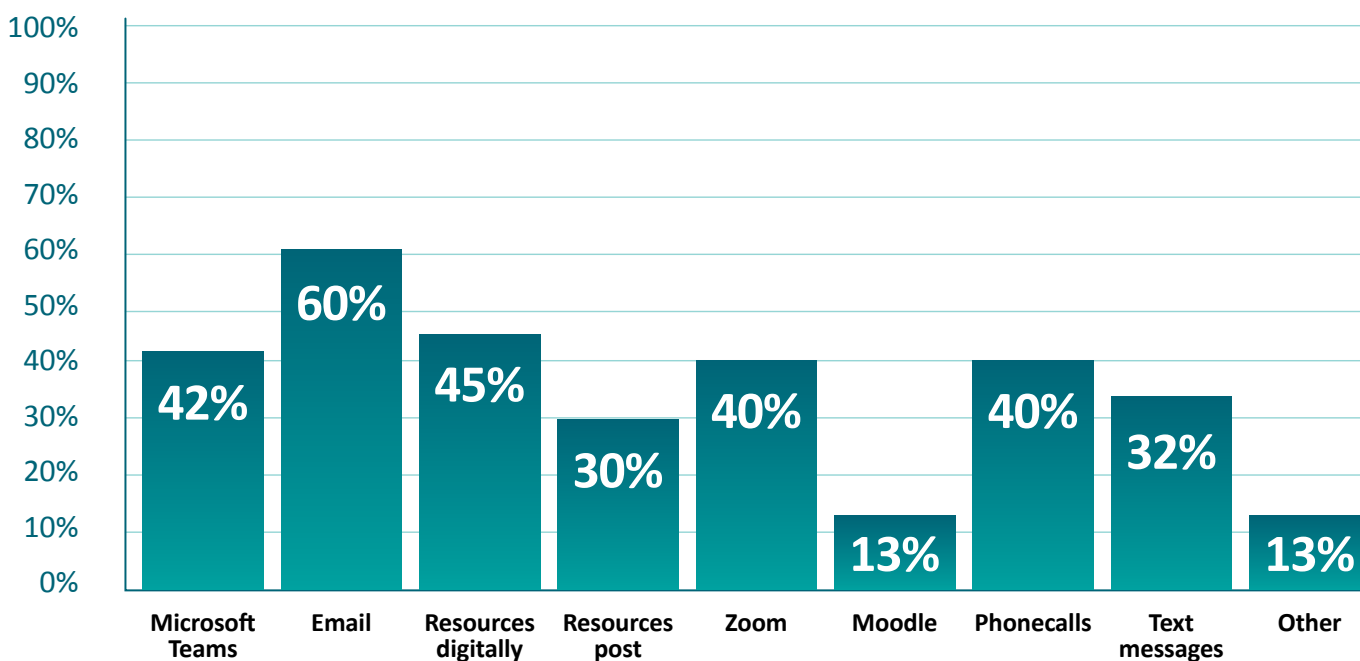
3.1.3 Conclusion and recommendations

The Buildings department continued to make improvements to the physical built environment during COVID-19 in anticipation of the return to face to face learning. Capital equipment requests and facility improvement plans are now agreed centrally by GRETB's senior management team, ensuring a strategic approach to capital development

There is strong evidence of the dedicated and timely response by the TEL team to quickly develop resources, materials and training to meet the unexpected need to transfer all teaching and learning online during COVID-19 lockdowns. This work continues to develop as GRETB prepares for the next phase in FET delivery whereby flexibility will be key.

GRETB should continue to work on its building projects through systematic identification of need across centres and committing to multi-annual plans for investment which ensures the provision of high quality, fit-for-purpose learning environments for all learners irrespective of programme or service.

GRETB should participate in all national discussions related to the definition of 'blended learning' for the FET sector remaining cognisant of its learner cohorts and their need for in-person contact. Consideration should be given to the provision of 'blended delivery' as opposed to a pedagogical approach to Blended Learning until such time as the sector has the requisite infrastructure in place to support same.

Learner Testimonial

"I have been living in Ireland since 2011 working in the retail sector and despite my degree in Sociology in Brazil I needed to get a qualification that would be recognised here, I wanted to study something else and get new skills to enable me to change my career path in this country. I knew I wanted something related to the education field.

It was not an easy decision to go back to education as a mature student, a mother of 2 young children and full-time worker. After the first class I felt so happy and encouraged to keep going despite all the challenges I knew I would need to overcome. But I got all the support I needed from the tutor and my fellow students. Staff at the centre were very respectful and I got so much care and encouragement. Each of the modules covered in the course give me all the knowledge and skills necessary to work in the early year sector with confidence. I am excited to continue in Childcare with my qualification, I hope to continue to Level 6 also."

- GRETB Learner

3.2 Assessment of Learners

3.2.1 Description

GRETB is committed to the fair and consistent assessment of learners as agreed under the four legacy QA agreements in existence pre amalgamation/ETB formation. The Centre/Programme manager is responsible for the implementation of robust assessment protocols to ensure the integrity and consistency of assessments, and the security of assessment evidence and records. All centres are informed of the key certification dates and responsibility then lies with Centre/Programme managers alongside their FET practitioners to devise assessments and an assessment schedule.

Centre/Programme managers and their FET practitioners are responsible for informing learners about the assessment process and the learners' responsibilities to ensure the integrity of the process.

GRETB's Assessment Tutor Pack is given to all FET practitioners. This contains assessment brief templates which describe the assessment process and procedure, the marking scheme, submission deadline, feedback date and authorship statement. An assessment brief is given to learners prior to commencement of the assessment task.

Currently two types of assessment models are operational in GRETB: Locally devised assessments and Assessment Instrument Specifications (AIS).

Centres are responsible for the conduct of assessments. Assessment policy documents relating to the conduct of assessment are operational across all FET programmes, these include- Assessment Deadlines, Assessment Malpractice, Reasonable Accommodation and Compassionate Consideration. Further information on the assessment cycle is contained in section 2.7 Integrity and Approval of Assessment Results.

Formative feedback is given to learners throughout programme delivery. It is viewed as important for the learners' progress and improvement whilst undertaking a programme. While much of the formative feedback is given on a continuous basis, it is also recorded formally with the learner's response (see p.20 Assessment Tutor Pack).

The process outlined in the Reasonable Accommodation policy is available to any learner who wants to be considered for a special accommodation. Every effort is made, as far as practicable, to meet the learner's request, while maintaining the quality of the award standard.

Adaptations/accommodations may include the following:

- *modified presentation of assignments/ examination papers, e.g. enlargements*
- *scribes/readers*
- *sign language interpreter*
- *rest breaks*
- *adaptive equipment/software*
- *use of assistive technology*
- *additional time*
- *separate room/space*

Extenuating circumstances and other short-term interventions that may be required from time to time are dealt with by the Centre/Programme manager by way of the following policies; Assessment Deadlines: Compassionate Consideration in Extenuating Circumstances policy document and Assessment Deadlines: Short-term Extensions policy document.

Centres are responsible for the secure storage of all assessment materials. When the assessment process is fully completed assessment evidence is securely disposed of in line with GRETB's Retention Schedule and data protection legislation.

Learners can appeal their assessment result if they are dissatisfied with their result or the assessment process. A learner who wishes to appeal their result will follow the process outlined in the Assessment Result Appeals Policy document, while a learner who wishes to appeal the assessment process will follow the process outlined in the Assessment Process Appeals policy document.

Response to COVID-19

GRETB acted swiftly to ensure that teaching and learning, and the assessment process, were not compromised by the COVID-19 emergency restrictions in March 2020.

Modules which were assessed by examination or skills demonstration were impacted by the restrictions as staff and learners could not attend their centres. The QA department in consultation with senior management and Centre/Programme managers proposed alternative assessment techniques, which were informed by QQI's Contingency Assessment Arrangements document. Centres applied to the QA department for approval to change the assessment techniques. The proposed contingency arrangements were formally approved through the governance structures.

The QA department in consultation with the SMT developed contingency internal verification and external authentication guidelines for centres to ensure that a quality assured assessment process continued to be implemented. The guidelines were informed by QQI's Contingency Assessment Arrangements. The contingency arrangements were approved by the QA Steering Group and adopted by the Quality Council. All RAP meetings were conducted remotely through MS Teams.

The contingency arrangement for internal verification required teachers to carry out their own IV as they could not enter centres or meet with colleagues. Sampling does not apply to the contingency IV procedure and therefore 100% of all learner evidence is Internally Verified. Feedback from the staff questionnaire and the centres at the RAP meetings indicated that FET practitioners found this experience a positive one and they became more careful when calculating results and inputting data. It was suggested in the responses to the staff questionnaire that more time could be set aside to complete the IV process. Centre/Programme managers have since been advised of the importance of allocating sufficient time to enable thorough verification of all assessment documentation.

The TEL department piloted e-Portfolios in a small number of centres. Follow-up feedback from the EA assigned to those centres indicated that the pilot was successful from the EA's perspective. This EA was assigned a centre that was in the pilot and a centre that was external to the pilot. She found the e-Portfolios extremely easy to navigate compared with the more traditional sharing of assessment evidence which is a mixture of hard copy and soft copy.

Where contingency arrangements were applied a sample of comments from EAs:

• Excellent contingency arrangement in place which required all classes to be delivered using Zoom and other technology. This process appears to have worked extremely well for the learning practitioner and learners.

• Well done all involved in teaching and learning and management of assessment processes during the COVID-19 period.

• The contingency arrangements appear to have worked well.

• Contingency arrangements have been applied in accordance with GRETB work experience and work practice contingency arrangements policy.

The COVID-19 restrictions impacted on learners' access to work experience, a mandatory module for all major awards. GRETB amended the national Work Experience/Practice assessment contingencies document for implementation across its FET Centres. The scenarios outlined in the document covered the varying contexts of the delivery of the module at the time of the restrictions. The recommendations approved through GRETB's governance structures ensured that all learning outcomes could be assessed.

The COVID-19 restrictions proved particularly challenging to meet the work placement requirements for the Level 5 and Level 6 Childcare and Healthcare awards. A national working group was formed, consisting of all members of the ETBI QA Network, to work on contingency arrangements that would satisfy the work placement requirements for the major awards.

The group consulted extensively with the key stakeholders and submitted the contingency work placement proposals to QQI for agreement. QQI approved the proposals for the ETBs to roll out within their own provision and complimented the rigour which was applied to process. GRETB's QA department brought the proposals through its governance structures for approval and disseminated the information internally through senior and middle management. Centres that were impacted by the restrictions applied to the QA department for approval of their contingency arrangements, using the QQI Governance Oversight Temporary CAS Modifications form.

The Teaching, Learning and Assessment Working Group was established in June 2021 to support the QA Steering Group in the identification and implementation of improvements in teaching, learning and assessment activity across FET in GRETB. It is intended that models of good practice in teaching, learning and assessment will be identified/developed and shared across FET.

3.2.2 Evaluation

There are clear, documented policies and procedures in place to ensure a sound underpinning of all assessment activity across GRETB provision. Positive feedback from External Authenticators' reports and feedback from learners demonstrate a robust assessment system that provides confidence to GRETB, its FET practitioners and learners. Areas for improvement are highlighted in EA reports and meetings with Centre/Programme and line managers lead to the development of training plans for staff based on the areas highlighted.

GRETB operates two well-established assessment systems - the FE and the Training QA systems. Work has already commenced to move programmes across with all Community Training now operating under the interim QA agreement (formally FE). There are plans to extend this work into a number of Training Centre programmes from September 2022 with planning to commence in Spring 2022. The establishment of one QA system for GRETB, when complete, will provide a robust single assessment system, which will benefit learners and staff alike.

Reflection on the response to the COVID-19 pandemic confirms that it was measured, controlled, and it provided confidence to all stakeholders. There was a high level of satisfaction among staff in relation to the information they issued about the assessment process as evidenced in the Staff Questionnaire.

Learners are informed of the assessment schedule in the Centre.
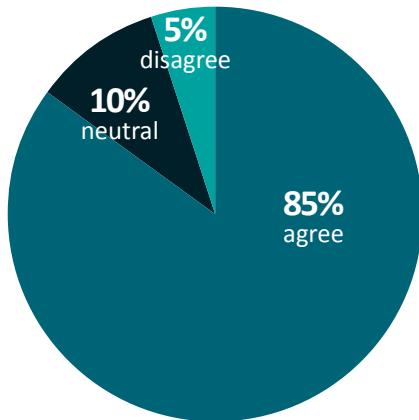
5% disagree
10% neutral
85% agree

Learners are informed of the implications of plagiarism.

4% disagree
7% neutral
89% agree

Learners are informed of how and when they will receive feedback from assessment.

4% disagree
14% neutral
82% agree
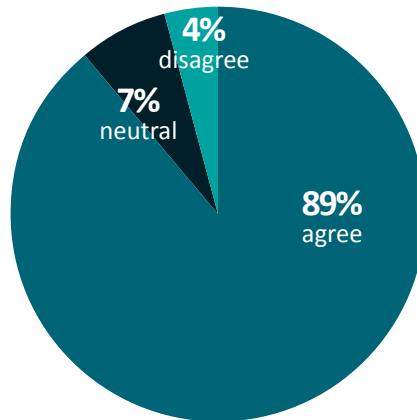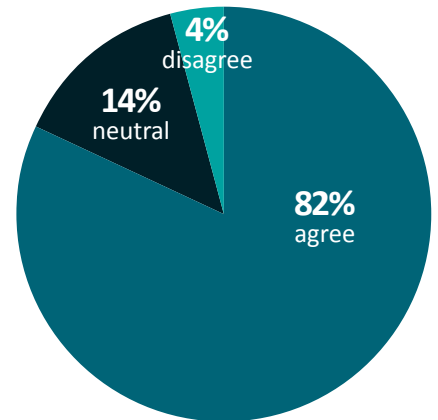
Similarly, the learners agreed with the staff perceptions as evidenced in the Learner Questionnaire.

I know the assignments and exams that are required on my course.

82% agree

Assignments and class activities are clearly explained.

92% agree

I receive feedback on my course work.

90% agree

However, it is clear from feedback from the staff questionnaire that more work needs to be done with Centre/Programme managers in relation to the dissemination of EA reports to staff:

Table 6: Practitioner Feedback on External Authentication Feedback

I receive feedback from the External Authenticator (EA) for my module(s) in my Centre.

52% agree	7% neutral	32% N/A	5% disagree

Areas outlined as best practice in the External Authenticator (EA) report are shared in my Centre.

57% agree	8% neutral	30% N/A	5% disagree

Areas outlined for improvement in the External Authenticator (EA) report are addressed in my Centre.

55% agree	10% neutral	31% N/A	5% disagree

Table 7:Practitioner Feedback on Assessment

	AGREE	UNSURE	DISAGREE	N/A
Learners are informed of the assessment schedule in the Centre.	65%	8%	4%	23%
Learners are informed of how and when they will receive feedback from assessment.	62%	11%	3%	24%
Learners are informed of the implications of plagiarism.	67%	6%	3%	25%
Assessment materials are stored securely in the Centre.	68%	7%	10%	24%

A sample of qualitative comments from learner questionnaires:

'I am enjoying the course and the online learning. Some subjects are easier taught in the classroom such as ICT'.

'I really enjoyed the course and thought the tutors were brilliant, very knowledgeable and approachable. The COVID-19 restrictions made it difficult to get work experience, and also we missed out on the practical work from January until April when we resumed. I know it couldn't be helped and at least we were able to continue with theory'.

'COVID-19 changed a lot about the course and didn't allow more practical work to take place which is an important part of the course. I do feel that no work experience and lack of practical work was not the best outcome on a course like this. The tutors did a great job under difficult circumstances'.

'More training for IT training and support for marginalised groups and individuals'.

'Training in relation to learner motivation online'.

98% of learners stated that 'they have a good relationship with their instructors/teachers/tutors'

3.2.3 Conclusion and recommendations

GRETB has a clear and standardised system which ensures compliance with quality assurance guidelines. Expectations and requirement for both FET practitioners and learners are clear and documented. There are systems in place which support learners in the provision of reasonable accommodations. There is evidence of positive feedback via the External Authentication process testifying to a system that is robust.

The COVID-19 impact on teaching, learning and assessment was very positively responded to by all stakeholders. The evidence of regular and timely communication with Centre/Programme managers and FET practitioners enabled the implementation of all contingency arrangements for assessment in line with QA-approved arrangements. Staff at all levels showed great agility in responding to new digital methodologies to ensure consistent quality assuring of the process, even in a virtual environment.

GRETB should continue its work in amalgamating QA processes as planned, with a schedule of courses/programmes throughout 2022. A process of outlining the importance of feedback of EA reports should be devised and rolled out with Centre/Programme managers.

A consistent approach to blended delivery should be further reinforced through ongoing training and upskilling via collaboration with QA, TEL and PL&D teams.

Consideration should be given to the engagement with employers regarding GRETB's QA system to enable an understanding of responsibilities across all stakeholders in work-based learning programmes.

Learner Testimonial

"Going back into education to do childcare was one of the best decisions I have ever made, As a mature student I was very nervous walking in the doors on the first day but that didn't last long, our tutor was amazing and helped me throughout the whole course, It has not only given me the qualifications needed to go back into childcare, but I also have made many new friends and my confidence has returned. I loved being back in the classroom so much I have decided to continue and do my level 6. For anyone thinking childcare is for them then this is the place to go to get your qualifications."

- GRETB Learner

3.3 Supports for Learners

3.3.1 Description

GRETB is committed to providing an inclusive FET service which encourages the participation of learners who are most disadvantaged or excluded from education and training. The aim of all programmes and services is to target those learners and to provide supports which foster positive engagement and participation. At induction stage, learners are afforded an opportunity to disclose any barriers which may affect their ability to succeed on a programme. If disclosures are made, the appropriate staff member advocates on behalf of the learner to provide supports, as necessary. Learners may at any point during their time in GRETB disclose a barrier to a member of staff and seek support. Confidentiality is central to this process. A QA working group on Learner Support is in place and representatives from across FET make up the membership of the group.

The mission of the Learner Support working group is 'to strive for an inclusive, learner-centred support service which is agile, accessible and compassionate'. GRETB delivers services to a wide range of diverse learners and as a result, the supports which learners require need to be equally wide ranging and diverse to meet their needs.

Access and inclusion are key to the support of learners within GRETB. GRETB is actively engaged in all communities across the region enabling learners to participate in programmes which are both accredited and non-accredited in their local areas. The Adult Basic Education and Community Education Service offer educational opportunities to some of the most disadvantaged communities in the region.

In an effort to ensure access and inclusion is central to all of the work in GRETB, both across its FET provision and under its obligation as an employer, the following work was undertaken throughout 2020 and 2021: Public Sector Duty values were developed; Equality and Human rights issues relevant to education and training were assessed; a civic society validation of the issues was undertaken and an action plan for implementation was put in place. All of the values which underpin the public sector duty in GRETB include participation and inclusion. The action plan focuses on raising awareness of the importance of equality, diversity and inclusion.

A lunchtime conversation series was facilitated, to explore issues of diversity and equality in GRETB. The first session focused on Equality, Inclusion and Diversity in the workplace whilst other themes explored LGBT+ awareness, Anti- Racism work in education, Disability Awareness and Inclusion, and the Traveller experience of education. Over 300 staff attended these online sessions.

Current supports available and promoted at centre/ programme level to all learners and include:

- *Reasonable Accommodation for Assessment*
- *Assistive Technology support: reader pens, hearing loops*
- *Assistive Technology awareness and training week*
- *Adult Education Guidance and Information service: find the right course*
- *Disability Supports*
- *ABE service: Reading, Writing, Numeracy, IT and English Language supports*
- *Counselling in person and online*
- *Laptop and Device Loan Scheme for Disadvantaged Learners.*
- *Youth Advocates: Support for early school leavers/ those at risk of early Support, mentoring, alternative options. One-to-one confidential setting.*
- *Sign language interpretation*
- *Awareness raising for staff*

3.3.2 Evaluation

Learner support is an essential component of successful learner engagement within GRETB. There are a large range of learner supports in place across the FET service as described above. The key support for any learner is the FET practitioner.

'I am very happy with my tutor, she is always in good form and is very approachable, and always makes you feel welcome, which does really help with the learning experience'.

As part of the restructuring of the FET department, an Inclusion Unit was established in November 2021. This unit will have responsibility for driving forward and building upon the good work already undertaken in this arena. Despite the absence of a dedicated unit until November 2021, recognition and awareness of the supports available to learners in GRETB is strong, as evidenced in the recent Learner Questionnaire.

Whilst areas such as language classes and disability supports, report a low level of awareness, this can be as a result of their somewhat niche demand. Notwithstanding this, the Inclusion Unit will engage in campaigns to highlight these supports in GRETB in 2022.

GRETB has demonstrated its commitment to the inclusion

Table 8: Awareness of Learner Supports at GRETB

	YES	UNSURE	NO
Literacy	72%	25%	3%
Language Classes	56%	38%	6%
Study Support	69%	28%	3%
Career Guidance/Counselling	73%	24%	3%
Mentoring	64%	32%	4%
Technology to help	82%	16%	2%
Disability Support	62%	33%	5%

of all learners and staff though the development of its Public Sector Duty values, and its statement and assessment of equality and human rights issues. The implementation of UDL and the professional development opportunities delivered to increase awareness of inclusion have helped to ensure a more supportive environment for learners.

The crucial and positive role this approach has on the experience of the learner in FET is highlighted below

The fact that this discussion about inclusion is happening is a nice surprise. I think it would be valuable to have a statement on the ETB website to say it is an inclusive learning environment. I think they should advertise it as being inclusive. I am part of the LGBTQ community and I feel I am comfortable in my skin at this stage and I don't need to see anything but I think it's good to create inclusive and safe spaces like posters that it is a place people can be comfortable in… People want to know you have their back and all you need is a simple poster in a toilet or on a notice board. If I see the rainbow flag it can just make me feel more comfortable. GRETB Learner, 'A Study on the role, contribution and impact of ETB FET on Active Inclusion in Ireland, ETBI 2021

Feedback from both the learner questionnaire and focus group show clear evidence that learners who accessed supports found this a very positive experience which facilitated their learning and positive outcomes.

'All the teachers and support systems put in place have been incredible. I have made a lot of friends'.

'When you requested support or assistance it was forthcoming and positive. The general relationship with the tutors and management is positive with learners. The tutors were personable, friendly, and accommodating'.

The Learner Support Working Group has identified through its work the need for a more 'learner centred' approach to learner supports in GRETB. This approach will ensure that regardless of location or programme/service learners can access the same level of supports in a consistent way.

'If I need support or advice, I know it is only a phone call away. That has helped my stress levels. I have really enjoyed my experience'.

The opportunity for learners to engage and have a voice in their learning is very important in the delivery of learner supports. GRETB has engaged with AONTAS, annually, to facilitate the Galway and Roscommon FET Learner Forum. It will continue to engage with Aontas in an effort to identify practical mechanisms to allow for greater representation of learners on a variety of GRETB's committees and working groups.

3.3.3 Conclusion and recommendations

The Learner Support and Public Sector Duty working groups are engaging in very proactive and positive work which should continue and develop further through the establishment of the Inclusion Unit. It is clear that there is a high degree of awareness amongst learners of supports available and how to access them. One-to-one and group adult guidance is an important element in this and should continue across all service provision in tandem with the work of the Provision and Pathways Unit.

The development of processes to assess language levels on entry for ESOL provision is a positive development in the support of learners in this cohort and the provision of laptops to 525 learners under the laptop loan scheme have all significantly enhanced the learner experience. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the provision of sign language interpretation was instrumental in maintaining links with deaf community learners which negated the existing barriers to participation, heightened during this period of isolation, for many.

To consolidate the work already undertaken by GRETB in supporting learners, the Inclusion Unit should continue to provide and promote supports which are consistently available to all learners. It should also undertake to ensure that the principles of UDL employed across all FET provision through the development of a UDL implementation Plan.

The Unit should also coordinate/centralise referrals for learner supports to ensure that learners can self-refer for services as required and continue to implement the Public Sector Duty Action Plan and promote diversity and inclusion in all programmes.

4

Objective 3:
Self Evaluation,
Monitoring and Review

4.1 Self-Evaluation, Monitoring and Review

4.1.1 Description

The legacy QA systems for the three former VECs and TQAS for the Training Centre commit to **self-evaluation, monitoring and review** of quality assurance of FET services. GRETB continues that commitment, in line with its legislative responsibilities, since its re-engagement with QQI in 2018. The re-engagement process included an executive self-evaluation report, which identified good practices and areas for improvement.

Since re-engagement GRETB submits an **annual QIP to QQI,** which is underpinned by a **Progress and Planning Report.** The QIP includes key development activities and lists priorities for policy and procedure development, with timeframes, which are discussed at dialogue meetings with QQI. These meetings are currently postponed while the Inaugural Review is in progress.

As part of this self-evaluation, GRETB has endeavoured to include all stakeholders in the review process by providing them with the opportunity to contribute through **staff, learner and stakeholder questionnaires** and participation in **focus groups**. The resulting qualitative data combined with quantitative data from information systems, e.g. PLSS, and QQI's benchmarking reports, provided the evidence to support the self-evaluation findings.

EAs provide external, expert, independent confirmation of fair and consistent assessment of learners. **Internal verification** provides centre level confirmation that assessment processes and procedures are followed. The IV and EA reports are presented at the **RAP meetings**, prior to centres requesting certification from QQI.

The organisation of the RAP and schedule of meetings is carried out by the QA department. The RAP meetings provide the opportunity for the QA department and the centres to monitor and review IV and EA Reports, and assessment results. Good practices and issues to be addressed are recorded for each centre on their individual RAP Report. Reports are sent to the centres after the panel meetings and follow-up on corrective actions occurs after each RAP meeting.

Youthreach Centres annually engage in **Centre Evaluation and Improvement Planning (CEIP).** Staff, learners, and other stakeholders are facilitated by an external expert in this formal evaluation. The resulting report lists a series of actions which form part of the subsequent evaluation and improvement plan.

GRETB learners participate in annual **learner feedback events facilitated by AONTAS**. The feedback reports from AONTAS are distributed to the relevant line managers for follow-up.

4.1.2 Evaluation

GRETB engages annually in a self-evaluation of the quality assurance of its FET services through its QIP and now the Self-evaluation Report (SER) for the Inaugural Review. Self-evaluation is a positive opportunity for GRETB's FET service to engage in a process of continuous improvement.

GRETB acknowledges that evaluation of its FET services needs greater attention and support. A culture of self-evaluation does not permeate the service, yet. Typically, centres carry out a programme review but evaluation at centre level of processes to assure the quality of provision is rare.

To foster a quality culture across the service, Centre/Programme management and other relevant staff would benefit from training in conducting evaluations. The QA department envisages that centres will conduct an annual internal self-evaluation, supported by the QA department, the findings of which will feed into an evaluation report for the service. It is also planned that thematic evaluations will be carried out across the sector e.g. course access, facilities, resources, policies. Currently, the QA department does not have the staffing capacity to support centres to implement a provider-led systematic approach to self-evaluation.

4.1.3 Conclusion and recommendations

GRETB values the provision of high-quality education and training programmes and services and has engaged positively with the annual Quality Improvement Plan process to assist in making improvements and developing towards a more embedded culture of quality across all FET provision. The preparation for the Inaugural Review has confirmed the need for greater and more consistent stakeholder engagement on an ongoing basis, particularly with learners.

There is sound evidence however that the monitoring and review of the assessment process is functioning well with feedback from EAs and RAP meetings informing measures for improvement of the assessment process. This external and independent process provides an additional layer of validity to the assessment grades awarded, thus ensuring that award standards are met.

It is clear however that historic insufficient staffing in the QA department has impacted negatively in the development and implementation of a systematic approach to monitoring, review and self-evaluation. The establishment of the FET Support & Development Unit in November 2021 is aimed at addressing this with the newly appointed FET Director engaging in a staff review across FET to address the deficits.

Training in evaluation and monitoring should be devised and provided to all staff through the PL&D function of the Support and Development Unit. This should allow for the creation of a systematic approach to evaluation whereby centres feed into the annual QIP. Thematic evaluations of FET services should be rolled out without delay.

Photo: Chaosheng Zhang

Learner Testimonial

"I completed a QQI Level 5 course in Healthcare Support at Ballinasloe College of Further Education. My experience of the course was excellent, I felt that the Tutors and management made every effort possible to help us complete our modules. Enrolling on the Healthcare course was a total career change for me but the Teachers on the course were excellent at making the modules interesting and easy to understand. The skills part of the programme was so true to life and really helped me to prepare for Work Experience and placement. I learned something new every day and really enjoyed this learning environment. I would recommend this course to people interested in a career in Healthcare. The reason I chose to the course Healthcare Support QQI level 5 is because I was interested in healthcare as my two uncles were doctors and my gran was a nurse. I wanted to change from retail to healthcare. Since I completed the course, I am now working in Central Park Nursing Home Clonbern Galway. I am very satisfied that the course has met my needs because what I learned in the class and group work was very beneficial in the work I do at the nursing home. I am currently working in Central Park Nursing Home two years in November this year. I have not just made friends I keep in touch with them. I would highly recommend that course to a friend and members of the public because it opens lots of opportunities"

- GRETB Learner

4.2 Programme Monitoring and Review

4.2.1 Description

The legacy QA systems for the three former VECs and the Transition Quality Assurance System (TQAS) for the Training Centre refer to programme monitoring and review. The practice of monitoring and review has continued since the amalgamation of the VECs and the Training Centre to form Galway and Roscommon Education and Training Board. Reviews provide the centres with the opportunity to identify what is working well and areas for improvement in relation to the programmes being delivered. The suitability of programmes in meeting the learners' needs and the local needs are also considered as part of the review.

Programmes are **monitored and reviewed** at centre level with approaches varying between the centres. The frequency of reviews also varies. Typically, programmes are formally reviewed at the end of delivery, with informal monitoring being carried out during the delivery. A sample of the varying approaches is described below from the focus groups.

- *Some evaluations are carried out with teaching staff and learners collaboratively whilst others appoint a staff member to carry out an overall evaluation of the learners and the service.*

- *Varies with staff sending links to learners to identify what worked well at the end of each module.*

- *Quarterly feedback and self-reflections.*

- *Formalised class review meetings throughout the year*

Figure 13: Frequency of Reviews

Areas outlined as best practice in the External Authenticator (EA) report are shared in my Centre.
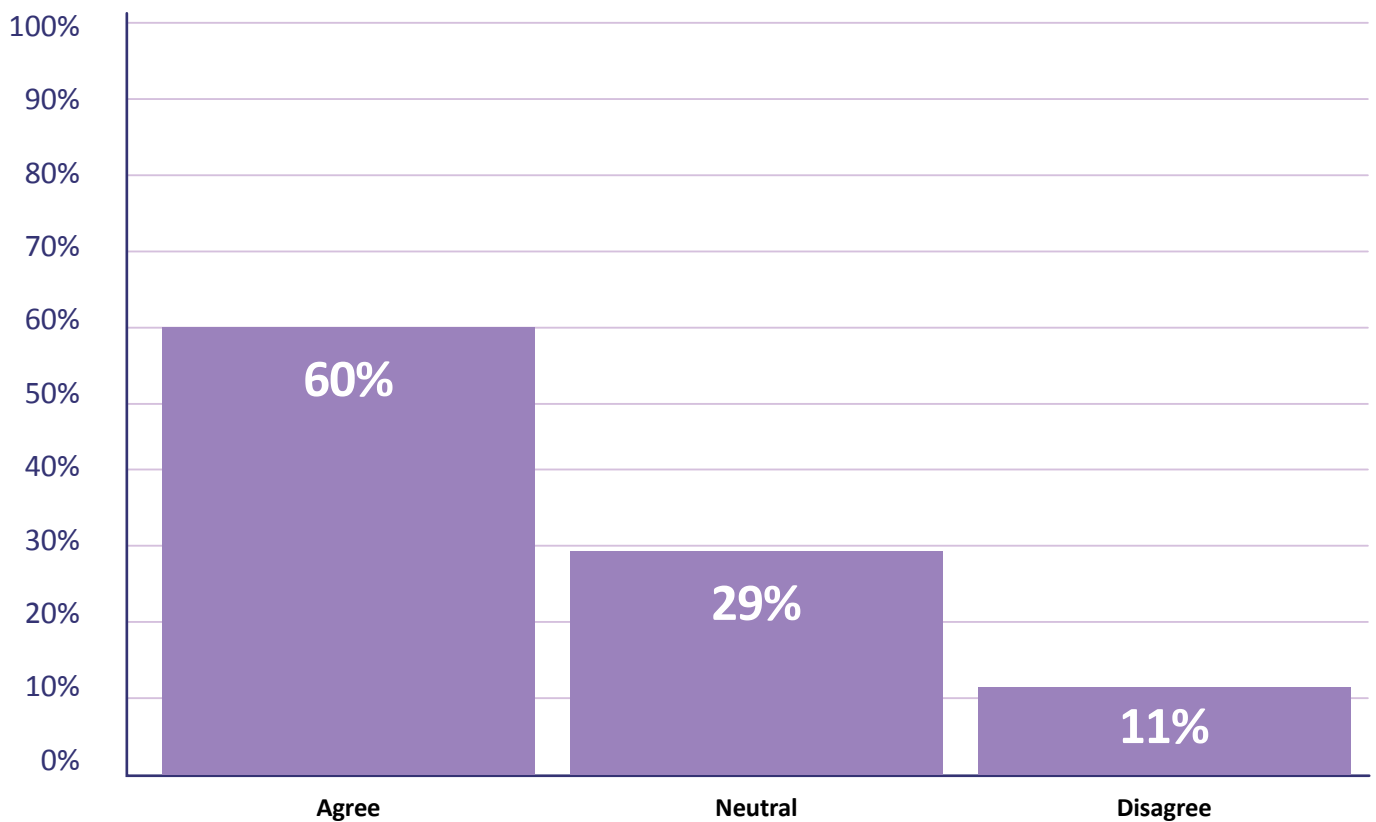
Currently, all **GRETB's validated programmes** are stored on a SharePoint which can be accessed by FET teaching staff. Where minor modifications are made to a programme the new version is uploaded by the QA department to the SharePoint and the older version removed.

Assessment Instrument Specifications (AIS) that require updating are discussed at RAPS and management source a subject matter expert to update the AIS. The updated AIS goes before the Programme Board for approval. Once approved, the Training Standards Officer (TSO) stores the updated version locally on the Training Standards shared folder.

The process for the updating of **Craft Apprenticeships** is detailed in below.

Figure 14: Assessment updates process for Craft Apprenticeships

Instructor (Feedback Form) → TSO → RAP → CADU → SOLAS to ETB
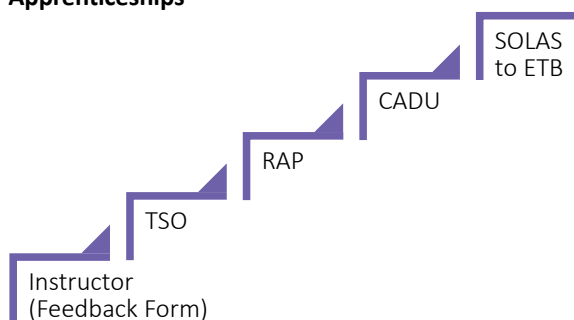
As the Co-ordinating Provider, GRETB recently established a **National Programme Board** as part of the governance structure of the **Arboriculture Apprenticeship**. A responsibility of the National Programme Board is to monitor, review and improve the apprenticeship programme (QAP P.15-17).

To ensure that validated programmes remain fit-for-purpose GRETB recognises the importance of programmatic review and **revalidation**. Typically, validation of programmes leading to QQI awards is for 3 to 5 years. The Advanced Certificate in Digital Media Production, the Advanced Certificate in Early Learning and Care and the Certificate in Early Learning and Care were approved by GRETB's Programme Board for submission to QQI under revalidation.

GRETB established a **Programme Board** (described in section 2.5.1) in 2020 with its ToR approved in 2021. The Programme Board has responsibilities in relation to programmes, monitoring and review.

Photo: Chaosheng Zhang

4.2.2 Evaluation

The majority of GRETB's FET centre staff (60%, Staff Questionnaire) recognise the importance of programme monitoring and review. The variety of monitoring and review **models** implemented locally by centres **needs to be streamlined** so that a coherent and consistent picture of the programmes being delivered, their effectiveness and suitability can be captured. Reports resulting from these reviews will inform future provision in the sector.

The results from the staff questionnaire to the statement **'reviews are carried out regularly in my workplace'** indicate that **11% of respondents disagreed and 29% were neutral.** This is concern and can be partly explained by the absence of support from the QA department. Also, centres conduct informal reviews without naming them as reviews, which may not be recorded in the questionnaire responses. Currently, the QA department does not have the staffing capacity to support centres in implementing a provider-led systematic approach to programme monitoring and review, but measures to address this are already underway (staffing review commenced Nov 2021).

The process of developing programmes for (re)validation highlighted the need for a governance structure to be put in place to approve the rationale and subsequent development of programmes. As a result, the agreed ToR for the Programme Board included programme approval for delivery in centres as well as programme approval for (re)validation. This has led to a more rationalised approach to programmes offered across FET centres. In relation to programme monitoring and review, it is planned that the Programme Board will approve a thematic schedule of reviews for FET in GRETB.

The AIS were traditionally managed centrally for all Training Centres. This system no longer exists and responsibility for the AIS now resides at provider level. The Training Centre instructors and Training Standards Officer (TSO) agreed at RAP meetings that a comprehensive review of the AIS system is required. It is acknowledged by all relevant staff that this is a substantial piece of work which is currently beyond the capacity of the QA department. An incremental approach is being considered for the updating of AIS on a priority basis as capacity allows. This is also an opportunity to consider harmonisation of assessments across all FET provision.

4.2.3 Conclusion and recommendations

The QA department acknowledges that a systematic approach to programme monitoring and review needs to be put in place which includes support for centres with their internal monitoring and review, provider level thematic reviews, and review and update of the AIS system. A systematic approach to the latter should be considered.

Whilst there is evidence that centres engage in programme monitoring and review, a more systematised, formal, and streamlined approach should be adopted with support from QA personnel. The Programme Board should play a role in the planning and oversight of these reviews.

As part of the integration of QA systems, the harmonisation of legacy assessment should be addressed.

Learner Testimonial

"The instructor was excellent - going above and beyond to offer us support. His combination of industry experience and teaching ability made him well placed to explain difficult concepts. The lab work and assignments set by the instructor enabled us to practice implementing these concepts in a real-world manner. The instructor was always available to patiently answer any questions whether by WhatsApp, email or in the evening sessions we had. The study resources provided such as the textbooks and practice exams were of great benefit. After completing all assignments and study I felt well prepared to sit the certification exam and passed it on my first attempt! I'm very grateful to have received this opportunity and would highly recommend this course with Compupac IT Solutions".

- GRETB Learner

4.3 Oversight, Monitoring and Review of Relationships with External/ Third Parties

4.3.1 Description

GRETB has a long tradition of working with external agencies, employers, and organisations to strengthen FET provision across the region. In all engagement with external and third parties, the organisation is committed to ensuring programmes are delivered in compliance with its quality guidelines and governance systems, and that risk to GRETB and its learners is minimised. Thus, ensuring learners receive a high standard of education & training and that programmes are subject to a monitoring process.

GRETB engages with **contracted training** providers from the multi-source framework of contracted trainers. The operation of contracted training is governed by operational procedures and QA standards as outlined in section 8 of the Temporary Quality Assurance System (TQAS). This provides for the compliance with all quality systems including IV, EA, and RAP.

Engagement with **other certifying bodies** such as – Cisco, CompTIA, Microsoft, Road Safety Authority, Irish Institute of Training and Development & Pitman Training, is also comprehended within the TQAS guidelines.

Throughout each contracted training programme, GRETB's Contracted Training Officer monitors and reviews all aspect of delivery and assessment and engages with both learners and FET practitioners involved for evaluation and feedback.

GRETB completes **certification audits** on a scheduled basis throughout the year on programmes that are delivered by **second providers**. The purpose of the audit is to monitor and evaluate, for the purposes outlined below.

- *To establish that a fair and consistent assessment process has been implemented by the second provider/contractor.*

- *To confirm that mandatory documented evidence is available and correct to support all certification requests made on behalf of learners.*

- *To monitor any quality issues which may arise.*

- *To liaise with the relevant contractor to identify and implement any corrective or preventative actions required to address any quality issues or adverse trends.*

Since the establishment of new generation apprenticeships (2016+), GRETB has engaged as a collaborating provider with a number of other ETBs and organisations to offer the apprenticeship programmes within its FET provision. Figure 16 details these collaborations and partnerships

Figure 15: Collaborations and Partnerships

- *Advanced Certificate in Auctioneering and Property Services - collaborating provider with CDETB*

- *National Craft Butchery Apprenticeship - collaborating provider with MSLETB*

- *Advanced Certificate in Software Development - collaborating provider with FIT*

- *Accounting Technician Apprenticeship - collaborating provider with ATI*

There are Memoranda of Agreement with each of the co-ordinating providers for these programmes. These set out the commitment to the quality assurance agreements and roles.

Community training is provided by organisations external to GRETB in community settings funded by GRETB. There is one Community Training Centre (CTC), seven Local Training Initiatives (LTIs) and two Specialist Training Providers (STPs).

All community training programmes offer QQI certified modules and awards except for the newly established Bicycle Maintenance and Repair LTI which currently offers a City and Guilds award. The programmes were part of phase one of the QA integration process. All community training providers now adhere to GRETB's QA agreement. Programmes are subject to rigorous monitoring by community development officers to ensure compliance with quality assurance guidelines and operating standards

Each provider has its own distinct governance policies and procedures, ensuring adherence to good QA guidelines and processes. Monitoring and evaluation is overseen by Community Training Officers under the direction of an AEO. The Community Training Officers work closely with the QA Unit.

GRETB engages regionally with industry, employers, and their employees to establish the organisation's ability to meet their further education and training needs. All programmes delivered through the Skills for Work, Skills to Advance, and Skills to Compete initiatives are GRETB validated programmes, are delivered by FET practitioners employed by GRETB and are subject to the same QA processes and procedures for delivery, assessment, monitoring and review.

The co-operation hours scheme is a programme whereby GRETB place FET practitioners with external bodies to deliver education and training programmes based on the needs of their learners. The programmes include non-accredited learning, and QQI modules levels 2 – 5. Currently GRETB have Service Level Agreements (SLA's) in place with 34 external bodies across the region. These include the Irish Prison Service, the Probation Service, Disability and mental health organisations, youth organisations and special education schools. The SLA outlines the role of GRETB and the role of the cooperating body. All SOLAS funded learners are registered on PLSS and timetables are submitted annually and updated throughout the year. An AEO conducts monitoring visit to centres, to speak to management, GRETB staff and learners. An annual report is completed by each centre.

4.3.2 Evaluation

Whilst the development of the non-craft apprenticeships over the last four years has opened opportunities for employers and learners in a myriad of industries, it also increases the responsibilities for ETBs to establish the requisite governance and oversight structures as per the *Topic-Specific Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Statutory Apprenticeship Programmes (2016)* This contributes further to the need to adequately staff units across the ETB with a role and responsibility to oversee, monitor and review relationships with external and third parties. As Co-ordinating Provider for the Apprenticeship in Arboriculture, GRETB is operating in a mirror image of this, as the organisation with ultimate responsibility for the oversight and governance of quality assurance of the programme.

Community training continues to prove valuable in enabling GRETB to access hard-to-reach learners by providing QQI certified training programmes in the community, which have strong progression and placement routes. A rigorous monitoring model, with signed MoU's ensures the programmes' operations are aligned to GRETB's quality assurance agreement.

Contracted Training, on the other hand, offers GRETB the flexibility to respond to specific industry and regional needs, thus enhancing the organisation's agility. Driving programmes which are in high demand due to industry shortages are facilitated in this way without the substantial financial investment required to meet the training and industry standards for provision in-house. Nationally recognised and agreed programmes such as these and the Advanced Driving Instructor programme are subject to sound quality assurance measures.

Engagement with enterprise and employers in the region was initiated through an employer requirements questionnaire sent to 140 employers. While the response rate was low (23%) the responses came from a range of sectors namely, Hospitality, Manufacturing, Logistics and ICT sectors. Newly emerging skills identified in the responses for further training were digital skills, coaching and people management, personal development and selling.

4.3.3 Conclusion and recommendations

GRETB has demonstrated it adaptability and flexibility in engaging with external agencies and third parties in the delivery of various programmes from apprenticeships to specialist programmes via contracted trainers. In this regard, it has also demonstrated its ability to respond to the QA and governance obligations under the MoUs in place and ensure staff are appointed appropriately to fulfil these obligations.

There are clear structures for the oversight, monitoring and review of contracted training, community training, second providers and specialist training providers. This is, in large part, due to the inherited staffing structures that remain in place since FÁS Training Centres were in operation. This further emphasises the impact of insufficient staffing to engage in this important element of quality assurance across all FET provision in GRETB.

As part of its work with local Enterprise, GRETB should consider the implementation of a Customer Relationship Management tool which could link into all oversight monitoring and review across GRETB with external/third parties.

Findings from the employer engagement questionnaire should be analysed by FET SMT and actions agreed.

Acting as Collaborating Provider for several new generation apprenticeships poses certain risks from a QA perspective which may be addressed with the establishment of the new national apprenticeship office.

As demand from industry increases through both the Skills to Advance and the Skills to Compete initiatives, GRETB will need to increase its programme approval and curriculum development capacity to meet this demand. The establishment of the FET Support & Development Unit (Nov 2021) and the adequate staffing of same, should address this.

Conclusion

The experience of engaging in self-evaluation has been an extremely positive one for Galway and Roscommon ETB. As the catalyst to produce this report, preparation for the Inaugural Review has facilitated an organisation-wide reflection on the significant developments, achievements, and successes of both learners and staff over the last three to five years.

During this evaluation of GRETB's governance and management of quality assurance, it has been evident that the appreciation, ownership, and commitment to quality has developed significantly over the time period and continues to strengthen across the organisation and its FET service. The formation of several sub working groups of the QA Steering Group has been pivotal to these developments and has anchored the embedding of a culture of quality across all services in FET.

The establishment of a Provision and Pathways Unit, assigns clear responsibility for access, transfer and progression to and within GRETB's FET provision and further afield into the worlds of higher education and employment. This work will have the vital support of the newly established Inclusion Unit in identifying barriers and supporting those with particular needs to ensure successful engagement with GRETB's FET services across all of its programmes. The development of a Learner Handbook, the widening of the counselling services to include online and bespoke adolescent counselling, and the plans to establish a learner assistance fund all point to a strong commitment to supporting learners on their journey in further education and training in Galway and Roscommon.

GRETB has adopted a governance structure for the oversight of quality assurance with clear lines of responsibility and terms of reference since 2018. These structures and groups are used appropriately and effectively to ensure robust governance and management of quality in the organisation; to assure all stakeholders that teaching, learning and assessment is of high quality, and that there are mechanisms for the evaluation, monitoring and review of FET in GRETB.

Notwithstanding this however, many of the working groups were established out of necessity and as a testament to the staff and management's commitment to quality assurance. The lack of adequate staffing to meet the demands of a continuously evolving and improving quality system in an organisation of this size is not sustainable via the working group model and will need to be addressed as a priority. Work is ongoing in this regard with the establishment of the FET Support and Development Unit, with QA at its core, and the commencement of an internal staff audit as part of the preparation of a business case to both the DFHERIS and SOLAS for the sanction of additional staffing. A proactive Unit that offers consistent support to the FET service across all programme development, review and monitoring, will need adequate staffing with the appropriate skills. The evidence presented in this self-evaluation clearly shows a culture of quality exists in the organisation, and with appropriate staff in place, this culture can become firmly embedded in an authentic manner. GRETB successfully merged some legacy QA systems within 3 years of amalgamation. Work should now continue to merge the two remaining legacy systems into one overarching agreement.

Gaps were identified throughout this process, via the various questionnaires and focus groups in the area of information sharing. New developments, policy and procedure updates and changes, and examples of best practice do not have an easily identifiable mechanism for dissemination to all staff concerned. The Corporate Services department is very active in the sharing of high-level information but operational matters that affect the provision of FET are currently communicated in a somewhat haphazard way via the service representatives on the various oversight and working groups. This has not proved consistent nor robust enough in ensuring that all policy and procedures and the documentation for same are easily accessible to all. The establishment of the GRETB Connect portal (currently under construction) will address the need for the central repository but there still remains a deficit in the ongoing and consistent communication of FET to its stakeholders both internal and external. This is an area of concern which is under discussion at a national level with ETB funders, SOLAS, but the Director of FET intends to address this need, internally, if external sanction for a communications officer is not forthcoming. The fact that 82% of respondents to the staff questionnaire agreed that 'GRETB regularly communicates with me regarding COVID-19 and information relevant to my work' proves the organisation's ability to communicate in a crisis. With the communications function integral to the Support and Development Unit it will become part of the fabric of QA in the organisation.

Learner representation on GRETB's governance groups is non-existent. Plans for two learner fora, one for levels 1-4 and unaccredited learning and another for learners at levels 5 and 6 are at an advanced stage of development. Progress was stalled at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic as learners, staff, and services concentrated efforts to moving teaching and learning to a virtual environment. This work will be progressed by the Support and Development Unit in early 2022 with a view to having both fora established by quarter 3 of the same year. The issue of learner representation on executive working groups and committees of the ETB is a more complex one and further exploration of the logistics of this needs to be undertaken. This will be done in consultation with senior leadership of GRETB, and with advice from learner representative bodies such as AONTAS.

GRETB looks forward to further engagement with the Review Panel on foot of this self-evaluation report. It will continue to engage with expert advice and support as it builds on the strong foundations of quality to further embed this culture in the next stage the QA life cycle in GRETB.

5

Appendices

Appendix 1

GRETB Board members, as of August 2021

CITY COUNCIL NOMINEES
1.   Cllr. Noel Larkin
2.   Cllr. Terry O'Flaherty
3.   Cllr. Michael Crowe
GALWAY CO. COUNCIL NOMINEES
1.   Cllr. Michael Maher
2.   Cllr. Shane Curley
3.   Cllr. Colm Keaveney
4.   Cllr. Peter Roche
5.   Cllr. Tom Welby
6.   Cllr. Gabe Cronnelly
ROSCOMMON CO. COUNCIL NOMINEES
1.   Cllr. Kathleen Shanagher
2.   Cllr. John Cummins
3.   Cllr. Laurence Fallon
ETB STAFF NOMINEES
1.   Ms. Jean Beswick- Duignan
2.   Mr. Daniel Cronin
PARENTS NOMINEES
1.   Mr. Sean Harnett
Vacant
COMMUNITY NOMINEES
1.   Ms. Bernadette Costello
2.   Ms. Nora Fahy
3.   Mr. Tomás Ó Nidh
4.   Ms. Mary Mullarkey
5.   Dr. Michael Hannon

Appendix 2

GRETB Audit and Risk Committee, as of August 2021

1.	Ms. Martina Maloney (Chairperson)
2.	Mr. Gerry Finn
3.	Br. James Mungovan
4.	Ms. Mary Coyne
5.	Cllr. Laurence Fallon
6.	Cllr. Noel Larkin

Appendix 3

GRETB Finance Committee, as of August 2021

1.	Ms. Mary Mullarkey (Chairperson)
2.	Cllr. Michael Maher
3.	Cllr. Michael Crowe
4.	Ms. Bernadette Costello
5.	Mr. Ivor Gleeson
6.	Mr. Charlie Notley

Appendix 4

GRETB Staff Membership of National and Regional Committees/Groups/Networks

Adult Education Officers Network	Galway Rural Development
ATI programme board	GMIT : FE / HE links
DEIS to FET Supporting Committee	Galway City LCDC
DSP/GRETB Monthly Galway City Forum	Galway County LCDC
ETBI Blended Policy Series Group	MEND group - (Links to HE) Superseded by the Department of Education and SOLAS Transitions Group
ETBI CE Forum	NAPD FET Committee
ETBI Communication Network Group	NAPD FET Sub Committee
ETBI Community Education Research Steering Committee	National Training Centre Managers Network
ETBI Corporate Services Group	NCGE Group
ETBI Directors Forum	NUIG FE / HE links
ETBI Digital Library Working Group	Regional Skills Forum
ETBI FOI/DP Group	Roscommon LCDC
ETBI Support to Apprentices Group	Roscommon Leader Partnership
ETBI Wider Benefits of Learning Steering Group	Roscommon Childcare Committee
FET COVID-19 Response Group (SOLAS)	TEL Advisory Committee (SOLAS)
FORUM Connemara	Roscommon Childcare Committee
Galway Childcare Committee	Western Regional Drugs Task Force
Galway City Partnership	

Appendix 5

Self-Evaluation Oversight Group Terms of Reference Committees/Groups/Networks

Governance Unit	Self-evaluation Oversight Group
Document Name	Terms of Reference
Approved by	FET Quality Council
Version	1.1
Review Date	November 2021

Purpose of the Self-evaluation Oversight Group

GRETB, as a QQI registered provider, has a statutory responsibility to self-evaluate and review its quality assurance systems and to engage in an external review of quality assurance by QQI. The purpose of the Self-evaluation Oversight Group is to oversee and guide the self-evaluation process and comment on GRETB's approach to quality assurance and enhancement as required for an external review by QQI. It will fulfil the role and responsibilities delegated to it by GRETB's FET Quality Council.

Self-evaluation Oversight Group Terms of Reference

The Chief Executive has delegated certain responsibilities to the Self-evaluation Oversight Group, as detailed below. The Self-evaluation Oversight Group is accountable to the Chief Executive for carrying out its functions, regardless of whether working groups are formed to advance these tasks.

The Self-evaluation Oversight Group is responsible for the following:

Operational matters

- Agreeing its operating procedures in consultation with the Chief Executive
- Co-ordinating the self-evaluation process
- Identifying core stakeholder groups
- Approving mechanisms/methodologies of engagement and a programme of engagements with core stakeholder groups
- Agreeing a communications strategy to ensure all stakeholders can access information on the self-evaluation process
- Monitoring progress of the internal self-evaluation
- Making recommendations to the Quality Department on amendments to processes and documentation that may be required
- Establishing working groups to advance self-evaluation matters, as required
- Ensuring the production, approval and submission of the self-evaluation report by the required date as outlined in the Review Schedule.

Membership of the Self-evaluation Oversight Group

Chair: The Chair is appointed by the Chief Executive and can be internal or external.

Secretary: The Secretary is appointed by the Chief Executive.

Ordinary Members may include:

- Staff involved in governance, support services and administration
- Learning practitioners
- Staff involved in the management of ETB provision
- Staff involved in quality assurance
- External expert in quality assurance
- Quality Department staff (ex officio, reporting role).

Operating Procedures

- The Self-evaluation Oversight Group will meet monthly
- The Self-evaluation Oversight Group will give a monthly report to the Chief Executive
- In order for a quorum to be established, 50% of members + 1 additional member must be in attendance
- The meeting agenda and supporting documentation must be circulated to members at least one week in advance of a scheduled meeting.
- Decisions are made by consensus or by the exercise of a vote if necessary; the Chair has the deciding vote in the event of a split decision
- Meeting outcomes are recorded and circulated in draft form within 2 weeks of a meeting
- The minutes of meetings are approved at the beginning of the subsequent meeting of the Self-evaluation Oversight Group
- Confirmed minutes are submitted for noting to the next meeting of the FET Quality Council.
- In some cases, at the discretion of the Chair, an incorporeal meeting of the Self-evaluation Oversight Group may be held where reports can be circulated virtually and accepted by members without the Self-evaluation Oversight Group having to meet.

Appendix 6

IV/EA improvements

Suggestions by staff for IV/EA improvements.
IV as a positive situation for staff to correct mistakes and observe methods colleagues use...a learning experience.
Training/Induction for new coordinators conducting IV needs to be put in place.
More Training on tutor packs yearly for all tutors.
More involvement of staff, more training so this can be shared. A lot of admin staff in GRETB would be very good at this role and there should be regular training for them and opportunities to cross train into this.
Al members of staff taking part.
More time set aside to complete the process
More management oversight
Remove the need to have the physical individual marking sheets for each student from the module descriptor
Replace the above for each module with a single summary spreadsheet.
There is not particular area that needs to be improved, but we are always looking for ways to improve.
Everything can be improved.
More Training on QQI QA for all staff. Time and resources should be in place for all existing staff and new staff regarding QQI and everything involved in delivering QQI. There seems to be large discrepancies regarding delivering QQI throughout the ETB sector.
Mentoring approach or an induction for new FET staff to a centre. Centrally carried out.
Update paperwork for the process.

Appendix 7

Progression and Outcomes for Learners 2019

	Employ-ment scheme / Voluntary Work	FET Course at the same or Higher Level	HET Course at the same or Higher Level	Inactive	Other	Paid full-time employ-ment	Paid part-time employ-ment	Self-em-ployment	Unem-ployed	Unknown	Grand Total
Adult Literacy Groups	7	1,272	9	58	81	83	19	5	39	147	1,721
Blended Training			1		6	3				31	41
BTEI Groups	12	1,392	1	65	91	39	180	10		961	2,753
Com-munity Education		324		71	1,442					1,299	3,139
Communi-ty Training Centres		11		4	5	8	2	1	1	3	35
ESOL	2	624	2	18	141	73	37	1	24	115	1,037
Evening Training		1			12	6				870	889
FET Co-operation Hours		82								448	530
ITABE	6	102		10	20					3	141
Justice Workshop		2		1	20	4			1	10	38
Local Training Initiatives	2	24	5	1	63	14	3		1	16	129
Other Funding		73			7					5	85
PLC	3	299	322	23	48	247	113	6	24	421	1,506
Refugee Resettle-ment		7									7
Skills for Work		91	2	1	13	58		5		29	200
Specialist Training Providers	4	30	5	5	28	11	8		1	3	95
Specific Skills Training		42	3	4	33	60	33	1	24	352	552
Traineeship Training		22		1	7	13	4		15	25	87
Voluntary Literacy Tuition		3		4	10			1		1	19
VTOS Core	11	114	7	11	12	27	13	2	19	74	290
Youthreach	4	118	2	12	15	7	10		18	23	209
Grand Total	**51**	**4,633**	**359**	**289**	**2,054**	**653**	**422**	**32**	**167**	**4,836**	**13,503**

Appendix 8 - Case Studies

1. An example of working with external groups - Inis Oírr, Co. na Gaillimhe, Community Education

COMMUNITY EDUCATION IN ACTION

Mná le Chéile

Mná Le Chéile was formed in 2007 on Inis Oírr. Co. na Gaillimhe. The group's activities are generally based around sewing and quilting. They have developed a beautiful workshop room, Teach Bríd, to house their classes, materials, and meetings. Over the past 14 years, older members have acted as mentors and supporters of newer members, passing on experiences and skills. The group speak of the value of these connections. There is a wide age range of people engaged in their pro-gramme who speak Gaeilge and English.

Partnership

Galway and Roscommon ETB: The ETB provides grant funding to the group. In addition, the Community Education Facilitator (CEF) has regular contact with the group to identify other sup-ports needed. The CEF regularly engages with the group and invites them to ongoing training pro-vided by Community Education. The grant from GRETB, on occasion, means that a tutor can travel from the mainland to deliver courses.

Mná le Chéile: The group provides the training venue, identifies their own learning needs, recruits new learners and provide support to each other. The group also organises trips to the mainland. These cultural and educational activities are not only for group members, but oth-er Islanders are also welcome and encouraged to participate. The group is aware that they can contact the CEF at any time for any supports required.

Community Education Features

- Nonformal / Informal: The course is an example of non-formal/informal edu-cation for adult learners who are engaged in lifelong learning.
- Needs-Based: The group survey the needs of its members to ascertain what courses are needed
- Inclusion: One of the key principles of the group is to encourage maximum par-ticipation and promotion of inclusivity on the island.
- Empowerment: The group also focuses on providing opportunities for all learn-ers on the island, encouraging empowerment and strengthening the community.
- Flexibility: Classes are offered both in the mornings and evenings to facilitate the needs of the group. This flexibility allows for a wider engagement with the community as a whole

Outcomes and Impacts

The group has made a significant impact on individual learners and on the entire community. It is a vital source of integration to newcomers to the island. New residents are actively recruited to the group, and this has an incredibly positive impact for older and newer members. Learners speak of how much they look forward to their classes and meeting people for the cúpan tae.

It's nice to meet new people, I really feel part of the community, it's a steady support in our community

2. Case Study – Gort FET Centre, Co. Galway – BTEI

Learners show talent in Painting, Project Management and Digital Communication Technology Skills.
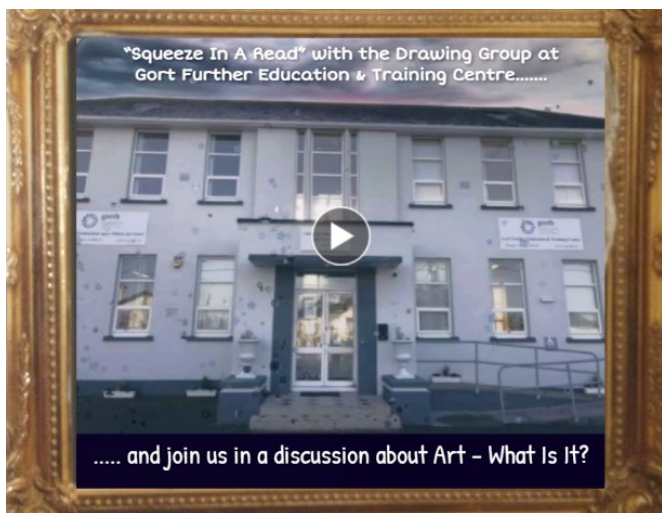
Twelve art learners made the transition from face-to-face classes to remote learning last March, which was no mean feat considering the practical nature of the module, i.e., "Fine Art Painting". The module would traditionally culminate in a display of artwork and this year was to be no different as the learners set about planning their first virtual exhibition. The exhibition featured learner work in watercolour, acrylic, oil, and mixed media. Presented via a video link on the Gort Further Education and Training Centre's Facebook page, the exhibition featured numerous pieces of art from each participant, artists profiles, an address from the participants and their tutor and an invitation into the artist's studios. You, the visitor, were encouraged to be an active participant rather than a passive viewer, by sharing your experience of the exhibition.

Our modus operandi was that "Art must go on and is too important not to share".

We are so proud of our learners for remaining engaged in meaningful work during this time. Learners have shown remarkable resilience and grace. Some had little previous art experience which made the quality of this work even more impressive. Staff and learners assimilated well into this new virtual learning world, teleporting seamlessly between the virtual classroom, home studio and gallery space, with just a few bumps and rocky landings along the way!

For our learners, it was exciting to have their work visible online and to be able to share it with their peers, family, and friends.

Learners have continued to share their work online, e.g. they marked the 'Ireland Reads' initiative earlier this year by creating their own eBook, based loosely on the exhibition, which you can interact with here by clicking on this link, *https:// read.bookcreator.com/k-t7yNzrCurHPo_kDJdJQs_gzG2DDB-b3Qwu61RYae8k/Dc2NNS-pRoe_latEpfzIrg?fbclid=IwAR0Z-VnXcDfY4JtGMdmIbFF1baZOemfMkOhpIp8pexcjcthshbh-Bluk4Q21E* (remember to use the play buttons on each page for full access to features)

Similarly, the group marked International Women's Day 2021, by inviting family, friends, and staff to join them in a fun drawing activity. You can enjoy the results of that collaboration by clicking on the following link: *https://www.facebook.com/1473388056230898/videos/719836565327465*

Claire Fahy, BTEI Co-ordinator/Mary Donnellan, Gort FET Centre.

3. Case Study – Casla, Conamara, Co. na Gaillimhe – Cooperation Hours

Bruach na Mara Services operate 2 Day Resource Centres in Casla, South Conamara for adults with an intellectual disability. GRETB tutors in collaboration with Brothers of Charity Services staff deliver training programmes onsite that are learner centred and give the individuals we support the opportunity:

- to learn new skills
- build confidence
- increase independence
- make positive connections
- engage with the community
- equip the learners to make informed choices about the issues that affect their lives

Fínscéal Art Sculpture and Animation Collaborative Project

Link to film: *https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1ckJin-SNKNuoVUmmbZRLN6l1hZ5EfSpyG?usp=sharing*

The inspiration for this project is based on the story of how Cnoc Mordáin got its name. Legend has it that the hill is named after a giant that lived in the land and terrorised the people who lived there. When first a colleague told this story we were on a bus driving through the townland of Rosmuc, a place that is wild and full of history. There is something magical about hearing local stories, they open up our imaginations and connect us to the land.

The project spanned over a long period of time from its inception at the end of 2018, the production and exhibition of artwork, sculptures and animation short film "Finscéal" illustrating the story (December 2019) to the screening of Finscéal at Galway Film Fleadh 2020. The project allowed the people we support to express their understanding of the tale and landscape through sketches, drawing, music, sculpture, language and finally presented in a short animation film. Activities included:

- Visiting local site and landscape of Cnoc Mordáin
- Creative writing workshops
- Sculpture and drawing workshops (Tommy Casby artist and tutor)
- Animation workshops (James McDonnel animation artist and tutor)
- Animation short film
- Soundtrack composition – Guth na Gaoithe inhouse ceilí band
- Launch and exhibition of artwork and film screening in Ionad Cultúrtha an Phiarsaigh, Rosmuc

The individuals we support were involved in all aspects of the project supported by the tutors and staff on site, throughout the making of the sculptures and the production of the animation. The outcome is a testament to their creativity, hard work and artistic talent.

The fruits of our labour resulted in a body of drawings inspired by the story, three sculptures: a hare, a hound, a boat and "Finscéal", a 3 minute animation short film. Both Gaeilge and an English narration ("Legends from the Mists") of the short film was produced. It has been a long and very enjoyable learning journey.

We are appreciative of the funding and support this project received from Galway County Council, GRETB and SOLAS.

Finscéal exhibition Ionad Cultúr an Phiarsaigh Rosmuc

Mairéad Conroy, Bruach na Mara Day Services, Casla, Co. na Gaillimhe.

4. Case Study – Tuam, Co. Galway – Youthreach

Youthreach Tuam and NUI, Galway: Community Knowledge Initiative

Youthreach Tuam, has collaborated on several occasions with NUI, Galway College of Science and Engineering, School of Natural Sciences. From an NUI Galway perspective, this collaboration in-volved 2nd year Biomedical Science students completing Community Knowledge Initiative project with an organisation in their community. Youthreach Tuam were delighted to partner with NUIG on this. Together, we developed a programme whereby 4 NUIG students attended Youthreach, over a period of 4 weeks with 2-hour sessions, facilitating Youthreach learners to complete sci-ence experiments in the Youthreach Tuam, Centre. The final session involved a trip to NUIG to complete experiments in the NUIG Science laboratories (complete with PPE) followed by a trip to the Zoology Department and ending with lunch in the NUIG Canteen.

There were many successes in this project including:

• experiential learning opportunities for Youthreach learners

• opening up the opportunities of science to Youthreach learners as Science is not part of the LCA curriculum

• exposing Youthreach learners to the NUIG campus (science labs, canteen, etc.) where the relationships already built with the NUIG students over the programme allowed Youthreach learners to feel comfortable on campus;

• working with young NUIG students on exciting experiments which was different to their usual classes

• exposing NUIG learners to Youthreach learners who were close in age to themselves and their experiences, backgrounds, education, etc.

On completing, NUIG learners presented their project to their class and lecturers. The Youthreach Coordinator attended this session and gave feedback to the NUIG learners and lecturers on behalf of the Youthreach Centre.

Incredibly positive feedback was received from all stakeholders involved in this initiative.

Brenda Ivers, Youthreach Co-ordinator, Youthreach, Tuam, Co. Galway.
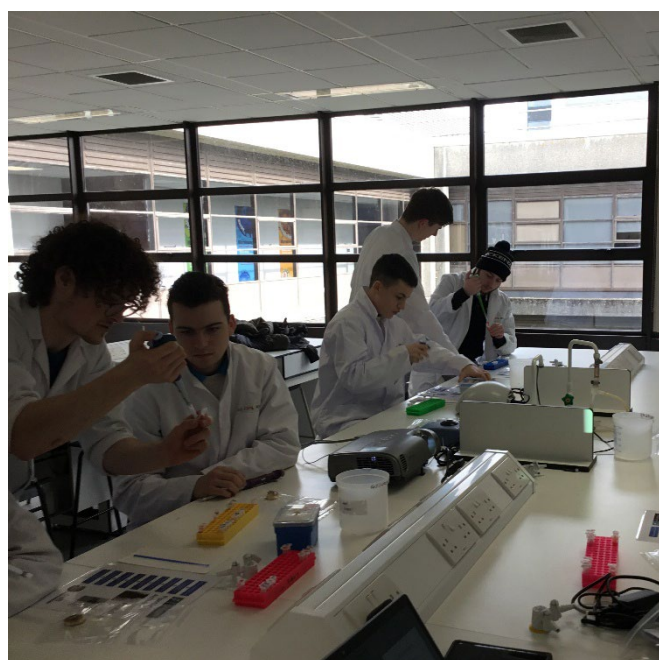
5. Case Study, GTI Galway City – PLC

Introduction:

Galway Technical Institute (GTI) is one of the largest FE colleges in Ireland and provides a wide range of Erasmus+ opportunities to both learners and staff. GTI was one of the first PLC colleges in Ireland to be awarded the Erasmus+ Mobility Charter by Léargas in 2014. This Charter (2014-2020) recognised the operational capacity of GTI to plan, manage and implement high quality mobility projects for learners and staff. Furthermore, GTI has just been awarded with the new Erasmus+ Accreditation and label of excellence for the new Erasmus+ programme (2021-2027).

GTI learners (800) have travelled abroad to gain valuable targeted work experience in their vocational areas. Studies show that a period spent abroad not only enriches learners' lives in the academic field but also in the acquisition of intercultural skills and independence. GTI has established work placement links with a number of partner colleges in Europe including Finland, Italy, France, Portugal, Poland, Turkey, Spain, Sweden and the UK. These work placements are fully funded and offer our learners a wonderful opportunity to develop their cultural and educational expertise while also completing a work placement in their vocational area. It is a unique learning experience for GTI learners and one they embrace fully as it allows them to develop skills and knowledge they may use in the future.

Staff exchanges have similar beneficial effects, both for the people participating and for the home and host institutions. Teachers have the opportunity to work shadow peers abroad and to teach in partner institutions. GTI is also involved in a number of KA2 Strategic Partnership projects where staff have the opportunity to observe best practice and to develop specialist teaching and learning resources for the college.

John McLoughlin, Deputy Principal, Galway Technical Institute, Galway.

6. Case Study – Castlerea, Prison Education

Level 3 Community Sport Coaching Course

For any level 3 learner wishing to further enhance their academic and sporting knowledge, the Community Sports Coaching Course provides a valuable and short insight into the field of sport and sports coaching.

Start Date: September 2021
Venue: Education Unit, Castlerea Prison
Duration: 12 Weeks

Introduction

Learners wishing to participate in the course must first undertake a short initial assessment consisting of 20 Maths questions and a checklist to request any further supports that they may need, such as literacy, numeracy, ICT or educational support. For those who do need to warm up their skills, we have a bespoke set of resource designed specifically for these classes. Literacy and IT supports are offered through learner support teachers and also online via Moodle for those requesting extra study skills help.

Course Specification The course is designed to encapsulate the academic and practical skills of learners. The design involves learners completing the level 3 General Learning Modules, along with receiving introduction courses in the understanding and delivery of practical coaching courses.

Module Delivery - Academic

1. Communications
2. Personal Effectiveness
3. Mathematics
4. Word Processing
5. Health Related Fitness
6. Intercultural Awareness

Module Delivery – Practical Coaching

1. First Aid Responder
2. FAI Kickstart 1
3. GAA Foundation Course
4. Rugby Level 1
5. Handball Level 1
6. Sport Ireland Safeguarding Level 1
7. Disability Awareness Training
8. Disability Inclusion Training

Collaboration

There is a strong collaboration between teachers and the coaches. The success of the course involves learners participating, supporting, and contributing to both the practical and theoretical elements of the course. The Cooperative teaching experiences shared between the teachers and coaches provide mutual support and assistance for planning and implementing structured and developmental lessons. These help with assessing learners' progress, sharing professional concerns, and addressing learners' learning needs. Importantly, this allows more opportunities for learners to understand and connect with content, thereby maximizing individual learning potential.

Pete Fleming, Castlerea Prison Education Unit, Roscommon.

7. Case Study – Galway City, Skills for Work

The Explore Programme is a 6-week initiative, designed and funded as a Regional Skills innovation to improve participation in lifelong learning in the workforce. In the West it is delivered in partnership with the Galway-Roscommon and the Mayo-Sligo-Leitrim Education and Training Boards. The aim of this course is to provide new opportunities for the existing workforce particularly in digital skills, health and wellbeing and in developing a desire for lifelong learning.

The City Bin Co. piloted this learning opportunity with a selection of our frontline heroes in Galway and has been delighted to collaborate with GRETB. We enrolled 16 of our frontline workers, drivers, helpers, yard workers and sales team members on this training initiative. All participants were provided with a digital device as part of the course and have received GRETB tuition using the device to research and create a series of experiential work-based projects on some aspect of their daily role. Examples of the projects include 'different types of waste,' our new service 'City Junk,' 'Safe working environment practices', 'defensive driving' and 'health & safety at work'. In addition to tuition from GRETB, our management team was on hand to mentor and support participants in preparing for their end of course presentation of projects.

The course culminated with some individual presentations on their chosen topics to the GRETB team and colleagues from The City Bin Co. The quality of the work was fantastic and detailed, and many of us came away with a new appreciation of some of the important tasks and checks that keep us on the road every day.

8. Case Study – Galway City, Employer Engagement

Creating the Production Operators of the Future

Galway and Roscommon Education and Training Board (GRETB) Employer Engagement department contacted Penn Engineering, a local engineering employer to explore the company's skills and training needs. Penn Engineering expressed an interest in upskilling production operators based at their plant in Mervue, Galway with a view to progressing these employees through further education onto higher education courses. The result? A flexible tailored traineeship to upskill existing employees and prepare for the jobs of the future.

Penn Engineering's manufacturing operations produce precision engineered components for global markets using various manufacturing technology and machinery. This requires their production operators to reach a high level of skill in operating machinery and learning to apply a knowledge of manufacturing engineering in their work.

Over the past number of years, based on the company's own comprehensive internal training programme and training needs analysis there has been a strong demand within Penn Engineering for an engineering course that could be accredited on the National Framework of Qualifications but also flexible around the operator's working schedule. GRETB's Employer Engagement department conducted mapping of the workplace training needs to suitable education options through evidence-based analysis, observation and collaboration with key Penn Engineering personnel.

Modular Learning - From the findings, GRETB proposed a QQI Level 5 Major Award in Engineering Technology Traineeship, which is a modular programme consisting of eight component awards. Whilst the major award is the destination, learners can bank each module that they have successfully completed during their journey. This proposal was warmly received by Senior Management and employees alike during an informal information session attended by prospective learners, some of whom had been out of the education system for a number of years and others with more recent academic achievements.

Flexible Tailored Delivery - One of the key considerations for both parties was with regard to how the programme would be delivered. Penn Engineering work through shift patterns and we wanted to ensure that the delivery of the programme would not interrupt this so it was decided to run the programme over two evenings a week after one shift finishes and before another shift commences. In addition, learner supports were made available (literacy, reader/scribe, English language courses) where necessary, along with the option to apply for Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning (RPEL) based on their knowledge and skills acquired within the work place.

Lasting Impact - The programme has provided Penn Engineering with another platform to further invest in its employees training, and ensure continual development of the skills needed for the future throughout its manufacturing operations. Production operators participating in the programme have the opportunity to step back into education with a support network from their employer and tutors, and can gain recognised accreditations in both new areas of learning and in the skills and knowledge that they are already applying in their roles in Penn Engineering.

9. Case Study – Regional Tour Guiding / Assessment, BTEI

My name is Tom Flanagan I am course coordinator and tutor, with the Galway and Roscommon Education and Training Board, on our QQI L6 National and Regional Tour Guiding programmes. We deliver our courses from October to April and over the past 6 years we have established a reputation as a leading provider in tour guiding education nationally. This past year has presented all of us in FET with great challenges and huge learning but also a great opportunity to change and adapt the ways we traditionally think about education provision. I would like to outline some of the challenges we encountered and innovations we applied to course delivery throughout the pandemic and look at how these challenges became opportunities to change the way we think about education provision in the FET sector into the future.

The use of technology in the classroom for our learner demographic has always been a challenge. While 'Zoom' and Microsoft 'Teams' have provided a quick solution to the continuity of service during the initial lockdowns getting staff and learners on board was not without its challenges. I think the key to our success here was good communication, teamwork and an abundance of learner support.

We faced numerous challenges in the rollout of our QQI assessments. Exams posed a challenge. How could we ensure the integrity of the exam assessment online and fulfil the learning outcomes in the virtual and online scenario where essentially the learner has unfettered access to the internet? We worked closely with Quality Assurance in GRETB to ensure our alternative online examinations met all of the learning outcomes and national standards.

Short answer and one-word answer questions were replaced and adjusted to illicit more detailed or responsive answers from the learner that required prior knowledge of the subject, while still adhering to the learning outcomes and methodologies of the exam instrument. We developed an examination policy and guidelines for staff and learners, covering everything from exam space requirements to instructions on receipt and delivery of completed examinations. The exam process was rehearsed with each learner group so that all learners were confident in the process of receiving, completing, and delivering their finished exams. Another challenge we faced in this process was accommodating learners who required additional supports. Although we required learners to type their exam answers this was not possible for all learners due to computer literacy issues or other reasons. We supported these learners by allowing them to hand write the examinations and to photograph the pages and email them on completion of the exam to be later typed verbatim for assessment purposes thus holding the integrity of the timed exam assessment while supporting the learners needs. Other learners who required a scribe were supported by using a separate online exam room where the learner was allocated an external staff member as a virtual scribe for the exam duration.

As we began our course provision again in October 2020, we implemented a blended learning model where all classes were broadcast online via Zoom from the centres and half the class would be in attendance in person and half in attendance online at any one time ensuring a safest environment for both staff and learners.

Our biggest challenge this term is in implementing our practical skills-based assessments. We were fortunate enough to have just completed the practical aspects of our courses last March before the first lockdown hit. As you can imagine a course in Tour Guiding, particularly National Tour Guiding requires substantial on-coach and on-site tour guiding experience. In a normal course year our learners are assessed on regional coach and site tours and two substantial three-day national tours both north and south of Ireland.

With the current lockdown projected to bring us well into March this year our biggest challenge to date has been to develop and implement suitable alternative assessments for the practical aspects of our courses that allow our learners to complete their qualification in a safe environment while meeting all the learning outcomes, national standards, and integrity of the qualification.

To do this we have produced some innovative virtual assessment tools that will allow us to, as close as possible, simulate the touring experience with our learners. Such innovations include the use of 360-degree videos of key sites and coach routes recorded by staff and available online. This allows learners to virtually move through a site while controlling where the camera is looking. Similarly, for 'on coach' assessments the learner can virtually guide to a group of peers as a virtual tour group on the 'Zoom' platform while directing where the camera is pointed along a tourist route. There is no substitute for the real-world experience for learners but in lieu of that innovations in technology like this have allowed us to create meaningful practical assessments as close as possible to the real thing that ensure we can meet our learning outcomes and give our learners the best possible learning and assessment experience given the circumstances.

Being catapulted into the realm on online education has stimulated innovation on our part and opened a new world of possibilities in FET for staff and learners. I would like to take this opportunity to thank and commend the work of the National and Regional Tour Guiding team in GRETB for their commitment and support of learners through this unprecedented time, Joe Lavery, Michael Coyne, Rory O'Shaughnessy and Gerard Mangan. I would also like to mention the amazing work of the TEL (Technology Enhanced Learning) team in GRETB providing support, training, and encouragement for all GRETB staff to venture into the world of online education. And finally, to our management and quality assurance teams in GRETB for their continued support in these challenging times.

Tom Flanagan, Course Co-ordinator, Regional Tour Guiding Skills.

Case Study 10 - Programme Development – Agriculture Awards

'GRETB was involved in a unique collaboration project with two other ETBs, MSLETB and WWETB, to write and develop three QQI awards at level 5 and level 6 for the Agriculture and Farming dis-ciplines. This piece of work came about because of the existing awards, which we had run for several years, being scheduled for deactivation. GRETB were offering this programme to learners with enormous success, and so it was imperative, in order to best serve our learners, to get in-volved in writing the new awards.   Collaborating with the other ETBs was a positive experience as we shared our expertise in different subject areas, developing programmes to be submitted to QQI under the new validation policy.   The QQI Validation Panel met with representatives from the three ETBs over two days in May 2019 and the three awards were granted approval by the PAEC in September 2019.

Developing the programme awards under the new validation policy was a great learning experi-ence for all GRETB teachers involved. It gave us a meaningful understanding of developing an award at levels 5 and 6. We were involved in writing component awards with sample assessment ensuring that all MIMLOs were covered. We are now delivering this programme in centre and we have great ownership of the programme, given our involvement in its development. It al-lowed us all, as experienced practicing teachers in the FET sector, to make our contribution to the content of this award so that it was focused on learner needs in our ETB. Participating in the validation panel, while it was grueling, gave us an opportunity as a GRETB team with our collabo-rating ETBs to highlight our work and effort in developing the programmes over an 18-month pe-riod.   We all expressed our pride in the process and in many ways was a form of professional de-velopment for us all. This programme in the centre continues to be successful and we see it as a model award fit for purpose for Agriculture and Farming in Ireland today, as it is affording our learners expertise in the sector.'

Sorcha O'Toole, VTOS Coordinator, Letterfrack, Co. Galway.

Case Study 11- Programme Development – Apprenticeship in Arboriculture

In 2017, through contact within the Regional Skills Forum, arboriculture employers in the West of Ireland approached GRETB over their concerns about the lack of professionalism and progression opportunities in their fast-growing industry. GRETB applied to the Apprenticeship Council to develop the new award in collaboration with the industry. GRETB, as the coordi-nating provider, was approved to develop a new National Apprenticeship in Arboriculture by the Apprenticeship Council. Following approval, a Consortium Steering Group (CSG) was es-tablished to oversee the apprenticeship programme development process. Employers, Health and Safety Authority, Office of Public Works and GRETB staff members were represented on the CSG. The CSG was supported by the QA department during the documentation and vali-dation process.

Using the Occupational Profile developed from consultation with employers the Curriculum Development Team (CDT) developed the MIPLOs, MIMLOs and curriculum for the apprentice-ship. The CDT was made up of GRETB staff with teaching and learning experience, repre-sentatives of employers from the industry and also representatives from industry bodies.

Darren Kilcoyne, ISA certified Arborist.

Case Study 12 - The Learner Support Service for Apprentices in GRETB

The learner support services for all apprentices in GRETB were embedded following a project in 2016 to support the motor mechanic apprentices, by providing them with literacy and numeracy supports. Before the trial, the previous four classes had a failure rate of 31.25%, after the supports were provided the next four classes had a 100% pass rate. The process is outlined as follows:

Phase One

From the first day of induction in phase one, apprentices are given a short initial assessment consisting of 20 Maths questions and a checklist to request any further supports that they may need, such as literacy or dyslexia support, study skills, basic drawing, or IT. For those apprentices who do need to improve their skills, we offer a short six-week course called Maths for Trades. We have a bespoke set of resources designed specifically for these classes. Literacy and IT support are offered through their local ABE centre and online via Moodle for those requesting drawing or study skills help.

Phase Two

At the start of phase two, apprentices enter the Training Centre for the 22-week block of theoretical and practical study, a trade specific Maths assessment is given, and following this warmup classes are offered for those who need them. Additionally, the service runs three separate sessions with each class group using a workbook called 'The Study and Learning Guide for Apprentices.' Dyslexia tests are available using the Lads Plus disk, and the support service works with the Training Standards Office to support any apprentice who requires a reader or a scribe.

Collaboration

There is a strong collaboration between instructors and the support service staff, who work closely together. The main supports cover the literacy and numeracy aspects of the theoretical side of each trade. The service is busy all year round. There is a dedicated room where apprentices can receive the specific help they need in their trade. GRETB is enormously proud of this award-winning support programme (which has since been replicated all over the country) enabling apprentices in Galway and Roscommon to be more successful in their chosen trades.

Alison Jones, Adult Literacy Organiser/ TEL , Mervue, Galway City.

Case Study 13 - Music Generation, Galway City-Youthreach

Joseph Kennedy Mills started with Music Generation in 2019. He began with small group lessons in guitar, then moved to keyboards and did some song writing sessions also. He built up a good relationship with his keyboard teacher and was willing to try bass guitar with him on a one-to-one basis. Joe took to this instrument with ease and enjoyed the lessons every week. We set up a music room, where Joe had his weekly lessons, he found this more comfortable as he could progress at his own pace. He was being introduced to different types of music and tunes and learning the notes to join in.

It was apparent to us in the Centre that Joe's confidence was growing, he was happier, he smiled more, he was more positive and communicative, and he was participating more in other Centre activities.

When COVID-19 hit in March 2020, all Youthreach students had to work from home and our classes were delivered on-line. We were very grateful that Music Generation also agreed to run Zoom on-line music lessons for students. We arranged for a Bass Guitar and Amplifier to be delivered to Joe's house so he could take part in the classes. This went very well and Joe's music lessons increased to twice a week. Very occasionally we had technical issues with Wi-Fi or device problems but for the most part it all went smoothly.

Joe agrees that the music lessons were a very big part of his life during the months of lockdown. He never lost enthusiasm, always came on-line for his lesson and often mentioned how the lesson went by too quickly. He enjoyed having something new to practise during the week. On our return to classroom based learning, Joe continued with his on line classes here in the Centre. He is looking forward to starting up again this September 2021.

Leeanne O'Connor, Youthreach, Galway City.

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