

QQI Review Report 2022

Inaugural Review of

Longford and Westmeath Education and Training Board



QQI REVIEW

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Foreword

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

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

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

- a self-evaluation conducted by the provider, resulting in the production of a self-evaluation report;
- an external assessment and site visit by a team of reviewers;
- the publication of a review report including findings and recommendations; and
- a follow-up procedure to review actions taken.

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

The Review Team

Each inaugural review is carried out by a team of independent experts and peers. The 2022 inaugural review of Longford and Westmeath Education and Training Board (LWETB) was conducted by a team of six reviewers selected by QQI. The review team attended a briefing and training session in QQI on 18 February 2022 and the planning visit to Longford and Westmeath Education and Training Board (LWETB) took place on 24 February 2022. The main review visit was conducted by the full team between 25 April and 29 April 2022.

Chair

Lewis Cooper is Director of the Independent Commission on the College of the Future, a prominent UK-wide review asking two central questions: what do we want and need from colleges from 2030 onwards, and how do we get there. The Commission published its vision for the College of the Future in August 2020, a UK-wide report in October 2020, and system-specific reports for England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales over the subsequent six months. The Commission is now continuing its work, including a report on university college relationships published in collaboration with the Civic University Network in February 2022. Prior to working in this role at the Independent Commission, Lewis worked at the Association of Colleges in England as Head of Public Affairs and External Relations where he worked to establish the #LoveOurColleges campaign; for a decade at the National Union of Students; and with two Westminster-based think tanks. Alongside his day job, Lewis is a PhD researcher at the University of Exeter (Penryn Campus), where he also teaches political theory.

Coordinating Reviewer

Ms Joanne Whitelock took up the role of Quality Assurance Coordinator with Donegal ETB in 2019. The role includes responsibility for the development and implementation of an integrated quality assurance system and its associated policies and procedures. Joanne has over 16 years of experience working in further and higher education in the UK and more recently Ireland, and has developed extensive knowledge of coordinating and implementing quality assurance policies and procedures. She has led quality inspections in 16-19 curriculum with Ofsted and Higher Education Office for Students inspectorates, and more recently as Review Coordinator for the recent Donegal ETB QQI Inaugural review.

Learner Representative

Ella Guinan studied a QQI Level 6 advanced business course in the LOETB Tullamore, which she enjoyed. She then decided to further her professional education by doing a 12-week medical secretary course with DCM Learning. Ella is currently working as a medical secretary in Midlands Regional Hospital Tullamore.

Peer Expert

For over 20 years, Geert Nanne Bruining has worked in the Dutch, English and Irish vocational educational systems as a teacher, internal verifier, Programme Leader/Quality Nominee BTEC (International Business Studies) and project manager 'Hotspot Cork' at Noorderpoort, Groningen, a vocational educational organisation in the north of the Netherlands. Currently, Geert Nanne works as teacher/internal verifier/programme leader of BTEC (International Business Studies) at Noorderpoort. He has an Educational Bachelor's degree in General Economics, Business Economics and History and recently received his Educational Master's degree in Learning and Innovation. Geert Nanne's thesis was on international cooperation in vocational education and was partially completed while living in Cork for a year. In Cork, he established durable relationships with educational and business partners. Thanks to these relationships, Noorderpoort was able to help the City of Groningen become the first Dutch City in the UNESCO Network of Learning Cities in 2018.

Peer Expert

Dr Ebon Joseph is a race relations consultant, director of the Institute of Antiracism and Black Studies and director and convenor of the African Scholars Association Ireland (AFSAI). Dr Joseph is the Coordinator and Lecturer in UCD of the first Black Studies module in Ireland. She worked as a Teaching Fellow at Trinity College Dublin, Career Development Consultant at the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland and in Business in the Community Ireland as Training and Employment Officer. Dr Joseph has a PhD in Equality Studies from UCD School of Social Justice; an M.Ed. in Adult Guidance and Counselling from Maynooth University; an IACP-accredited diploma in Professional Counselling; and a B.Sc. in Microbiology from the University of Benin. Dr Joseph focused her PhD dissertation, entitled 'Racial Stratification in the Irish Labour Market' on workforce experiences. Ebon is an author, TV panellist, columnist, equality activist and convenor of various webinars on anti-racism. With a research focus on labour markets and race relations, she has presented at several conferences, businesses, and non-profits. Ebon is a published author and contributes regular responses on contemporary issues of racism in Ireland. Her recent book is entitled *Critical Race Theory and Inequality in the Labour Market: Racial Stratification in Ireland* with Manchester University Press. She also co-authored the book *Challenging Perceptions of Africa in Schools: Critical Approaches to Global Justice Education* with Routledge in Jan 2020.

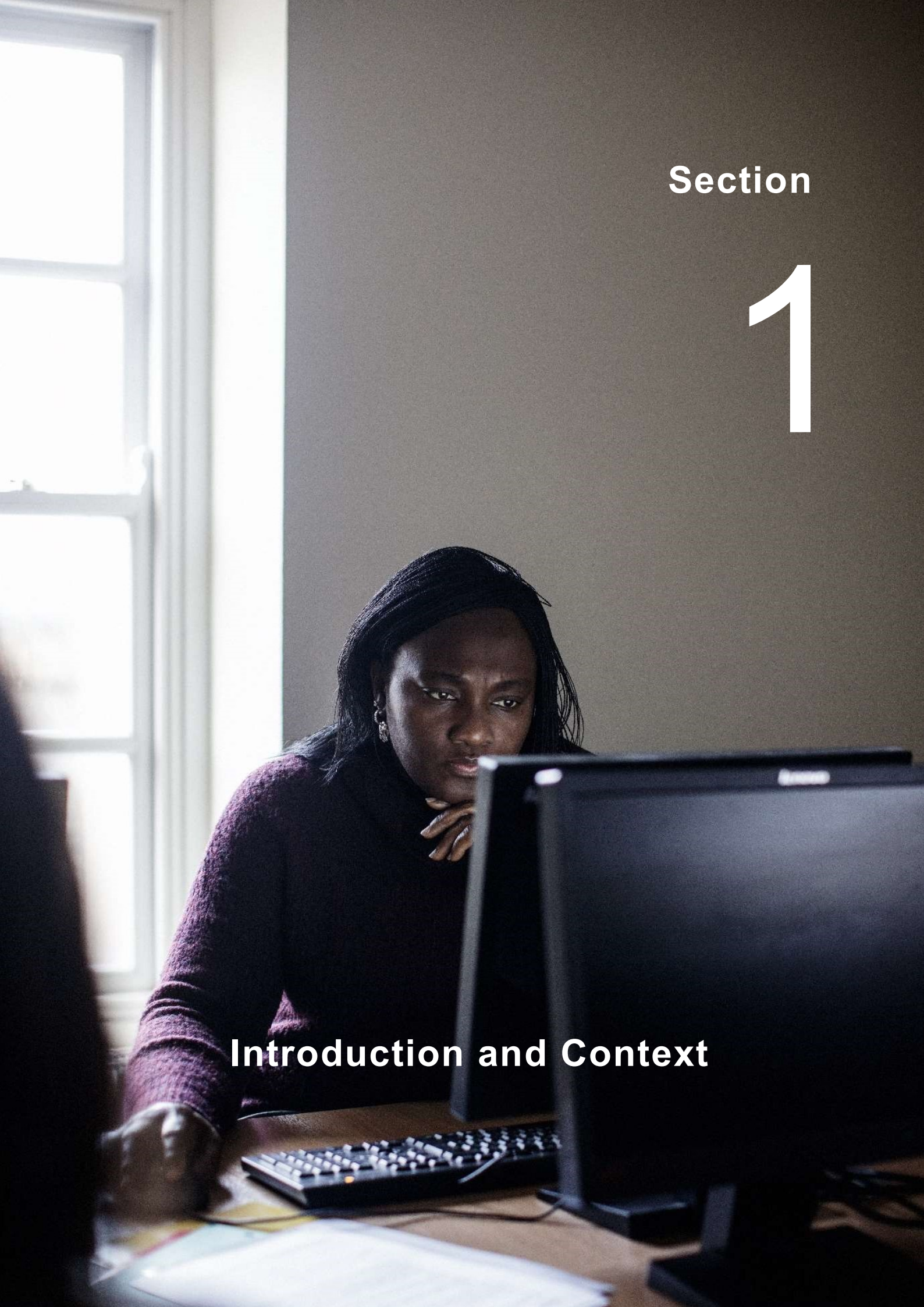
Industry Representative

Nikki McGoohan's professional background has involved working with a varied range of SMEs. For over 14 years as a partner in ProTemp she provided a range of business services including financial and general administration, mentoring business owners, and assisting them in their dealings with employees and financial institutions, including banks and accountancy firms. Prior to this Nikki worked in areas such as banking, insurance and with a start-up nanotechnology company. Subsequently Nikki spent 6 years as a member of the management team of a manufacturing company with responsibility for HR/H&S. Since July 2020 Nikki is the Director of Propel 2Gether Ltd providing services such as business mentoring, executive and personal coaching, and training. Nikki also works part-time with CMETB delivering courses such as HR Management, Business Management and Project Management as part of their evening provision.

Section

1

Introduction and Context



Section 1: Introduction and Context

Longford and Westmeath Education and Training Board (LWETB) was established under statute by the Education and Training Board Act (2013) and commenced operation on 1 July 2013. LWETB is one of sixteen education and training boards (ETBs) in Ireland. LWETB assumed responsibility for the assets and activities of Longford VEC, Westmeath VEC on 1 July 2013 and the SOLAS-related training activity which was previously delivered by the FÁS Midland Region in July of 2014.

LWETB is an organisation of considerable geographical scale. It provides services across the two counties in multiple locations, has over 1,000 staff, an annual budget of over €60 million and over 14,000 learners and students. It caters for a diverse population with different educational, social and cultural needs. LWETB delivers a wide range of education and training services including:

- Post-primary schools and colleges
- Post Leaving Certificate courses (PLC)
- Further education and training centres
- Further education and training services
- Youth services
- Music education.

The LWETB region has the smallest population of any ETB in Ireland. According to the 2016 Census the population of Longford and Westmeath is 129,643. This has seen an increase of 3.4% since the previous census and is slightly lower than the national average increase in population for the state as a whole, which was 3.8%. There are high levels of youth population in the region with 31,015 or 23.9% under the age of 15 and 38,711 or 29.8% under the age of 20. There is a considerable number of foreign nationals in both counties with the figures from the 2016 census being slightly above the national average of 12%. There are also high levels of the population with low educational attainment. In 2016, a total of 9% of the population in Longford and Westmeath were over 15 years of age and had ceased their education at primary level or had no formal education. This is slightly above the national average of 8%.

Historically, County Longford has recorded the highest rate of unemployment in the state (19.6% compared to 12.9% as of the last census), with urban unemployment particularly high at 29.3%. Westmeath has the seventh highest rate of unemployment in the country. Unemployment remains a significant feature of life in both counties, with higher unemployment rates for males than females according to the 2016 census figures. Longford has the lowest level of professional workers (4.8%) and the highest level of unskilled labour (27.7%) in the state, with Westmeath mid-range in both.

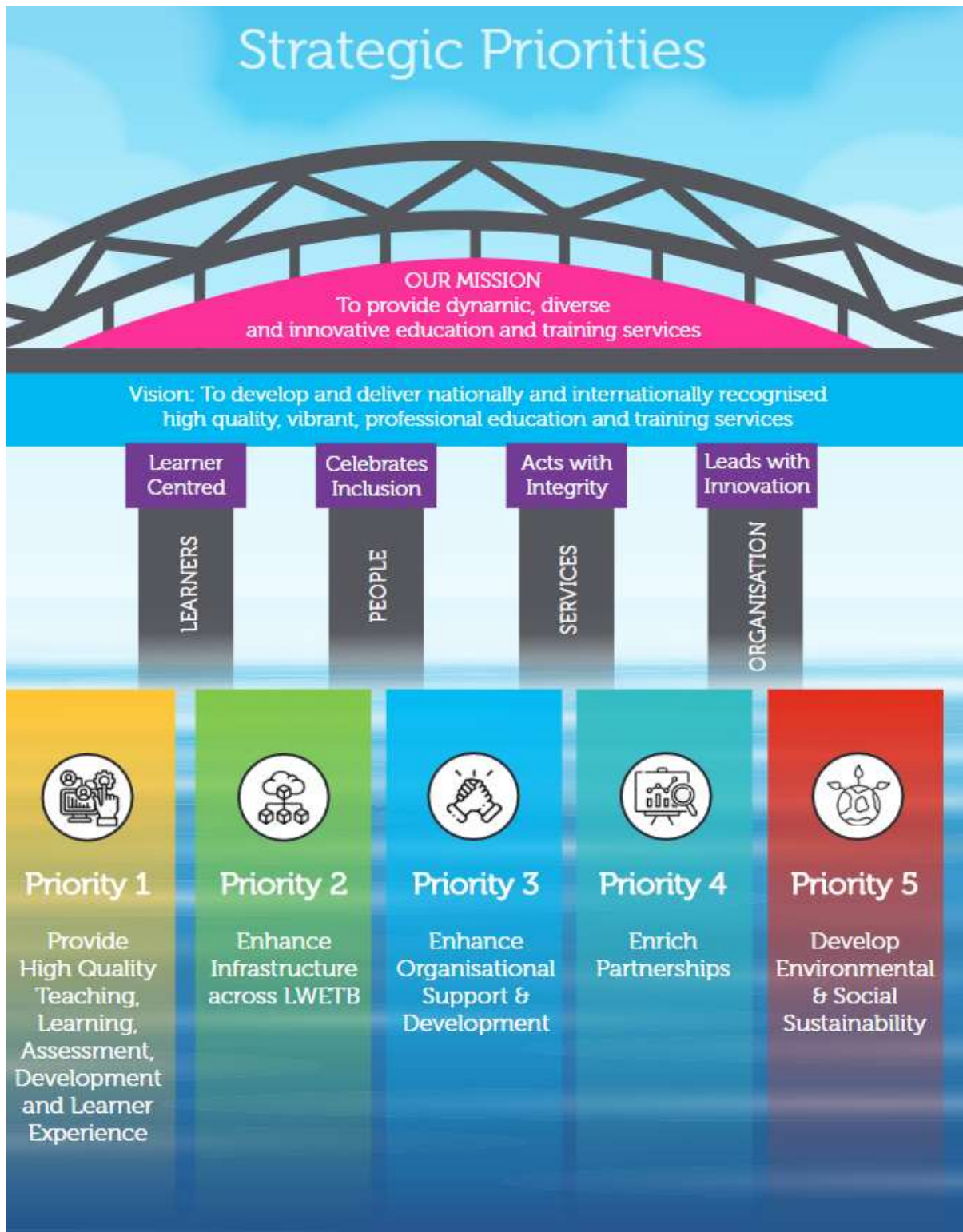
Figure 1 – Locations of LWETB Services (2021)



Longford and Westmeath ETB Provider Profile, pp. 4-5

The LWETB Statement of Strategy (2022–2026), was in draft at the time of the review but has since been published. It is guided by national policy and grounded in the current socio-economic and educational reality for people living in Longford and Westmeath. The strategy states the mission, vision and values of LWETB and identifies key strategic priorities for delivery over the lifetime of the strategy.

Figure 2 – LWETB Strategic Priorities



Longford and Westmeath ETB Strategy Statement (2022–2026), p. 15

This review was conducted following the Covid-19 global health pandemic. The restrictions associated with the pandemic required LWETB to respond with flexibility and agility to both the delivery and the development of its services, as well as its approach to governance, management, and operations. The review of the ETB was conducted virtually using online methodology.

In response to the pandemic, LWETB provided emergency remote teaching and learning. This included online resources and lessons for learners as well as supports for learners who could not engage online. Other services, such as learner support and general management, had to be delivered remotely also. Staff reported to the review team that they were provided with the necessary supports to work from home as required. LWETB established a mental health portal which was made available to staff and included regular communications on updated national guidelines and policy.

The pandemic has continued to have a significant impact on the labour market and economy and will create social and economic challenges for communities in the region. As of April 2021, the national adjusted measure of unemployment, including those claiming Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP)¹, stands at 22.4%². Given the lower skill level of the labour workforce, Longford and Westmeath³ are expected to exceed the national unemployment rate. This adjusted unemployment rate is falling as the economy reopens (down 8% from April 2020)⁴.

The review team recognises the considerable effort of LWETB during this period and commends LWETB on its learner-centred approach, which was clearly at the heart of its activity. The review team is of the opinion that the extensive support put in place, the investment in continuing professional development (CPD) for staff (with a focus on blended learning) has been exemplary. The review team finds there are important learnings here and the review process is an opportunity for the ETB to build on these, and to reflect on learnings, in order to continue LWETB's ongoing development.

QQI published core statutory quality assurance guidelines for all providers in April 2016, and sector-specific quality assurance guidelines for education and training boards (ETBs) in May 2017. These guidelines collectively address the quality assurance responsibilities of ETBs as significant public providers of further education and training (FET). The scope of these guidelines incorporates all education, training and related services of an ETB. This is regardless of whether these lead to QQI awards, one of the other nine awards recognised in the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ), or awards of other awarding regulatory or statutory bodies.

As stated in LWETB's self-evaluation report (SER p. 26), there are currently four active quality assurance (QA) arrangements in place in the ETB. One of the key elements of LWETB's strategy is to align all future further education and training (FET) policies and procedures with QQI's core guidelines in order to establish common practices across all FET provision. The standardisation and

¹ PUP refers to the social welfare Covid-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment for employees and self-employed people who lost employment due to the public health emergency.

² <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/mue/monthlyunemploymentapril2021/>

³ <https://consult.westmeathcoco.ie/en/consultation/draft-westmeath-county-development-plan-2021-2027/chapter/05-economy-employment>

⁴ Longford and Westmeath ETB Self-evaluation report (SER), p. 7

development of common policies, practices and procedures has been a priority for the QA team who commenced work on this in 2019. The QA team has evolved its own brand within LWETB as the Further Education and Training Quality System (FETQS). The remit of the FETQS team is to develop and enhance and build a quality culture and environment across all FET centres for staff and stakeholders.

The functions of the FETQS team are supported by LWETB's governance structures; the Quality Governance Group (QGG) and Programme Governance Group (PGG) are both overseen by the Quality Oversight Group (QOG). The FETQS team have developed a logo that denotes approval from the FETQS team and relevant governance group and is used on presentations and support materials across the wider organisation.

A man with short brown hair and a beard, wearing a blue zip-up hoodie, is smiling and looking down at a laptop keyboard. He is holding a pen in his right hand and writing on a white sheet of paper. An acoustic guitar is positioned in front of him, resting on his lap. The background is a blurred indoor setting with wooden paneling.

Section

2

Self-evaluation Methodology

Section 2: Self-evaluation

Methodology

Following the publication of QQI's guidelines⁵ and Terms of Reference for the Inaugural Review of Quality Assurance in ETBs (December 2019), and extensive discussions between representatives from the sector and QQI regarding the direction and management of the review process, LWETB's Director of Further Education and Training (FET) established a Self-evaluation Steering Group (SESG). The role of ETB Review Coordinator was established to oversee, manage and direct the review process.

During both the planning meeting and the main review visit, the CEO and FET Director described their strong commitment to the inaugural review process and that it is an opportunity to reflect on the ETB's progress in relation to QA and to identify areas requiring further development. After careful consideration and planning, the SESG was formed in June 2021. This group included representatives from across all FET services, including the Director of FET, FET managers, representatives from the FET Quality Team and the FET support services. The review team noted that the group was management-heavy and included three directors, an area training manager, two Adult Education Officers (AEOs) and an assistant manager, despite LWETB's strenuous efforts to seek a diverse range of staff representatives. Membership of the SESG also comprised representation from educators, second providers (community training centres and specialised training providers, guidance service, technology enhanced learning (TEL), professional development (PL&D), the FETQS Team and the Training Standards Office. There were no learner representatives, and the review team recommends developing this area in order to embed the learner voice across all LWETB activities.

Initially the review process commenced with each centre completing a profile and self-evaluation template. The on-site approach was adapted when it was evident that virtual meetings via MS Teams would be of more benefit.

The review team heard that LWETB's review coordinator guided managers and coordinators through the self-evaluation process, allowing for the extraction of relevant and useful information to support a fair and accurate view of their service. Managers and coordinators represented the views of their departments and centres, as well as their interactions with staff and learners. This included feedback relating to facilities and resources. During the main review visit, the review team was told that the SESG used questionnaires, focus groups, evaluation forms and meetings to gather information for the self-evaluation review.

It was noted by the review team that there was limited evidence of the systematic collection and utilisation of data. The review team in turn found it unclear how data then informed decisions and

⁵ Policy for the Inaugural Review of Quality Assurance in Education and Training Boards (QQI, 2019)

where decisions made were evidenced-based. The review team recommends that the systematic use of data collection to review and evaluate progress be an area for ongoing development.

During the main review visit meetings, the review team heard, from both the management team and review coordinator, that significant efforts were made to consult with a wide range of stakeholders from across the organisation during the self-evaluation process. This included staff in roles across the organisation, learners from across the ETB's FET provision as well as collaborative partners and external stakeholders. This was also clear from proactive efforts made to engage with staff and learners through social media ahead of the review week, which was notable and commendable. The review team was unable to determine the extent of involvement from stakeholders, the scale of it and how this feedback systematically fed into the review process. The review team proposes that systematic engagement with stakeholders be developed further.

A great deal of data was collated and produced by the Self-evaluation Report (SER). However, it is not clear to the review team how this is used to drive decision-making, which metrics are used to measure performance across different areas of provision and how this is in turn is fed back to learners and staff. In order to ascertain how LWETB used data to inform decision-making, the review team addressed the gaps in information management during the main review visit. This is dealt with in further detail in Section 3, Information and Data Management, below.

Following the consultation phase of the self-evaluation process and subsequent clarifications and revisions, the findings were collated into a cohesive document. This document was presented to the SESG Chairperson and group members for approval, and to the Chief Executive for ratification prior to submission to QQI.

The review team finds the SER to be a comprehensive document that provides an outline of LWETB's approach to quality assurance and enhancement. The SER is structured under the three QA objectives:

- Governance and Management of Quality
- Teaching, Learning & Assessment
- Programme Monitoring and Review

The report addresses each subsection under the three objectives using the following format:

- Outline of the arrangements relating to that subsection
- Evaluation: Examination of the effectiveness of these arrangements
- Conclusion: Identification of effective practice, areas under development and future goals and challenges

The SER includes appendices and URL links to additional information. The review team finds the identification of opportunities for future development in the report's conclusions demonstrative of the organisation's commitment to continuous improvement and it was helpful to the review team in the development of its own recommendations. The review team wishes to recognise LWETB's

commitment to developing a very comprehensive SER and commends LWETB on its proactive and reflective engagement with the self-evaluation process. A huge amount of work has been put into this process. The review team finds that the reflections in the self-evaluation have been good, as were the discussions conducted throughout the main review visit. The review team would like to pay particular tribute to the SESG for leading the review process, and to the wider SER review team, as well as those who gave up their time during the main review visit. The level of, and approach to, engagement demonstrates the commitment across the ETB to drive improvements in quality and to embed quality. The review team's recommendations and identified areas for change are all driven by LWETB staff and learners across the ETB. The review team sincerely hopes that LWETB will take this opportunity to implement the recommendations and ongoing reforms identified in the SER, and those which have been further developed in this report. Ultimately, this must be understood and led as a change management process, which will require clear ongoing strategic leadership.

Commendations

- The review team commends LWETB on its clear focus on the learner as central to its services and in line with its values. The review team recognises the considerable effort of LWETB during the pandemic and commends LWETB on its learner-centred approach, which is clearly at the heart of its activity.
- The review team commends LWETB on its engagement with the self-evaluation process and the clear commitment to change illustrated throughout the main review visit.

Section

3

**Quality Assurance &
Enhancement**



Section 3: Quality Assurance & Enhancement

Objective 1: Governance and Management of Quality

LWETB, established under the Education and Training Boards Act (2013), has a corporate governance arrangement based on the statutory structures, functions and responsibilities as set out in that Act. LWETB is governed by a board of 21 members including representatives from Westmeath and Longford County Councils, ETB staff and parent representatives.

The Chief Executive (CE) has overall responsibility for the oversight of all LWETB activity, including further education and training (FET). Executive functions are carried out by the CE and reserved functions are carried out by the Board. Reserved functions are set out in Section 12(2) of the Education and Training Board Act (2013)⁶. The executive assists the members of the board in the carrying out of their functions as required.

The Director of FET has operational responsibility for the coordination and management of the ETB's FET services and activities, providing leadership, guidance and support. An Area Training Manager and Adult Education Officer (AEOs) s are responsible for individual FET provision. Local centre coordinators manage the day-to-day running of each centre.

ETB Mission & Strategy

LWETB is developing a new strategy for 2022–2026 guided by national policy and grounded in the current socio-economic and educational reality for people living in Longford and Westmeath.

Throughout the main review visit, it was evident to the review team that there is a clear commitment from all staff to deliver on LWETB's strategy, and that learners are placed at the centre of what LWETB do. Staff and learners confirmed to the review team that offering support to learners, both educational and pastoral, was part of the ETB's daily activities. The review team found that the learners in the main review meeting sessions were fantastic advocates for LWETB, and clearly valued the opportunities and support afforded to them by staff across the FET service.

As previously stated, one of the ETB's values includes being learner-centred, and throughout the review week the review team heard from passionate staff who were consistently learner-focussed. This was demonstrated repeatedly through responses from staff members and current learners.

⁶ <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2013/act/11/section/12/enacted/en/html>

LWETB's mission statement emphasises their aim to provide a diverse and innovative education and training service. The review team is unclear on how aspects of this mission statement have been achieved. For example, there was reference to innovative practice, yet the review team was unclear how the aspiration to achieve innovative education and training has impacted on LWETB's quality assurance processes. A recommendation would be to develop clear key performance indicators (KPIs) or benchmarks to confirm that these aspects of the ETB's mission are being met and achieved.

LWETB's strategy statement refers to the ETB's commitment to diversity and inclusion. It was unclear from the SER how diversity and inclusion is realised, monitored and evaluated.

The review team recommends that the ETB expand the use of data for performance monitoring. This will enhance both operational and strategic planning and enable the provision of a more consistent FET experience. The development of KPIs and plans which include clear targets and measures will be important for continuous self-evaluation and enhancements.

LWETB is clearly on a change management journey, and this is evident throughout the SER, the current draft strategy and in conversations with representatives from across the ETB. Plans are in development to retire legacy QA systems and processes and replace them with fit-for-purpose policies, procedures and systems that are integrated across all FET provision. However, it is evident that not all staff across the ETB are clear about where the ETB is going, or the stages required to get there. The review team believes this should be addressed by LWETB and recommends that this involve creating a clear plan and timeline for the journey, including clear goals and objectives. This should be communicated to the wider ETB community to ensure that all staff are aware of the direction of the intended integrated QA system, and the progress being made

Recommendation

- The review team recommends that LWETB establish a clear plan and timeline to integrate their QA systems. The plan needs to include clear and robust goals and objectives, which can be communicated to the wider ETB community to ensure that all stakeholders are aware of the planned integrated QA system, and the progress being made.

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

LWETB has established structures for the governance and management of quality assurance. The governance structure is designed to align with QQI's Core QA Guidelines. The QA governance structure aims to provide transparency in the improvements and developments of QA structures,

service and provision. The structure allows for oversight and collaboration of QA activities and objective separation of the three groups:

- Quality Oversight Group (QOG),
- Quality Governance Group (QGG) and
- Programme Governance Group (PGG).

Each group has developed terms of reference (ToR), defining its role and responsibilities. The review team noted from the ToR that there is no external representation on any of the governance groups, nor representation of learners.

The FETQS have undertaken important work in developing these three groups. However, the review team observed that there is limited awareness throughout the organisation and amongst external stakeholders of the role and activities of the QOG and its sub-committees. Throughout the main review visit, meetings with staff made it apparent to the review team that there is a lack of clear and systematic communication in relation to these governance structures and the oversight of quality assurance. The feedback received from staff indicates that there is little understanding of how the structure works. The review team also heard that it is not known how staff and learner feedback reaches the QA governance groups nor how they, in turn, communicate to staff. This key role for the senior management team (SMT) – to clearly communicate aims, objectives and progression – should be strengthened.

Furthermore, the review team finds there is a disconnect between the governance groups, the SMT and staff across the ETB. Throughout the main review visit's meetings with staff, a number of references were made to the lack of communication, a lack of awareness as to "what was happening" and a general view that staff's concerns were not being fully considered by management.

The SER identifies that communication and consultation are recognised by LWETB as important areas going forward. To address the benefits of wider external representation, the review team recommends more diverse representation in QA governance structures. This will enhance the development of LWETB's plans to improve and will facilitate the inclusion of a wider range of voices. Specifically, the review team recommends the inclusion of learners, representatives from industry and the community sector throughout the ETB's QA structures. The review team further recommends systematic wider and deeper engagement with these groups to ensure all voices, particularly the learner voice, are able to shape and influence the emerging integrated QA system.

The review team also recommends that a clear communication strategy be developed by LWETB to consider how information from staff and other stakeholders feeds into governance groups and the SMT. In turn, how this information is used should be communicated back to staff and other stakeholders.

The Quality Oversight Group (QOG) and its sub-committees have been in place in LWETB since 2019. The QOG was preceded by the Quality Assurance Implementation Group (QAIG) who had its first meeting in April 2018 and was replaced by the QOG in November 2018. Feedback received from

governance group members during the main review visit meetings suggests that these members do not feel that they are working as effectively as they could be. The review team believes that it would be good practice for LWETB to review the work plans of the QA governance structures to define and strengthen their contribution to the development of QA systems. This will provide an opportunity to enhance the structural integrity of the ETB's governance groups and strengthen QA governance structures as decision-making structures and to determine their contribution to the development of QA systems.

The FETQS quality team was established in 2019 and has evidently been seeking to achieve an integrated QA system to enhance quality and to develop systems for the provision of supports. During the main review visit meetings, some staff felt that a more collaborative and inclusive approach could be adopted that would be more conducive to participation. The review team understood from the SER that QA development was carried out in consultation with FET staff, learners and stakeholders. However, at times this was not the impression expressed by some staff during meetings with education providers and this area would require to be addressed.

There appears to be a clear structure for reporting between the FETQS team and the Director of FET and FET managers (quarterly plans) and for these plans to link with strategic planning. This encourages the sharing of best practice and knowledge but, again, does not seem to sufficiently engage teaching staff. Staff regularly told the review team they would welcome the opportunity to share best practice through communities of practice (CoPs) and other means of engagement. The review team recommends that the ETB develop means of sharing best practice through CoP and staff integration across FET. LWETB should continue with the work that is being undertaken to develop a clear structured approach and framework to QA that meets the needs of the emerging FET sector and ensure all staff and stakeholders are part of this approach.

The current language used by staff across the ETB suggests a sense of there being "siloes" acting as barriers to change across LWETB. The review team frequently heard that LWETB is a 'new ETB' or a 'small ETB', and that divisions exist between further education (FE) and training, or between LWETB and second providers. The review team considers this unhelpful and encourages the ETB to draw a line under this, including by moving beyond this language. This would support a change in mindset in the FET community. The review team urges the SMT to use the review process as an opportunity to move forward and advises staff to hold themselves accountable for change, too.

The LWETB self-evaluation report (SER) identifies current QA developments and future plans. These were further illustrated to the review team at meetings with staff during the main review visit. The review team would like to recognise the positive work that has been undertaken on the Modular Management System (MMS) to allow centres access to approved assessments and to manage their own programme requests. This MMS focus is on quality assurance whilst also providing support for quality assurance systems such as programme proposals. It will allow autonomy at centre level and for staff to engage with QA supports. This system should also be supported by the assessment updates so assessments material will remain fit for purpose and current. The SER identifies that the

FETQS team is currently working on a learner handbook and induction process to support, guide and assist learners throughout LWETB, regardless of programme or provision. This was supported through meetings with staff during the main review visit. The review team suggests that LWETB continue with and prioritise the development of a learner handbook and an induction process that will support learners across the FET provisions and make the experience equitable for all learners. The review team is of the view that learners should participate and contribute to this development.

Recommendations

- The review team recommends more diverse representation in LWETB's QA and wider governance structures, particularly in terms of including learner voice and that of employers. This will strengthen the development of LWETB's plans to improve. Furthermore, the ETB needs to ensure that representation is valued and used effectively with a clear strategic direction.
- The review team recommends that a clear communication strategy be developed. This needs to identify a clear communication loop between the SMT, governance and management structures and feedback from and to stakeholders, particularly the learner voice. It is important for LWETB to develop a communication strategy that informs stakeholders of its aims, of any progress being made towards those aims, and of how feedback is received and the impact it has on the strategic planning and enhancement of quality assurance.

Documentation of Quality Assurance

The LWETB's SER makes reference to their quality improvement plan (QIP) from 2017 and how it identified key tasks and timelines to achieve the integration of their four legacy QA arrangements. As a future goal the review team heard that the plan is to retire legacy systems and processes and replace them with fit-for-purpose policies, procedures and systems that work across all FET provision. From the strategic plan has commenced the Quality System Index (QSI) which tracks the 11 core guidelines for transparency of documentation. The QSI coincides with a strategic review system for continuous improvement. The planning and progress of this was unclear during the main review visit, including crucially to a number of staff in LWETB.

The review team recognises that work is underway on developing new policies which will have a common format, replace legacy documents and support the development of an integrated QA system. The SER suggests that this is being done in consultation with staff and learners. However, there was little evidence during the review visit meetings to suggest that staff feel they are part of this process. The review team is of the view that this should be part of the overall planning, as well as identifying which policies should take priority. LWETB needs to communicate a clear message to staff about the

plans and priorities and develop different ways in which stakeholders can contribute. The review team feels that the development of the MMS is vital as a central location for current policies and documents, to allow staff to become familiar with and feel part of developments and to support an integrated QA system approach.

Staff Recruitment, Management and Development

The recruitment of staff for FET service delivery is organised and managed by LWETB's Human Resources Unit. For these staff, the national agreements and procedures are applied to their recruitment, management and development.

Once the job description, role and responsibilities are defined, vacant positions are advertised internally (to all ETB staff in Ireland and Institutes of Technology (IoTs)) or externally through a variety of media such as LWETB affiliated websites, LinkedIn, Print Media, etc. This is followed by a shortlisting of candidates based on pre-defined criteria, an interview process and then final selection by a selected panel of trained interviewers and subject matter experts.

Teaching staff must hold either a pedagogical qualification and/or have sufficient expertise to carry out the role, thereby enhancing the teaching and learning environment. Pedagogical standards are maintained and enhanced through continuing professional development (CPD) initiatives throughout the career of the educator. These include professional development opportunities related to Universal Design for Learning (UDL), blended learning and technology enhanced learning (TEL).

LWETB acknowledges in their SER that some vacancies (such as those for specialist educators) are very difficult to fill. Recruitment, retention and staffing gaps is an obvious challenge across all ETBs as also identified in the SER by LWETB. The review team recognises that this is a challenge nationally, and indeed internationally. The review team have recommended wider engagement with employers as part of strengthening the governance and management structure, which could support closer working relationships with local industry and employers and provide an option for accessing subject and industry-specific input into course content and delivery, as well as opportunities to develop and strengthen CPD opportunities. The review team recognises that there has been a significant reduction in the length of time required to fill vacant positions in LWETB. This was a previous area of improvement that is now being addressed.

LWETB currently operates under the SOLAS Contracted Training Framework. This framework nominates preferred training providers across 12 different domains of expertise. These external providers have proven through a lengthy tendering process that they have the technical ability, experience and appropriate supports in place to deliver quality training on behalf of LWETB. External provision has allowed LWETB to provide training in areas where it otherwise lacks expertise, training in regional locations where it does not have suitable facilities or when suitably qualified in-house staff are not available.

Staffing in second providers, and through the contracted training facility, is the responsibility of the contracted provider. These contractors must ensure they have sufficient staff with the appropriate skills to deliver on their contractual obligations to LWETB. Staff in these organisations are required to comply with the ETB's quality assurance procedures. The review team heard feedback from staff representing second providers that suggested they feel excluded from CPD opportunities (even if this barrier to accessing CPD does not in fact exist). LWETB need to be cognisant of this and ensure that CPD opportunities are accessible and proactively communicated to all staff to ensure a consistent learner experience.

LWETB demonstrates a strong commitment to the continuing professional development of its staff, which is to be commended. A CPD Coordinator has been appointed to drive CPD initiatives which are supported by senior management. Staff members can avail of programmes delivered internally and can also apply for funding to pursue relevant external courses. The review team is of the opinion that good progress has been made during the pandemic in terms of investment in CPD, and this is to be commended. The professional learning and development (PL&D) coordinator and the wider team leading this are doing a good job, which is valued by staff. It is worth noting that staff were complimentary and grateful for the wellbeing initiatives, for example, the workshops and video series that have been put in place.

The review team found that the investment in digital skills is particularly impressive and commend the ETB for its investment in workforce development. The important work of the technology enhanced learning (TEL) CPD team is notable, and staff feel the process for the identification of PL&D is generally strong, although it is recognised that work will continue in this area. Staff did identify the need for training and support to be available for support staff who have contact with learners, in terms of dealing with the challenges of learner support across welfare, wellbeing, mental health and diversity and inclusion. The review team found that clarity is required about where staff can turn for additional support if needed. During the main review visit, staff informed the review team that CPD requests they identify are granted, which is positive. However, the strategy for investment in CPD is unclear, as is its impacts on quality and how impact is monitored and evaluated. This was identified in the SER, and the review team strongly agree. LWETB needs to develop a formal procedure for collecting staff feedback on the impact of CPD initiatives. The review team recommends that the ETB develop ways of measuring the impact of CPD on driving quality and develop this to determine how CPD opportunities are prioritised.

LWETB is currently in the process of the development and commencement of Communities of Practice (CoPs), as identified in the SER. The aim is for staff to be able to move within their respective fields of learning to share their passions, resources, skills gained, knowledge and competencies in their respective subject areas. Throughout the main review visit, the review team heard many references made to CoPs and identified that whilst they exist in language there is no substance to them at present. It was evident to the review team during meetings with staff that they are fully motivated and willing to engage in this process. The review team has concerns that there is a risk that it will be dispiriting if CoPs do not materialise, and this therefore requires attention. Staff

consistently said that CoPs are very important and welcome and would be beneficial in trying to redress siloes across the ETB, support ongoing development and improve quality. An important element of this will be ensuring CoPs include staff in second providers, and also include CoPs focused on bringing together support staff across particular specialisms as well as teaching staff. The review team considers that this can play a critical role in supporting the move to a 'one ETB approach'.

As well as developing CoPs across LWETB, the review team heard that there is a significant appetite for bringing staff together across particular specialisms regionally and nationally. Several staff described emerging practices through the pandemic, which they benefited from and valued, and which could usefully be retained and developed.

Commendations

- The review team commends LWETB on the work undertaken during the pandemic, particularly the extensive support put in place for staff and learners.
- The review team commends LWETB for the work undertaken to significantly reduce the length of time required to fill vacant positions in LWETB.
- The review team commends LWETB on its continued commitment and investment in the professional development of its staff.

Recommendations

- The review team recommends that LWETB develop means of sharing best practice through the establishment of communities of practice (CoP) and staff integration across FET. This should include teaching and support staff (including contracted training) and will be critical to a 'one ETB' approach.
- The review team recommends that LWETB develop ways of measuring the impact of CPD on driving quality and develop this to determine how CPD opportunities are prioritised.

Programme Development, Approval and Submission for Validation

A number of LWETB's programmes have been delivered for many years. They were developed through collaborative national processes across the sector or through structures which were retained after the establishment of the ETBs. These programmes are described by staff as 'legacies' which were once suitable for learners. The review team is unclear as to whether these programmes are still suitable. As many programmes are more than ten years old, it was difficult for the review team to be assured that all the ETB's courses met the current needs of employers, learners and the wider community.

The review team recognises that over the last three years LWETB has strived to update its programmes (under current restrictions with programme specifications) and commends them on their engagement with other awarding bodies to ensure that programmes build skills, foster inclusion and facilitate pathways to learning. The SER identifies examples of cooperation with external parties regarding 'development of programmes' (though collaboration and programme development are two different things). However, the review team received feedback from external stakeholders that the ETB could be more proactive and visible regarding the many opportunities there are to collaborate more closely.

There is a clear process for new programme development, which is set out in the SER. LWETB regulates and oversees validation as well as the enhancement and updating of programmes through its Programme Governance Group (PGG). The PGG reviews all documentation, ensuring modules and certification accord with the awarding authority guidelines and programme resources are in place (physical, human and material). Once the PGG is satisfied and any clarifications received, the programme is brought before the Quality Oversight Group (QOG) for approval. The QOG may request additional information if necessary and can either approve or deny delivery.

It appears to the review team that the reviews of existing programmes are carried out as required on a case-by-case basis. However, there is no apparent system for periodic review of all programmes to ensure continued relevance. Staff members acknowledged during the main review visit that updating current programmes to meet the needs of learners and employers requires a more structured approach. Staff also confirmed that there was a very significant appetite for this to be prioritised by LWETB. During the main review visit, teaching staff stated that programme development and revision is a time-consuming process, particularly as it requires consultation with learners and external stakeholders. The review team is of the opinion that it may be possible to address these demands on staff members through collaboration with other providers on programme development. This was raised a number of times as a helpful approach by staff and management at LWETB.

What also emerged in the meetings with staff and employers is the length of time required to validate a programme. Employers made it clear to the review team that the time required is detrimental to meeting their needs. The review team is of the view that this timeframe makes it difficult for the ETB to be flexible in its response to labour market changes and employer demands. However, the review team recognised that there are also other factors to be considered in developing new programmes.

Employers need to be consulted to ensure programme proposals are relevant and modern and will lead directly to employment. The new programme also needs to be balanced with a consideration of quality and academic integrity, and by creating progression pathways for learners beyond the immediate job being proposed by employers. Consequently, the review team is of the opinion that higher education providers should also be consulted in the development of some new programmes as the input of their representatives would be invaluable to course development and would also strengthen the link with the academic and skill requirements for progression to third level.

LWETB is facing several significant challenges in respect of its existing validated programmes. It became clear during the main review visit that a considerable number of programmes need to be updated as a matter of urgency.

Industry representatives, learners and teaching staff reported that some content was significantly dated and no longer relevant to the knowledge and skills required in the labour market. This is a considerable challenge for the ETB and poses a risk to its reputation and capacity to deliver relevant programmes. In addition, many of the assessment instruments associated with the programmes delivered are dated. However, the review team recognises that the ETB has collaborated with other ETBs through ETBI to address this issue and a number of assessment instruments have been updated.

The review team was also made aware that the content of some of the craft apprenticeship programmes was dated, and the review team stresses the ETB's responsibility to address this in collaboration with SOLAS. It is recognised that LWETB is working with other ETBs to address this issue, and this is commendable. However, the review team is of the strong opinion that to continue to deliver outdated programmes to significant numbers of learners may affect the learners and their progression opportunities and could pose a reputational risk to the organisation. Addressing this issue should be prioritised as a matter of urgency.

The review team recommends that the ETB prioritise the development of a Programme Delivery, Development and Validation Policy and subsequent procedures to ensure a strategic focus in line with QQI Guidelines (as identified in the SER). This should include procedures for reviewing and updating current modules and assessments. Furthermore, the review team is of the opinion that relevant stakeholders should be involved in this development. This can be utilised to establish communities of practice to develop, enhance and improve both Module Descriptors and Assessment Instrument Specification (AIS) to ensure fit-for-purpose assessments, learning outcomes and current methodologies.

Throughout the main review visit's many meetings with staff, the commitment and motivation of staff to engage in communities of practice (CoPs) to support the update of assessment instruments was evident to the review team. This is a real opportunity for LWETB to get subject matter experts together to develop, enhance and improve both module descriptors and assessment instruments to ensure fit-for-purpose assessments, learning outcomes and teaching and learning methodologies are being utilised. These CoPs can develop a common goal to improve the delivery of service to learners

while also facilitating the sharing of experience and good practice. This will create positive collaboration across programmes, provision and levels. The review team is of the view that this will further support a quality culture that allows the sharing of best practice as well as working toward a unified approach to FET. LWETB also needs to ensure that learner and employer feedback feeds into this process in a systematic way.

The review team encourages the development of a systematic programme review process to identify programmes that require updating. LWETB should prioritise the updating of assessments, effectively utilise the commitment and motivation shown by staff, and initiate the development of CoPs to support this process. Other stakeholders, including contracted training, should be involved in this activity as part of the wider developments relating to the amplification of the learner voice and enhanced employer engagement.

Commendation

- The review team commends LWETB on its engagement with other awarding bodies to ensure that programmes build skills, foster inclusion and facilitate pathways to learning.

Recommendation

- The review team recommends that LWETB prioritise the development of a Programme Delivery, Development and Validation Policy and subsequent procedures to ensure a strategic focus in line with QQI Guidelines.

Access, Transfer and Progression

In its Strategy Statement and SER, LWETB highlights its key focus on being a learner-centred service, and this was recognised by the review team during staff meetings throughout the review process. This was particularly visible and impactful during the Covid-19 period, when support to learners and communities was vital for learning success as well as physical and mental wellbeing.

Learners requiring additional supports are referred on to services through a variety of measures, for example, through the FET Recruitment Service, FET Adult Guidance Service, referrals from the Department of Social Protection (DSP) and School Guidance Services. The good cooperative links between provisions enables learners to receive the correct information about other provisions/courses that they may be more suited to. However, it has been recognised by LWETB that different referral pathways used by different provisions can be complex and would greatly benefit from simplification.

Relevant information for learners regarding the knowledge, skill and competence needed for course entry is provided through a variety of means including (but not exclusively) information sessions with

potential learners, various LWETB websites and radio and print media. Information for potential learners is shared on the LWETB website. The review team found this site difficult to navigate and information was considered hard to find. This issue has been identified by LWETB in addition to course information being inaccurate, and not being displayed in a consistent format and style across LWETB, making it difficult for learners to compare course options. The review team agrees that one of the LWETB's goals should include a consolidation of the promotion and recruitment of its FET programmes.

The addition of a dedicated Enterprise Engagement Coordinator in LWETB was welcomed by the review team. The review team heard from staff and industry representatives that this has raised the profile of LWETB with local industry with increased interest in Skills to Advance (STA) initiatives. The new role also facilitates ways of addressing employer engagement across the ETB.

FET Adult Guidance Service provides quality information, guidance and counselling to FET learners. This service also distributes a weekly newsletter to subscribers which places a focus on wellbeing and taking care of one's own mental health. This service is often the first point of contact for learners. The review team heard evidence that guidance staff strive to provide a consistent approach to dealing with learners that is impartial and delivers a person-centred service. The review team was informed about the new learner induction process that highlights the service so that all learners are aware of its existence. The review team agreed that this was a very good service but there was more work to do to ensure it is consistently available across the ETB's provision.

The review team recommends that LWETB develop a mechanism for monitoring who is accessing the service and who is not. This would assist in ensuring that the service is consistently available across the ETB, and to diverse groups of learners. This monitoring would also allow for the measurement of the services quality and impact. Having an 'Access Officer' may support an inclusive service and support the monitoring and impact of this service.

LWETB operates progression pathways for learners to higher education (HE). Learners who meet the eligibility criteria for HE study may wish to undertake NFQ Level 6+ programmes either through direct application to the HE provider or through the CAO system. LWETB has a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Technological University of the Shannon (TUS), to support progression opportunities.

Many programmes afford learners the appropriate skills to directly enter the labour market, for example the vocational training opportunities scheme (VTOS), traineeship, specific skills training (SST), post-leaving certificate (PLC), local training initiatives (LTIs) and specialist training providers (STPs). Learners can avail of impartial information, advice and guidance provided by the FET Adult Guidance Service before, during and after a course to assist the learner to make the right career decision.

Whilst LWETB supports learners to transfer from one programme to another within the ETB, supported by the recruitment department and adult guidance department, on a case-by-case basis,

there is no formalised development of learner induction. The review team considers that the mapping and publicising of these pathways are areas that can be improved by LWETB.

Commendation

- The review team commends LWETB for the development of its learner induction and feels that, along with the learner handbook and educator handbook, this will support a consistent learning experience for LWETB learners.

Recommendation

- The review team recommends that LWETB develop a mechanism for monitoring its guidance service. This will include who is accessing the service, and crucially who is not, so that it can ensure that the service is consistently available across the ETB, including to harder to reach groups. This monitoring will also allow for the measurement of the service's quality and impact.

Integrity and Approval of Learner Results

LWETB FET Service has detailed quality assurance policies and procedures in place to support the integrity of learner assessment and results as well as to support consistent decision-making and standards across the service and centres' programmes. The assessment policies and procedures include internal verification (IV) and external authentication (EA) processes, examination procedures, learner appeals and results approval panels (RAPs).

The FETQS team reviews and updates policies at organisational level, ensuring they are fit for purpose and provide commonality among FET provision. LWETB has committed to integrating policies and procedures across its services and locations. The review team considers that LWETB need to ensure that assessment-related policies and procedures are a priority to ensure the fair and consistent assessment of learners across its service.

The Training Standards Office (TSO) oversees the approval of learner results both for first and second provider assessments (who all follow the same process). All assessments are securely stored, some in a newly developed Assessment Management System (AMS) and distributed as appropriate by the TSO. The TSO is custodian of assessments and oversees the implementation of QA requirements for various awarding bodies specific to training. It provides oversight, takes corrective action, and ensures all processes are in line with QA policies.

During sessions with staff and learners it was made clear to the review team that the work done so far by the FETQS team and TSO was recognised and appreciated, and that the training and support

provided by them was valued. Everyone was fully aware of the need to integrate existing systems into a single system, though the need to differentiate was also expressed – for example, between FE and T, for second providers as well as among different awarding bodies. Even though the FETQS team is aware of this and wants to use feedback from staff to develop an improved and integrated system, it was felt that the new way of working was now too rigid for a lot of programmes and courses. As identified in section 3 (Structures and Terms of Reference for the Governance and Management of Quality Assurance), communicating this process and these developments more clearly to all staff is necessary to ensure the system works in all FET centres.

The review team recognises and commends the work that has been started by the FETQS team on the integration of legacy systems into a single approach. The review team encourages the SMT to take a leading role and communicate the steps of this journey to staff throughout LWETB.

Another issue raised by teaching staff was the excessive amount of paperwork required for assessments. They felt the system was not proving the quality of teaching and assessment in relation to the development of learners, but instead teachers' ability to do paperwork and tick boxes. The review team is of the opinion that as part of the plan for an integrated QA system, the ETB should strive to create a system that is more user friendly, with less paperwork, fewer boxes to tick and more focused on learners' development. The benefit of the system needs to be communicated to staff so they have a clear understanding and rationale for why they should engage with this system, its purpose and related impact.

There is external oversight of the assessment process through the external verification of results process. The External Authenticator provides independent confirmation of fair and consistent assessment of learners in accordance with QQI requirements and reports on consistency of assessment results with national standards. This is achieved by the EA examining a percentage of the modules completed. LWETB recognises the need for clarity in the different experiences of EAs and their approach to work carried out using outdated AIS descriptors and the challenges these pose for second providers across FET.

The SER identifies that finding from EA reports feed into the continuous improvement cycle for each provision by:

- Identifying an individual or group who may need additional training
- Highlighting any necessary corrective action
- Assisting the FETQS Team with any documentation that needs revision or development
- Allowing for areas of excellence and areas for improvement to be presented to teaching staff and coordinators as a group

However, LWETB have highlighted the way in which EA reports can sometimes contain conflicting recommendations between reports and are based on the EA's personal preferences (typically around the presentation of work). The review team suggests that LWETB develop an EA Panel to offer training and support to EAs and to standardise their approach and adherence to LWETB practice.

The review team strongly advises LWETB to prioritise updating of existing assessment instrument specification (AIS) briefs as part of the development of the Programme Delivery, Development and Validation Policy as identified in section 3, Programme Development, Approval and Submission for Validation. The ETB could utilise EAs from a panel to review assessment as part of their formal QA process to ensure that they are fit for purpose.

The review team recognises and commends the work that is being undertaken to develop a Learner Handbook and Educator Handbook and suggests that the completion of this task be prioritised to ensure a consistent learner experience.

Commendations

- The review team recognises and commends LWETB for the work that has been started by the FETQS Team on the integration of legacy systems into a single approach.
- The review team recognises and commends LWETB for the work that is being undertaken to develop a Learner Induction, Handbook and Educator Handbook to ensure learners enjoy an equitable learning experience and receive the same support and information across the service.

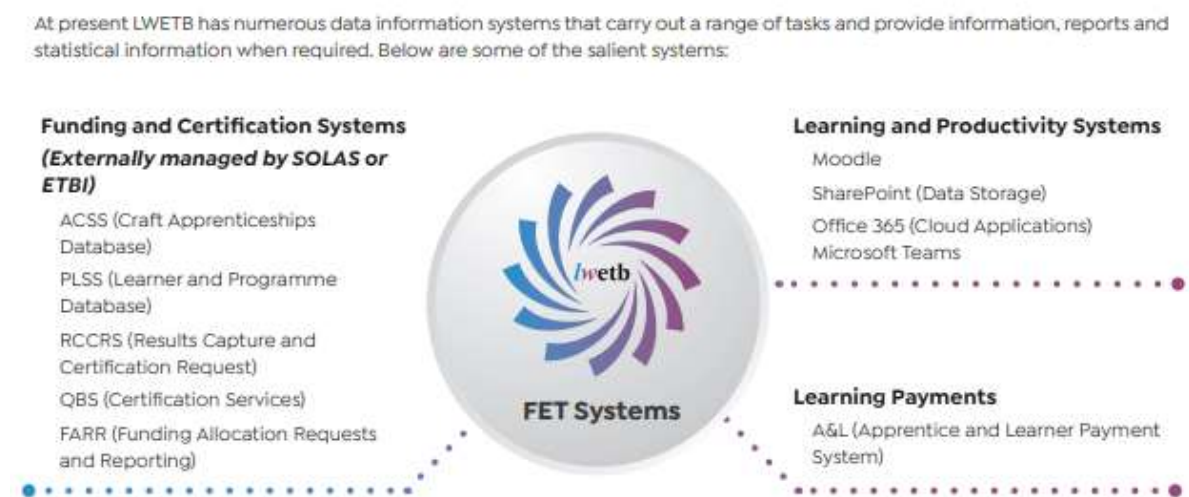
Information and Data Management

QQI Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines identify the need for controls and structures to be put in place to generate named data and reports which are communicated to staff and management for self-monitoring and planning purposes.

The SER identifies that the ETB uses a range of data management systems to store and manage data and perform administrative and operational functions. Many of these are legacy systems, which are externally managed by SOLAS or ETBI. There is an apparent lack of integration between these systems. During the review week visit LWETB staff commented on how they would like to streamline their data management systems; however, this type of development depends on the creation of common systems for collecting and storing information at a national level, and a number of sector-wide initiatives to harmonise and consolidate systems into a uniform structure. LWETB stated in the SER that they will continue with their participation in ETBI/SOLAS-led advisory groups to voice requests for enhanced information systems.

At present LWETB has numerous data information systems that carry out a range of tasks and provide information, reports and statistical information when required. Below are some of the salient systems:

Figure 3 – LWETB Information and Data Management



Longford and Westmeath Self-evaluation Report (SER), p. 64

The review team heard that LWETB is making progress in streamlining its data management through the development of an MMS (Modular Management System) and AMS (Assessment Management System). The ETB employs a Management Information System (MIS) Coordinator to provide the required information and statistical outcomes from FET learners. It is of vital importance that this role be utilised effectively to give focus and priority to data analytics to support QA and quality enhancement.

As the ETB gathers and stores substantial personal data relating to learners and staff members, it is subject to General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR). A data protection officer supports services on data protection requirements and keeps abreast of developments from the Data Protection Commissioner's office. Important updates are incorporated into training programmes, guidance documents and policies or are highlighted to senior management as an area warranting attention. All staff receive GDPR training, along with regular refresher training.

It was clear to the review team throughout the main review visit that there is little systematic use of information and data to inform decision making, or to inform the senior management team or the governance and management groups about what is working well and what requires improvement. There is little use of qualitative or quantitative data or measures for benchmarking or key performance indicators (KPIs). The effective collection and use of data has not been identified as a challenge or development in the SER. As identified in section 3 (Information and Data Management), LWETB needs to develop the use of data for performance monitoring. This will enhance both operational and

strategic planning and enable the provision of a more consistent FET experience. The development of KPIs and plans which include clear targets and measures will be important for continuous self-evaluation and enhancements.

Recommendation

- The review team recommends that LWETB develop mechanisms for the systematic collection of data and its use. Data can be used effectively to review and evaluate provision and for performance management. This will enhance both operational and strategic planning and enable the provision of a more consistent FET experience. Furthermore, the development of KPIs and plans which include clear targets and measures will be important for continuous self-evaluation and enhancements.

Public Information and Communication

LWETB is covered by the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act (2014) and ETB staff confirmed during the main review visit that the ETB routinely publishes as much information as possible in an open and accessible manner as part of normal business activities.

LWETB's SER states that their goal for communication is to be:

“Open, appropriate to the audience, clear, concise, constructive, informative and timely”

Providing information to learners, industry and the wider community is paramount in LWETB's activities. For example, it advertises its services, fulfils its duties as a public body and informs of developments in the local FET sector. The ETB engages in various means to communicate both internally and externally. This includes the use of a newsletter, social media, local media (radio, print), hosting open days and the LWETB website. Internal communication in the ETB takes place on a range of technologies: Microsoft Office 365 incorporating Microsoft Outlook and MS Teams is employed throughout the organisation in addition to third-party software, such as CoreHR, which allows for efficient information to staff regarding pay, pension or other entitlements.

Clear and robust communication is a critical element in LWETB's change management process. This is identified in the SER and is being explored by the ETB, including the development of more staff capacity. However, the review team is of the opinion that ultimate responsibility for communications needs to lie with the SMT.

LWETB does not have a communications plan or strategy, and much of the communication with external parties is through individual centres, services and programmes. During the main review visit, and in the examples in the SER, ETB colleagues illustrated the range of activities undertaken to promote the programmes offered by LWETB. The review team noted, and ETB staff commented on, the lack of consistency and uniformity in presentation and style.

Meetings with external representatives emphasised to the review team that name recognition and raising awareness of what the ETB does requires improvement. Whilst the review team observed some good practice with the use of social media, a more consolidated approach is required.

It was evident during a number of meetings that there is a clear gap in the feedback loop on a) developments/ progress/ evaluation on quality assurance, and b) wider reflection, evaluation and responses to feedback from learners, staff and external partners. The planning of a clear communication strategy is of the upmost importance to ensure that this communication loop works effectively to generate information and feedback but equally to share planning, progress and enhancements with relevant stakeholders in a timely fashion.

The review team recommends that the ETB continue to be proactive in developing an open and transparent approach to making information available to the public, and its internal and external stakeholders. As part of the change management process the ETB needs to establish a communication strategy which includes all relevant forms and modes of communication and that reviews and incorporates existing policies relating to communications. This strategy should cover arrangements for marketing LWETB's programmes, social media accounts, printed materials and videos to ensure a consistent approach across the service. As the use of data to measure the outcomes of its programmes is improved, it is important that the ETB would publish the outcomes of these processes. The review team considers the use of consistent and clear messaging to be critical and should be led by the SMT and embedded throughout the organisation.

Objective 2: Teaching, Learning & Assessment

The Learning Environment

LWETB's self-evaluation report (SER) described the physical infrastructure of the ETB. The main review visit was conducted using virtual methodology and therefore the review team was unable to comment on the ETB's physical learning environment. The review team noted the significant, and speedy, progress which had been made in the creation of a virtual learning environment, including support for staff to use TEL training, in response to individual learner needs and support for staff in their preparation for online delivery and assessments, which we commend as part of the ETB's response to the pandemic (Section 3, ETB Mission & Strategy).

LWETB has a number of new building projects in development to meet future FET needs and to add vibrancy and regeneration to communities in Longford and Westmeath (SER p. 86). Learner survey results included in the SER (p76) show there is general learner satisfaction with LWETB's physical facilities and resources.

The SER (p. 74) identified that learners can expect to be supported academically, vocationally, and personally as they progress in their learning journey. This was articulated by staff and learners in their direct engagement with the review team during the main review visit. The review team commends the commitment of staff throughout the ETB.

The learning environment across LWETB has many strengths, and the feedback from learners is impressive across the learner surveys and as reported by learners during the main review visit. As is noted throughout the SER, the efforts made during the pandemic to support learners with remote study was both impressive and highly valued by learners. This included the loaning of computers and other equipment where required, support with digital access, training in the use of MS Teams and a proactive approach to identifying the needs of learners. This is to be commended (Section 3, ETB Mission & Strategy).

There are opportunities to develop a system to capture feedback on the learning environment and the consistency of service right across LWETB. Current learner feedback is positive but further development is required to capture and share this feedback internally. Furthermore, a clear process needs to be developed to ensure that feedback informs strategy and accountability. This needs to be supported by a robust procedure for a more coherent and consistent feedback loop so that learners know their voice has been heard and that the ETB has responded to it.

The review team notes that whilst the SER makes reference to a complaints procedure which gives learners the opportunity to raise any issue, during their meetings with learners the team was not clear where learners can raise concerns about the learning environment if not with their tutor. The review team is of the opinion that this needs to be addressed. This could be incorporated into the learner handbook that is being compiled so that all learners receive the relevant information and are aware of the complaints procedure.

All teaching staff have practical experience, appropriate subject matter expertise (SME) and appropriate qualifications. Throughout the main review visit staff made reference to being able to easily access continuing professional development (CPD) initiatives which allow for additional skills to be mastered. This ensures that the learning environment benefits from modern pedagogical practices. The Teaching and Learning Strategy⁷ outlines LWETB's goals to develop technological integration and skills for all LWETB staff, learners, and stakeholders.

Commendations

- The review team commends the commitment of staff throughout LWETB.
- The review team commends LWETB for its investment in workforce development. The work of the technology enhanced learning (TEL) team is very effective, and staff feel the system is generally strong.

Assessment of Learners

LWETB have procedures in place to ensure fair and consistent assessment of learners. Course assessment requirements are communicated to learners during induction. At the start of each module, teaching staff provide a detailed breakdown on the nature of the assessment, the grading system, the type (assignment, examination, skills demonstration, project etc.) and the percentage value of each. A set of learner instructions is provided to the learners for each assessment. This details the assessment, and when and how to submit work. The assessments are verbally explained to ensure learners understand what is being asked of them.

An Assessment Instrument Specification (AIS) or locally devised assessments are available for all validated QQI modules. This details the assessment requirements, along with suggested sample answers for the assessor, learner and supervisor instructions, learner declarations, marking guidelines and summary marking sheets. Non-QQI modules do not require an AIS, but instead rely on the documentation (and assessments, if applicable) provided by the awarding body.

As mentioned previously in section 3 (Programme Development, Approval and Submission for Validation) most AISs are outdated and need to be updated to reflect demands from industry, teaching staff and learners to ensure their relevance. Teaching staff mentioned during the main review visit that they had to apologise to learners for the assessments that were outdated. They felt the new systems in place were not yet designed to address these needs but were in the process of

⁷ <https://www.lwetb.ie/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Teaching-and-Learning-Strategy-Information-and-Technology.pdf>

becoming more tailored due to consultation with staff and further development of the procedures and policies surrounding programme development and assessment. Also, the external demands and constraints in relation to the updating or changing of learning outcomes from awarding bodies heavily influences their ability to work with, develop and improve the assessments used.

Policies relating to assessments, including plagiarism, referencing, assessment misconduct, academic integrity, etc. are explained to learners upon course commencement and prior to each assessment event. They are also informed where to access these policy documents.

During main review visit sessions, learners were full of praise for how teaching staff helped them during their time at LWETB and the review team commends this commitment from staff (Section 3. ETB Mission & Strategy). Though mainly informal/verbal, it creates an environment of trust and respect which supports learning. The development of the Learner Handbook will create a more unified approach that can help staff by reducing the number of issues to be resolved.

The review team noted a matter of concern during a session with teaching staff. There appeared to be a perception that the different departments in the FET service could not share a document if it had been created in another department, even though this document was seen as good practice. As the ETB develops its use of CoP and the sharing of practice and resources becomes more familiar, it is hoped that this perception will change.

A newly designed Assessment Management System (AMS) is currently in development for secure distribution of assessments by the Training Standards Office (TSO). The review team considers this will be of great help to teaching staff as the number of forms used can be reduced and digitally produced. The current perception amongst teaching staff is that the time they spend filling out forms and ticking boxes is too onerous.

Recommendation

- The review team recommends that LWETB develop a learner induction process and learner handbook that is FET-wide and consistent, so that every LWETB FET service user receives the same information and is aware of the supports available and how to access them.

Supports for Learners

Learner support comprises a wide variety of activities both before and after a learner enrolls in a programme. These supports can differ in each centre or programme and some of these supports are unique to each provision. This includes the marketing of the ETB and its programmes, as well as mechanisms for helping individual learners select the right programme for them. The learners and staff from the ETB's support services informed the review team that the centres/services offer a wide range of support once learners are enrolled. For example, supports for learners who have additional

needs, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), language development, careers guidance, support for applications to higher education or progression to other programmes, travel to centres, etc. For learners who do not have the IT equipment required for home learning, a laptop loan scheme is in place to facilitate remote learning. The review team heard how this was very much appreciated by learners.

LWETB provides support for learners with disabilities and additional learning needs. A range of reasonable accommodations is available to support a fair and consistent assessment process for all learners, to allow a learner to demonstrate their level of achievement and to reach their full potential. LWETB's Reasonable Accommodation Policy allows for assessments to be adapted for learners where it is believed they would be at a disadvantage because of an impairment or disability. Each centre manager or coordinator has responsibility for implementing this policy and is supported if required by the FETQS team or TSO.

Throughout the main review visit, learners provided confirmation that they were very grateful for the pastoral support they received from their teachers, tutors and instructors and for this, the ETB staff should be commended. There were also several references made to the advice and guidance offered by the adult guidance service and how useful this was for learners. This was also evident from the Learner Survey Feedback identified in the SER (p. 94).

The ETB identified in the SER (p. 95) that it is challenging to ensure that all learners are aware of the support available and that they have fair access to it. This was also evident in the meetings with learners. Whilst learners were aware of the pastoral support offered by their immediate tutor, teacher, or instructor, they were less sure of what was available across the service. Furthermore, learners being taught by second providers do not appear to always know the extent to which they can avail of support services in LWETB, such as the availability of a FET guidance service or literacy services.

The review team recommends that the ETB continue to raise awareness and promote the range of supports available to learners. LWETB is encouraged to develop a learner induction process that is FET-wide and consistent across the organisation, so that every LWETB FET learner is aware of the supports available and how to access them. This will be further supported by the of the Learner Handbook.

The service and support offered by the Adult Guidance Service is seen as invaluable to learners. This service can be further developed by ensuring it is consistently available across the ETB and that all learners are aware of how to access it. Further work is required around the monitoring and self-evaluation of the service and assessing its impact.

As suggested below and linked to the development of a monitoring and self-evaluation process, LWETB should ensure that this service has mechanisms for monitoring who is accessing support so it can be improved. LWETB should ensure there are ways of measuring the quality of the service and the impact it has so that enhancements can be identified and implemented.

The learners who met the review team noted that they, and their classmates, were regularly asked for feedback from their teachers, tutors and instructors. This process was very localised and specific to course and module delivery. They reported that teaching staff were always available for discussion and gave feedback on assignments and examinations.

The review team noted that there are opportunities for the ETB to listen to learners. This was evidenced by learners interviewed by the review team confirming that many (if not most) opportunities are informal, and this can leave learners uncertain about the follow-up actions which result from their feedback.

As identified in the SER (p. 88) there is no formal mechanism for learners to make representations to LWETB about matters of immediate concern to the learner body, such as a learner council or learner representatives. Formal and informal feedback and questionnaires currently completed are post-event activities. From meetings with staff and learners, it is unclear to the review team how feedback from these questionnaires is used effectively to inform the strategic planning of quality assurance or how this information is disseminated to staff and learners to inform them of the response, identified actions and quality assurance enhancements. As identified in section 3 of this report (Structures and Terms of Reference for the Governance and Management of Quality Assurance), it is important for the ETB to develop a communication strategy so that staff and learners are clear about how their feedback is received and the impact it has on the strategic planning of quality assurance and any enhancements that are implemented.

The Learner Charter was formalised in 2020, documenting what learners can expect from an education and training provider and what LWETB can expect from its staff and learners in line with their partnership approach to teaching and learning. Whilst brief references were made to this in staff meetings, none were made during meetings with learners suggesting that it is not yet widely known.

The review team welcomes the development of the Learner Charter and recommends that the ETB use the induction process and the of the new handbook to publicise its content widely so that all learners are aware of it. The review team is of the view that LWETB needs to focus on the development of the learner voice and consider the development of more formal opportunities for the learner voice to be considered during course and module improvements, teaching and learning approaches and assessment.

Commendation

- The review team commends LWETB and its staff for the excellent pastoral support given to learners.

Recommendation

- The review team recommends that LWETB develop mechanisms for embedding the learner voice across all relevant activities and governance. Furthermore, a clear process needs to be developed to ensure the feedback informs strategy and accountability. This needs to be supported by a robust procedure and a more coherent and consistent feedback loop so that learners know their voice is being heard.

Objective 3: Self-evaluation, Monitoring & Review

Self-evaluation, Monitoring & Review

Given that this is the inaugural review of LWETB's QA processes, and the first time LWETB has engaged in the associated self-evaluation, the review team welcomed LWETB's commitment to investing effort and energy in supporting a robust approach to self-evaluation which sought to engage the wider LWETB community. As outlined above under section 2, a steering group was established, a consultative process was introduced to support the content of the SER, and efforts were made to be inclusive.

Throughout the main review visit the review team heard how the self-evaluation process had facilitated an enhanced understanding and ownership of quality and quality enhancement processes and has identified areas for improvement. However, the review team noted that the self-evaluation report often described the quality assurance processes which were used by the ETB, rather than analysing the extent to which they were effective in improving the quality of provision.

References are made in the SER to the use of a range of reports to plan, monitor and review its operations. LWETB states that it allows management to focus on achieving agreed targets while also informing learners, staff, other government bodies and the wider community on its achievements, the changes being implemented and the direction LWETB is currently pursuing.

The ETB has developed a draft strategic statement for the period 2022–26, which sets out its strategic priorities and reports on their progress on an annual basis. In addition, the FET Service also developed an Executive Self-evaluation Report (2017) and Quality Improvements Plans (QIPs) in line with QQI Statutory Core Quality Assurance and Sector-Specific Quality Assurance Guidelines for ETBs. The outcomes are reviewed annually, and action plans amended as necessary. All of these reports are published on LWETB's website. In addition, the ETB enters into successive 3-Year Strategic Performance Agreements with SOLAS (most recently from 2018-2020). This agreement sets out the context, strategic priorities and the ETB's contribution to the achievement of key national FET sector targets. These targets include the number of learners on specific categories of programmes, retention, and certification levels. This agreement is reviewed annually with SOLAS. The new Strategic Performance Agreement (SPA) 2022–2024 is due for circulation in 2022.

The external authentication (EA) process provides a basis for a review of the ETB's processes relating to assessment of learner achievement. EA reports reflect an external view on fair and consistent assessment in validated programmes provided by LWETB. The EAs issue reports detailing strengths and areas for improvement for the assessment process, recommendations made by an EA are reviewed by the FETQS team and provide valuable feedback and input into continuous improvement plans for learner assessments leading to QQI awards.

Top level reports are being produced but it is not clear to the review team how this data is used to monitor performance and drive quality enhancement. It was noted by the Chief Executive that the

ETB FET Service is working at an operational level towards a 'whole of organisation' approach to strategic developments in FET provision.

This was borne out throughout the main review visit in meetings with staff and other stakeholders. There seems to be excessive focus on collecting (paper-based) feedback forms, and not enough focus on a) how these are used systematically, and b) how feedback is in turn fed back to staff and stakeholders.

The review team noted that the appointment of a data reporting officer to support the systematic collection of data is an important contribution to any effective self-evaluation, monitoring and review process which is compliant with QQI Core Guidelines.

The review team recommends that LWETB introduce continuous and systematic self-monitoring and evaluation to support organisational learning. This should be supported by data – standards, targets and indicators – as well as by benchmarking and the systematic collection of feedback from learner, staff and stakeholders. LWETB need to ensure that the development of a communication strategy includes clear actions on how to communicate QA developments to all stakeholders to ensure the wider ETB community fully understands the purpose of the approach to quality assurance and to engender confidence in this.

Commendation

- The review team commends LWETB's appointment of a data reporting officer. This role should assist in the systematic collection of data and contribute to effective, self-evaluation, monitoring and review processes. LWETB is encouraged to ensure the position is effectively utilised.

Recommendation

- The review team recommends that LWETB introduce continuous and systematic self-monitoring and evaluation to support organisational learning. This should be supported by data – standards, targets, and indicators – as well as by benchmarking and the systematic collection of feedback from student, staff and stakeholders

Programme Monitoring & Review

Currently the programme/module review form application process identifies issues and concerns with individual curricula or assessments as detailed in the modular descriptor.

The Programme Governance Group (PGG) monitors review requests and manages these changes based on the scale of the review required, engaging external subject matter experts and internal

communities of practice as appropriate. Once the PGG is satisfied, it is presented to the Quality Oversight Group (QOG) for ratification.

The review team was made aware by staff of the very significant amount of work involved in developing or reviewing existing programmes. The expected workload and staff commitment are barriers to the development of this process. In an environment where a significant number of the ETB's programmes are based on curricula and outcomes developed more than ten years ago, these barriers to the development of more up-to-date and employer-relevant content appear to inhibit the quality of the ETB's provision. The review team noted that the ETB is in the preliminary stages of developing procedures to modernise programme content and assessments through communities of practice (CoP). This will be supported by the establishment of two new systems, The AMS (Assessment Management System) and the MMS (Module Management System) which have been discussed above. The review team emphasises the importance of always ensuring the views of stakeholders, including learners and employer groups, are considered in the development of proposals for new or amended programmes.

Programme reviews are brought to the PGG by the FETQS team and ratified by the QOG. The SER (p. 105) suggests that the PGG and QOG have a robust process in place for programme monitoring and review. During the main review visit, the review team heard evidence from staff and learners of some programme evaluation taking place, but there is no apparent systematic and consistent process of data collection or information-sharing with the FET programme coordinators and managers. Reference was made to learner programme evaluations, but this was not a consistent approach, and it is unclear how this data is utilised effectively to inform performance and QA enhancements.

It appears that data is reviewed at governance level (PGG) but there was no real sense of how that data is used effectively by the group, what impact it has on QA and how this is used to inform the QOG. The review team did not get the sense that this was a strategic group despite having referenced having a "hands-on" approach with a wide-spanning membership of "on the ground" practitioners. During the meeting with this group, it was recognised by the ETB representatives that programme review is at a micro level, and they are hoping that the MSS system will allow for a more macro approach.

The review team noted that there are lots of plans but no evidence of prioritisation. As identified above in section 3, the ETB needs to develop a very clear strategic plan and identify priorities and this needs to be communicated to managers and staff so they can plan operationally and have a clear focus of the direction of quality assurance.

Also previously discussed in section 3, better use of data and evidence is required to improve performance, including utilisation of KPIs and benchmarking to support quality enhancement across the ETB to ensure consistency of experience for every learner. This will be critical to the success of the integrated QA system and will be an improvement in both evidence gathering and in the use of the data collected. The enhanced collection and use of quantitative and qualitative data, including for

example stakeholder feedback, destination statistics and certification and other organisational performance information, will support an improved understanding of organisational effectiveness and support the enhancement of quality assurance across the ETB.

Oversight, Monitoring & Review of Relationships with External Parties

LWETB develops and manages relationships with a wide range of external organisations in delivering its services. These organisations include statutory and non-statutory bodies, other FET providers, HE providers, community organisations, local authorities, and employer representatives. They include formal arrangements governed by contracts and MOUs as well as more informal relationships. The ETB also maintains close links with national stakeholders such as SOLAS, QQI and other certifying and regulatory bodies.

LWETB uses contracted training, LTIs and STPs for external provision of training. Contracted training providers are selected after a competitive tendering process undertaken by SOLAS and the Office of Public Procurement. The performance of external provision is monitored on a per course basis and accessed on course placements, certification levels and learner feedback. External providers must follow LWETB's Operating Guidelines at all times to ensure a professional learning environment. The SER identifies (p. 105) that regular management meetings with contracted training companies and an ethos of cooperation ensure a positive relationship exists and is maintained. Review meetings with second providers, confirmed that meetings do take place, however these could be further improved to ensure that LWETB is tapping into wider knowledge, experience, and links with employers. This would also support unified FET culture and service.

The Enterprise Engagement Coordinator manages local enterprise relationships and receives feedback (informally and formally) on training offered under the Skills to Advance and Skills for Work pathways. The review team noted that there have been definite strides made in employer development, through the new role, which is clearly valued across LWETB. However, the review team could not clearly determine how employer engagement is embedded strategically. The ETB need to develop a systematic approach to employer engagement, so it does not miss out on opportunities.

LWETB is well regarded by employers across the region and enjoys many strong relationships. There are a range of ways in which these could be developed further, and also embedded across LWETB. These include:

- Employer representation on the board and other relevant committees
- Using employer feedback systematically
- Developing more consistent approaches to work placements, and developing a focus on monitoring and reviewing the quality of work experience
- Embedding relationships so that they do not solely rely on individual relationships/ relationships at centre level

- Exploring opportunities to play a bigger role in regional development – employers and other external stakeholders identified this as an opportunity for development, which could open up access to funding

Recommendation

- The review team recommends that LWETB use the experience gained through developing the SER to continue to strengthen its engagement with external stakeholders. This will further enhance its capacity to identify emerging needs and develop services to address them.

A young woman with blonde hair in a ponytail is operating a forklift in a warehouse. She is wearing a grey long-sleeved shirt, a bright yellow high-visibility safety vest, and blue nitrile gloves. She is looking forward with a focused expression. The background shows blue metal shelving units. The text 'Section 4' is overlaid in the top right, and 'Conclusions' is overlaid in the bottom center.

Section

4

Conclusions

Section 4: Conclusions

The inaugural review of LWETB has been a positive and productive process for the ETB. As is identified in the SER, the review process has presented a valuable opportunity to pause and reflect, with staff, learners, and partners from across LWETB. This has shone a light on notable strengths that exist, and that everyone across LWETB should be proud of – not least, the great efforts that have been undertaken over the past three years to support learners through the pandemic period. It has also crucially presented an opportunity to capture emerging strengths – including on workforce development, employer engagement and learner support – all of which are vital areas to continue to prioritise and embed. In addition, it has allowed staff, learners, and partners to identify areas that now can be developed and improved upon.

As noted by the review team throughout the report, the commitment to maximising the benefits of this process from everyone at LWETB has been evident throughout. The review team is clear in commending this. There is an opportunity now to use the completion of this review process to draw a line, as LWETB looks towards the future – building on the progress that has been made and enacting the key changes that require ongoing work.

The review team identifies central themes for recommendations and commendations and is confident that these reflect priorities identified by SMT, staff, learners, and external partners, and that there is an overwhelming appetite for taking these forwards. The risk is that insufficient communication and lack of clarity about the process could generate a lack of confidence in the process. It is for this reason that a central recommendation is that this be described and led as a clear change management process – with a clear and consistent message, clear steps and ensuring that everyone across LWETB is clear about how change is being implemented, and their role in taking this forward.

The review team made a distinct decision to limit the number of commendations and recommendations to ensure the key messages were clear to all LWETB staff and stakeholders. Furthermore, we have worked to ensure that the approach to recommendations is manageable and LWETB staff are able to plan for and engage in the resulting actions to meet the recommendations.

4.1 Conclusions on Arrangements for Governance & Management of Quality

Important progress has been made to establish a new approach to governance and oversight of QA, as well as the establishment of the FETQS integrated function. There is a clear commitment from LWETB staff involved in these structures to progressing this. The review process has also been identified by a number of staff as demonstrating that QA is a matter for everyone, whatever their role in the ETB.

There are clear areas that can now be built on, including in the representation of learners and external partners on all elements of QA governance, in clear metrics and data to inform QA processes, and in strengthening communication so that there is clear and consistent feedback on what is being done to respond to issues that have been identified.

The SER and strategy documents describe LWETB as learner-centred, and this is clearly reflected in the approach from staff across the ETB. However, there is a notable lack of learner representation, including on the ETB's board and all of the QA bodies. There is an opportunity to go much further in embedding and developing the learner voice and ensuring that there is a genuine partnership approach to co-constructing policy and practice.

Central themes emerging from the conclusions on arrangements for governance and management are clearly situated around the learner voice and developing mechanisms for embedding the learner voice across all of the ETB's activities.

With regard to employer engagement, establishing representation on the governance structures is crucial. LWETB needs to utilise its strong relationships with a wide range of employers to support this. LWETB is going through a change management process and, fundamentally, the response to this review should be understood as a strategic change management process which requires ownership by senior leadership, clear articulation of the aims, process and steps that will be taken, and consistent communication throughout.

Workforce development has rightly been identified as a key priority for LWETB. This area has been a particular focus during the pandemic, significantly CPD, which is to be commended. The work of the TEL PD team is very effective, and staff feel the system is generally strong. However, more work is needed to involve staff in second providers who can feel separated and unable to access CPD opportunities. The development of CoPs can help support this, as well as strengthening the sharing of best practice to raise quality and support a 'one ETB approach', as teaching staff sometimes feel that they are operating on islands and suffer from a lack of wider engagement with peers.

A continued focus on programme review and development is required. The module descriptors are hugely out of date, and there is overwhelming consensus from staff across LWETB that this requires urgent attention. A number of staff, including leadership, noted the challenge of finding the capacity to review these. There is apparent confusion about what the barriers might be. It is not clear how learner, staff, and employer feedback feeds into this process in any systematic way. Developing new programmes is a major challenge, and a big risk – employers can seek programmes elsewhere. As noted, LWETB need to commence the development of a Programme Delivery, Development and Validation Policy and subsequent procedures to ensure a strategic focus in line with QQI Guidelines.

4.2 Conclusions on Arrangements for Teaching, Learning & Assessment

The passion and commitment of staff across LWETB to delivering for learners is incontrovertible; this was evident starkly in the lengths staff were prepared to go to during the pandemic to support learners to continue to access education and training, as well as to provide wider learner support.

There is a clear need to update programmes and assessments systematically and regularly, and this is a matter of priority for LWETB. There is a concern about the capacity in the ETB to undertake this, and so it will be valuable to explore where this can be undertaken in collaboration with other ETBs (or indeed HEIs, where appropriate), or on a national basis. And where SOLAS lead on programmes, as with apprenticeships, there is a need to look at how these can be updated more frequently and systematically too.

Workforce development through CPD is also clearly identified as a priority. The effort put into this, in particular to improve the digital skills of teaching staff during the pandemic, was highly commendable, and staff reported positively on their access to CPD. The exception being those working in second providers, who at times were not aware of CPD opportunities available to them. CoPs were described frequently to the review team as an emerging model but are very much in a nascent stage. This should be taken forward as a priority, not just as an element of CPD but also in building networks across LWETB.

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

The engagement with the review process is to be commended, and, as identified in the SER and in conversations during the main review visit, staff consistently acknowledge the value of identifying both strengths and weaknesses across LWETB. The opportunity is now to take this forward, as part of a change agenda.

In terms of monitoring QA, there is a great deal of data collected, including learner feedback forms, but it was not apparent how this is systematically used as part of monitoring and review processes, and how the response is in turn fed back to learners themselves, as well as to staff.

LWETB, as an organisation, enjoys strong relationships with a wide range of employers. However, it is not clear how systematic this is, nor how sustainable. There is too little central management of who is responsible for relationships, how to develop more consistent approaches to work placements and focus on monitoring and reviewing the quality of work experience.

Important steps have been taken with the establishment of a new employer engagement team and it is important that this be retained and developed, as an ongoing strategic priority for LWETB.

During the review meetings with employers, there was a view that LWETB could be playing a bigger role in setting regional priorities/ influencing emerging strategies, including opening up funding opportunities, which should be explored.

4.4 Commendations

1. The review team commends LWETB on its clear focus on the learner as central to its services and in line with its values. The review team recognises the considerable effort of LWETB during the pandemic and commends LWETB on its learner-centred approach, which is clearly at the heart of its activity.
2. The review team commends LWETB on its engagement with the self-evaluation process and the clear commitment to change illustrated throughout the main review visit.
3. The review team commends LWETB on the work undertaken during the pandemic; particularly the extensive supports put in place for staff and learners.
4. The review team commends LWETB for the work undertaken to significantly reduce the length of time required to fill vacant positions in LWETB.
5. The review team commends LWETB on its continued commitment and investment in the professional development of its staff.
6. The review team commends LWETB on their engagement with other awarding bodies to ensure that programmes build skills, foster inclusion, and facilitate pathways to learning.
7. The review team commends LWETB for the development of its learner induction process and feels that, along with the learner handbook and educator handbook, this will support a consistent learning experience for LWETB learners.
8. The review team recognises and commends LWETB for the work that has been started by the FETQS Team on the integration of legacy systems into a single approach.
9. The review team recognises and commends LWETB for the work that is being undertaken to develop a Learner Induction, Handbook and Educator Handbook to ensure learners enjoy an equitable learning experience and receive the same support and information across the service.

10. The review team commends the commitment of staff throughout LWETB.

11. The review team commends LWETB for its investment in workforce development. The work of the technology enhanced learning (TEL) team is very effective, and staff feel the system is generally strong.

12. The review team commends LWETB and its staff for the excellent pastoral support given to learners.

13. The review team commends LWETB's appointment of a data reporting officer. This role should assist in the systematic collection of data and contribute to effective, self-evaluation, monitoring and review processes. LWETB is encouraged to ensure the position is effectively utilised.

4.5 Recommendations

1. The review team recommends that the ETB establish a clear plan and timeline to integrate their QA systems. The plan needs to include clear and robust goals and objectives, which can be communicated to the wider ETB community to ensure that all stakeholders are aware of the planned integrated QA system, and the progress being made.
2. The review team recommends more diverse representation in LWETB's QA and wider governance structures, particularly in terms of including learner voice and that of employers. This will strengthen the development of LWETB's plans to improve. Furthermore, the ETB needs to ensure that representation is valued and used effectively with a clear strategic direction.
3. The review team recommends that a clear communication strategy be developed. This needs to identify a clear communication loop between the SMT, governance and management structures and feedback from and to stakeholders, particularly the learner voice. It is important for the ETB to develop a communication strategy that informs stakeholders of its aims, of any progress being made towards those aims, and about how feedback is received and the impact it has on the strategic planning and enhancement of quality assurance.
4. The review team recommends that LWETB develop means of sharing best practice through the establishment of communities of practice (CoP) and staff integration across FET. This should include teaching and support staff (including contracted training) and will be critical to a 'one ETB' approach.
5. The review team recommends that LWETB develop ways of measuring the impact of CPD on driving quality and develop this to determine how CPD opportunities are prioritised.
6. The review team recommends that the ETB prioritise the development of a Programme Delivery, Development and Validation Policy and subsequent procedures to ensure a strategic focus in line with QQI Guidelines.

7. The review team recommends that LWETB develop a mechanism for monitoring its guidance service. This will include who is accessing the service, and crucially who is not, so that it can ensure that the service is consistently available across the ETB, including to harder to reach groups. This monitoring will also allow for the measurement of the services quality and impact.
8. The review team recommends that the ETB develop mechanisms for the systematic collection of data and its use. Data can be used effectively to review and evaluate provision and for performance management. This will enhance both operational and strategic planning and enable the provision of a more consistent FET experience. Furthermore, the development of KPIs and plans which include clear targets and measures will be important for continuous self-evaluation and enhancements.
9. The review team recommends that the ETB develop a learner induction process and learner handbook that is FET-wide and consistent, so every LWETB FET service user receives the same information and is aware of the supports available and how to access them.
10. The review team recommends that LWETB develop mechanisms for embedding the learner voice across all relevant activities and governance. Furthermore, a clear process needs to be developed to ensure the feedback informs strategy and accountability. This needs to be supported by a robust procedure and a more coherent and consistent feedback loop so that learners know their voice is being heard.
11. The review team recommends that LWETB introduce continuous and systematic self-monitoring and evaluation to support organisational learning. This should be supported by data – standards, targets, and indicators – as well as by benchmarking and the systematic collection of feedback from student, staff and stakeholders.
12. The review team recommends that LWETB use the experience gained through developing the SER to continue to strengthen its engagement with external stakeholders. This will further enhance its capacity to identify emerging needs and to develop services to address them.

4.6 Statements on Quality Assurance

The review team considered and evaluated a wide range of documents as part of the review process. These included the SER, a range of publicly available documents regarding LWETB, and supplementary documents that were provided in response to requests made as part of the review process. During the main review visit, the review team met with learners, employers, second providers, community representatives, other external stakeholders, teaching and support staff, managers at all levels and members of the Governance and Management groups. Based on the evidence gathered, the review team is satisfied that LWETB is implementing its current quality assurance policies and procedures effectively. Recommendations are made to support the ETB in the continued enhancement of the implementation of QA policies and procedures and to bring them into line with the QQI Statutory QA Guidelines.

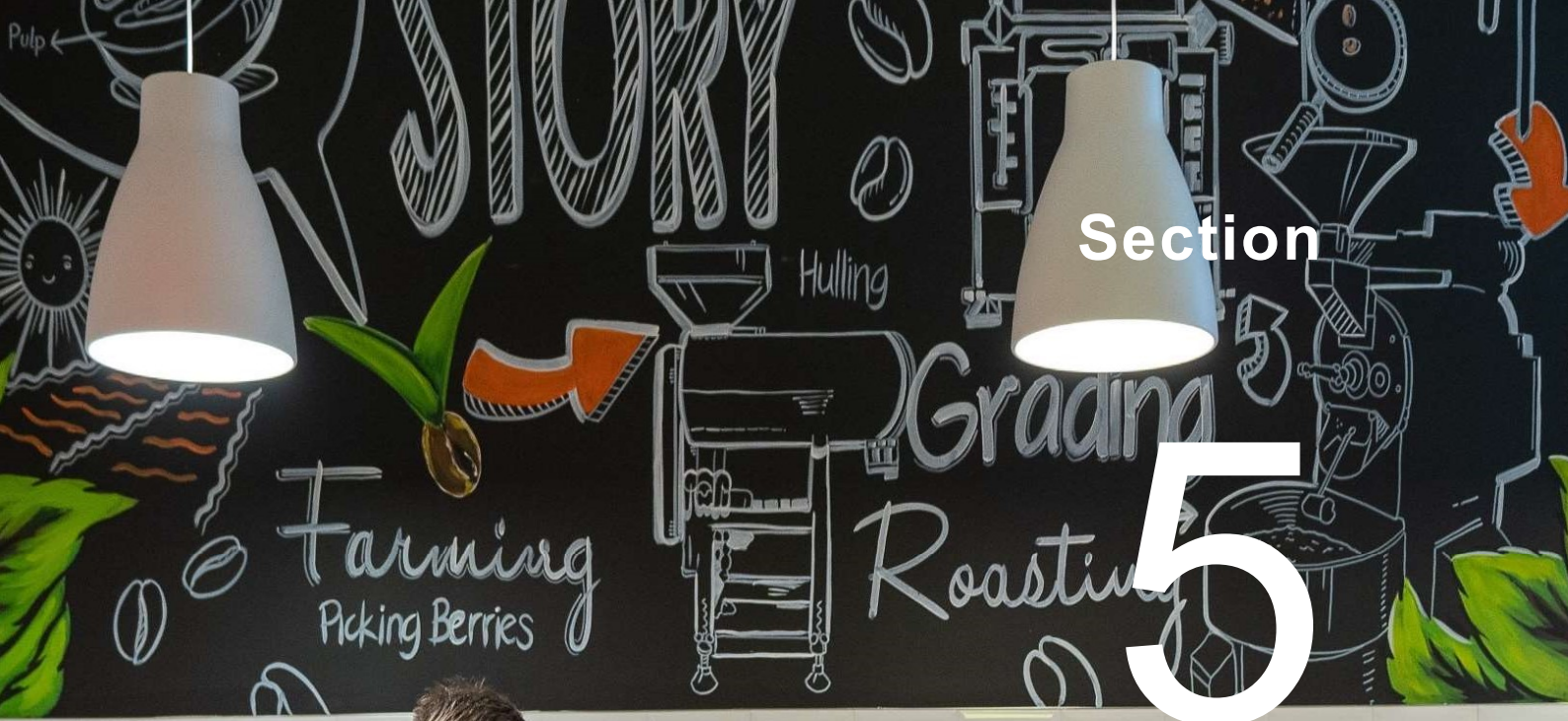
Following the extensive review process, the review team is satisfied that the ETB's quality assurance policies and procedures, which have been approved by QQI, are compliant with QQI's Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines and the Sectoral Specific Guidelines for ETBs. The review team recognise the work that is being undertaken to further develop the policies and procedures to ensure they are more comprehensive and are fully adhered to across the ETB. The review team confirms that the policies, processes, and procedures used by LWETB are in line with the *QQI's Policy Restatement and Criteria for Access, Transfer and Progression in Relation to Learners for Providers of Further and Higher Education and Training*⁸. As LWETB has recognised, it must continue to work toward providing more consistency in respect of ATP and the communication of opportunities to learners.

The review team found evidence that the existing governance policy and procedures at LWETB support quality enhancement. The review team notes that the ETB currently has a programme of work in place and further work planned to enhance quality. The review team observed a real commitment from staff across the ETB to quality enhancement. What is required now is a clear strategy and plan that focuses on how these enhancements can be achieved to support an excellent learner experience.

⁸ QQI Policy Restatement, Policy and Criteria for Access, Transfer and Progression in Relation to Learners for Providers of Further and Higher Education and Training

Section

5



ETB Review Response

Section 5: ETB Review Response

Longford and Westmeath Education and Training Board has welcomed each phase of the QQI Inaugural Review and the subsequent Review Report. The independent review team on the institutional review of quality assurance was held in April of 2022. The constraints of COVID-19 meant that this engagement was conducted online, however this did not diminish the engagement shown by LWETB learners, staff and stakeholders in the involvement, contributing and collaboration of this process. LWETB found the process of both the collation of data for the Self-Evaluation Report and Provider Profile a positive and engaging development to then fully immerse our documented findings with the opportunity to then portray them face-to-face online with the QQI review team through our online visit. LWETB was happy with the engagement of learners, staff and stakeholders with which the review was conducted, chaired and facilitated by the Review Team in conjunction with QQI. Both interactions in the development of the SER and the review visit allowed LWETB a vital opportunity to critically self-reflect our service and provisions as well as re-strengthen collaboration within LWETB and externally with community, contracted training and other LWETB stakeholders.

LWETB would like to highlight the professionalism, courteousness and enthusiasm that the Review Panel took to the process in all of the review interactions as it was one of positivity and real interest in who LWETB is. LWETB appreciates that the Review Panel saw all of our actions in how we support learners in providing a service that is appealing, reaching and meeting the needs of learners within Longford and Westmeath. LWETB was appreciative of the recognition that educators and staff received for their commitment and drive in the notable effort and support that staff and stakeholders give to learners in FET.

LWETB received both commendations and recommendations as outcomes of the Review process. We particularly welcome the specific commendations made:

- The review team commends LWETB on its clear focus on the learner as central to its services and in line with its values.
- The review team commends the continued commitment to learners from staff throughout the ETB.
- The review team commends the ETB for its investment in its workforce development. The work of the TEL PD team is very effective, and staff feel the system is generally strong.
- The review team recognises and commends the work that has started by the FETQS Team on the integration of legacy systems into a single approach.
- The review team recognises and commends the work that is being undertaken to develop a Learner Induction, Learner Handbook and Educator Handbook to ensure learners receive an equitable learning experience and receive the same support and information across the service.

LWETB equally welcome the recommendations made by the review team as included within the report and appreciates the review team recognises that as within our SER, it was identified that *'learners are at the heart of all that we do, and are integral to delivering a quality service in teaching*

and learning'. As such, LWETB will deliver an action plan that ensures a further and continued embedding of a quality assurance culture and system within LWETB that is fit-for-purpose and robust based on recommendations made. It is pertinent to highlight that many of the recommendations made by the review team mirror that of the future focus outcomes of the SER and this will further strengthen and underpin the outcomes made.


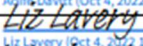
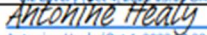
FETQS is at the helm of quality assurance within LWETB in ensuring that we meet core statutory requirements and lead the way forward in the continued development of a single QA system that works for FET. Further Education and Training in LWETB plays a vital role within Longford and Westmeath counties in the economic development and social cohesion and we intend from these commendations and recommendations to deliver an even stronger, effective and engaging service that will continue to support growth and purpose.

The review team highlighted and commended LWETB's ability to respond to the challenges faced by staff, stakeholders and learners during COVID-19 and this underlines our commitment to shape and lead this next critical phase of development and enhancement of our teaching and learning to align to and respond to learner requirements, governance management including self-monitoring and development requirements as highlighted within this report.

We would like to acknowledge and thank all our staff, learners and stakeholders who took part in this review and who have played an important role in supporting this process within the FET pillar of LWETB. This invaluable input will allow us to foster deeper collaborative efforts and ensure a fit-for-purpose response to recommendation's made to ensure a diverse, concerted and action deliverable process is developed to meet the needs of learners.

We would like to thank our SESG steering group who worked tirelessly in the development of the SER, Provider Profile as well as the time, effort and collaborative support given during the review week. Finally, we would like to thank QQI and the Review Team for their time spent, effort made and connection we had pre, during and post this process.

This report will assist us in moving to this exciting next phase of FET development within LWETB. Making a positive and impactful educational difference within the landscape of Longford and Westmeath is a responsibility which we do not take lightly and we fully support the shaping of a more defined and well-rounded LWETB because of this report. LWETB has worked hard to deliver our mission, vision and values and couple with our new Strategic Focus 2022-2026 and with this report we endeavour to continue to meet the needs of learners as they are at the heart of everything that we do.

Chair of Board	Cllr. Aoife Davitt	 Aoife Davitt (Oct 4, 2022 11:37 GMT+1)
Chief Executive	Liz Lavery	 Liz Lavery (Oct 4, 2022 15:15 GMT+1)
Director of FET	Antonine Healy	 Antonine Healy (Oct 4, 2022 17:28 GMT+1)



Appendices

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Appendix A: Review Terms of Reference

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

1. Background and Context for the Review

1.1.1 QQI established Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for all providers in April 2016, and Sector Specific Quality Assurance Guidelines for Education and Training Boards (ETBs) in May 2017⁹. These guidelines collectively address the quality assurance responsibilities of ETBs as significant public providers of further education and training. The scope of the guidelines incorporates all education, training and related services of an ETB, leading to QQI awards, other awards recognised in the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ), or awards of other awarding, regulatory or statutory bodies.

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

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

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

⁹ Policy for the Inaugural Review of Quality Assurance in Education and Training Boards (QQI, 2019)

(to establish procedures for the review by QQI of the effectiveness and implementation of a provider's quality assurance procedures) and to section 34 of the 2012 Act (the external review by QQI of a provider's quality assurance procedures).

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

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

2. Purposes

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

Purpose	Achieved and Measured Through
1. To encourage a quality culture and the enhancement of the learning environment and experience within ETBs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasising the learner and the learning experience in reviews. • Constructively and meaningfully involving staff at all levels of the organisation in the self-evaluation and external evaluation phases of the review. • Providing a source of evidence of areas for improvement and areas for revision of policy and change and basing follow-up upon them. • Exploring innovative and effective practices and procedures. • Providing evidence of quality assurance and quality enhancement within the ETB.
2. To provide feedback to ETBs about organisation-wide quality and the impact of mission, strategy, governance and management on quality and the overall effectiveness of their quality assurance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasising the ownership, governance and management of quality assurance at the corporate ETB-level, i.e., how the ETB exercises oversight of quality assurance. • Pitching the review at a comprehensive ETB-wide level. • Evaluating compliance with legislation, policy and standards. • Evaluating the impact and effectiveness of quality assurance procedures.

<p>3. To improve public confidence in the quality of ETB provision by promoting transparency and public awareness.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adhering to purposes, criteria and outcomes that are clear and transparent. • Publication of clear timescales and terms of reference for review. • Evaluating, as part of the review, ETB reporting on quality assurance, to ensure that it is transparent and accessible. • Publication of the individual ETB reports and outcomes of reviews in accessible locations and formats for different audiences. • Publication of sectoral findings and observations.
<p>4. To support system-level improvement of the quality of further education and training in the ETBs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publishing a sectoral report, with system-level observations and findings. • The identification and dissemination of effective practice to facilitate shared learning.
<p>5. To encourage quality by using evidence-based, objective methods and advice.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using the expertise of international, national, learner, industry and other stakeholder peer reviewers who are independent of the ETB. • Ensuring that findings are based on stated evidence. • Facilitating ETBs to identify measures for quality relevant to their own mission and context. • Promoting the identification and dissemination of examples of good practice and innovation
<p>6. To provide an opportunity for ETBs to articulate their stage of development, mission and objectives and demonstrate the quality assurance of their provision, both individually and as a sector.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publication of self-evaluation reports, conducted with input from ETB learners and wider stakeholder groups. • Publication of the reports and outcomes of reviews in accessible locations and formats for different audiences.

3. Objectives and Criteria for Review

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

Objective 1: Governance and Management of Quality:

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

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

Indicative Matters to be Explored

a) The ETB's mission and strategy

- How/do the ETB's quality assurance arrangements contribute to the fulfilment of these?
- Is the learner experience consistent with this mission?

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

- Are the arrangements sufficiently comprehensive and robust to ensure strong governance and management of operations (e.g., separation of responsibilities, externality, stakeholder input)?
- Is governance visible and transparent?
- Where multi-level arrangements exist (i.e., where responsibilities are invested in centre managers), is there sufficient clarity, co-ordination, corporate oversight of, and accountability for, these arrangements?

c) The documentation of quality assurance policy and procedures

- How effective are the arrangements for the development and approval of policies and procedures?
- Are policies and procedures coherent and comprehensive (do they incorporate all service types and awarding bodies?), robust and fit for purpose?
- Are policies and procedures systematically evaluated?

d) Staff recruitment, management and development

- How does the ETB assure itself as to the competence of its staff?
- How are professional standards maintained and enhanced?
- How are staff informed of developments impacting the organisation and how can they input to decision-making?

e) Programme development, approval and submission for validation

- What arrangements are in place to ensure alignment of programme development activity with strategic goals and regional needs?
- Are the arrangements for the approval and management of programme development robust, objective and transparent?
- What arrangements are in place to facilitate and oversee a comprehensive programme development process in advance of submission for validation (e.g., the conduct of research, inclusion of external expertise, writing learning outcomes, curricula etc.)?
- Are there structures in place to support collaborative programme development with other ETBs/providers?

f) Access, transfer and progression

- How does the ETB quality assure access, transfer and progression systematically across all programmes and services?
- Are there flexible learning pathways, respecting and attending to the diversity of learners?
- Are admissions, progression and recognition policies and processes clear and transparent for learners and implemented on a consistent basis?

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

- What governance and oversight processes are in place to ensure the integrity of learner assessment and results?
- How does the ETB ensure that these arrangements provide for consistent decision-making and standards across services and centres?

h) Information and data management:

- What arrangements are in place to ensure that data are reliable and secure?
- How are data utilised as part of the quality assurance system?
- What arrangements are in place to ensure the integrity of learner records (including, where relevant, the sharing of learner data with other providers on national apprenticeships)?

- How is compliance with data legislation ensured?

i) Public information and communications:

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

Indicative Matters to be Explored

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

Objective 2: Teaching, Learning and Assessment

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

Indicative Matters to be Explored

a) The learning environment

- How/is the quality of the learning experience monitored?
- How/are modes of delivery and pedagogical methods evaluated to ensure that they meet the needs of learners?
- How is the quality of the learning experience of learners on work placements ensured?
- Is there evidence of enhancement in teaching and learning?

b) Assessment of learners

- How is the integrity, consistency and security of assessment instruments, methodologies, procedures and records ensured – including in respect of recognition of prior learning?
- How is the standard of assessment of learners on work placements ensured – particularly where these are undertaken by non-ETB staff?
- Do learners in all settings have a clear understanding of how and why they are assessed and are they given feedback on assessment?

c) Supports for learners

- How are support services planned and monitored to ensure that they meet the needs of learners?
- How does the ETB ensure consistency in the availability of appropriate supports to learners across different settings/regions?
- Are learners aware of the existence of supports?

Objective 3: Self-Evaluation, Monitoring & Review

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

Indicative Matters to be Explored

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

- What are the processes for quality assurance planning, monitoring and reporting?
- Are the processes for self-evaluation, monitoring and review (including the self-evaluation report undertaken for the inaugural review) comprehensive, inclusive and evidence-based?
- Is there evidence of strategic analysis and follow-up of the outcome of internal quality assurance reviews and monitoring (e.g., review reports, external authenticator reports, learner feedback reports etc.)?
- How is quality promoted and enhanced?

b) Programme monitoring and review

- How are programme delivery and outcomes monitored across multiple centres (including collection of feedback from learners/stakeholders)?
- Are mechanisms for periodic review of programmes comprehensive, inclusive and robust?
- Is there evidence that the outcome of programme monitoring and review informs programme modification and enhancement?
- Are the outputs of programme monitoring and review considered on a strategic basis by the ETB's governance bodies to inform decision-making?

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

- How does the ETB ensure the suitability of the external parties with which it engages?
- Is the nature of the arrangements with each external party published?
- Is the effectiveness of these arrangements monitored and reviewed through ETB governance?
- Does the ETB assess its impact within the region and local communities?

3.2 In respect of each dimension, the review will:

- i. evaluate the effectiveness of ETB's quality assurance procedures for the purposes of establishing, ascertaining, maintaining and improving the quality of further education, training, and related services; and
- ii. identify perceived gaps in the internal quality assurance mechanisms and the appropriateness, sufficiency, prioritisation and timeliness of planned measures to address them in the context of the ETB's current stage of development; and
- iii. explore achievements and innovations in quality assurance and in the enhancement of teaching and learning.

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

- Provide a qualitative statement about the effectiveness of the quality assurance procedures of the ETB and the extent of their implementation;
- Provide a statement about the extent to which existing quality assurance procedures adhere to QQI's Quality Assurance Guidelines and policies (as listed at 3.4), to include an explicit qualitative statement on the extent to which the procedures are in keeping with QQI's Policy Restatement and Criteria for Access, Transfer and Progression in Relation to Learners for Providers of Further and Higher Education and Training;¹⁰
- Provide a qualitative statement on the enhancement of quality and
- Identify effective practice and recommendations for further improvement.

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

- The ETB's mission and objectives for quality assurance
- QQI's Sector-Specific Quality Assurance Guidelines for Education and Training Boards
- QQI's Topic-Specific Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Statutory Apprenticeship Programmes;
- QQI's Topic-Specific Quality Assurance Guidelines for Blended Learning;
- QQI's Policy Restatement and Criteria for Access, Transfer and Progression in Relation to Learners for Providers of Further and Higher Education and Training;
- QQI's Policies and Criteria for the Validation of Programmes of Education and Training and
- Relevant European guidelines and practice on quality and quality assurance

¹⁰ <https://www.qqi.ie/Downloads/ATP%20Policy%20Restatement%20FINAL%202018.pdf>

4. The Review Team

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

4.2 QQI will identify an appropriate team of reviewers for each review who are independent of the ETB with the appropriate skills and experience required to perform their tasks. This will include experts with knowledge and experience of further education and training, quality assurance, teaching and learning, and external review. It will include international representatives and QQI will seek to ensure diversity within the team. The ETB will have an opportunity to comment on the proposed composition of their review team to ensure there are no conflicts of interest. The roles and responsibilities of the review team members are as follows¹¹:

Chairperson

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

- Leading the conduct of the review and ensuring that proceedings remain focused.
- Coordinating the work of reviewers.
- Fostering open and respectful exchanges of opinion and ensuring that the views of all participants are valued and considered.
- Facilitating the emergence of evidence-based team decisions (ideally based on consensus).
- Contributing to, and overseeing the production of, the review report within the timeline agreed with QQI, approving amendments or convening additional meetings if required.

Co-ordinating Reviewer

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

¹¹ Further detail on the conduct of reviewers is outlined in QQI's Code of Conduct for Reviewers and Evaluators.

is provided in the report to support the team's recommendations. The role of the co-ordinating reviewer includes:

- Acting as the liaison between the review team and QQI; and, during the main review visit, between the review team and the ETB review co-ordinator.
- Maintaining records of discussions during the planning and main review visits.
- Co-ordinating the drafting of the review report in consultation with the team members and under the direction of the chairperson within the timeline agreed with QQI.

All Review Team Members

4.5 The role of all review team members includes:

- Preparing for the review by reading and critically evaluating all written material;
- Investigating and testing claims made in the self-evaluation report and other ETB documents during the main review visit by speaking to a range of staff, learners and stakeholders.
- Contributing to the production of the review report, ensuring that their particular perspective and voice (i.e., learner, industry, stakeholder, international etc.) forms an integral part of the review.
- Following the individual ETB reviews, providing observations to inform the development of the sectoral report.

5. The Review Process and Timeline

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

Appendix B: Main Review Visit Schedule

Date: 25.04.2022				
Day 2				
Time (GMT)	Group	Participants	Roles	Purpose
09.00-09.30	ETB Review Coordinator Director of FET	Karen Moore Antonine Healy	FET Standards Officer FET Director	Meeting with ETB Review Coordinator
10.00-10.15	1a. ETB Chief Executive	Liz Lavery	Chair Executive	Discussion of mission, strategic plan, roles and responsibilities for quality assurance and enhancement
10.15-11.00	1b. ETB Chief Executive & SMT	Liz Lavery	Chair Executive	
		Antonine Healy	Director of Further Education and Training	
		Charlie Mitchell	Director of Organisation Support and Development	
		Brian Higgins	Director of Schools, Youth and Music	
11.30 - 11.45	Review Team Break			
11.45-12.30	2. Self-Evaluation Team	Charlie Mitchell	Director of Organisation Support and Development	Discussion of the development of the self- evaluation report
		Brian Higgins	Director of Schools, Youth and Music	
		Ronan Murray	Area Training Manager	
		Hugh Connor	Assistant Manager	
		Elizabeth White	Rehab Group - NLN	
		Jennifer Simpson	Educator	

1pm- 2pm	Review Team Lunch/Break			
2pm-2.45pm	3. Parallel sessions with learners, including learners			Discussion of learner experience
	Parallel session 1 (Unaccredited and L 1-3 learners)	Israa Abdo	level 3 - level 5	-
		Niamh O'Reilly	level 3 upwards	
		Charlotte Kearney	level 3 - level 5	-
		Regina Uogelaite	level 1 -3	-
		Sinah k Malebye	level 3 - level 5	-
		John McDermott	level 1 - 3	-
		Ayesha Arslan	level 1 - 3	-
		Kathleen Doyle	level 1 - 3	-
		Joan Cassidy	level 3 - level 5	-
	John Gavigan	level 3 - level 5	-	
	Parallel session 2 (Accredited levels 4, 5 and 6)	Collette Glynn	VTOS	-
		Caroline Kelly	BTEI Longford	-
		Melanie Sweeney	TCL Community College	-
		Lauren Callaghan	Longford YouthReach	-
		Eileen Mulligan	Medical Administration level 5	-
Dante Vatasescu		level 5 - Youthreach	-	
Patrik Nistor		Longford YouthReach	-	
Tom Hand		VTOS	-	
2.45-3.15pm				
3.15-4.00pm	4. Learner Voice	Mary Sheedy	Templemichael PLC	-
		Maura Cawley	Templemichael PLC	-
		Kseniia Magan	Templemichael PLC	-
		Shauna Creevey	Mullingar CC PLC	-
		Tara McComb	Mullingar CC PLC	-
4.30pm-4.45pm	Review Team Break			

4.45-5.30pm	5. Parallel sessions with LEARNING PRACTITIONERS		6 Learning practitioners from unaccredited provision and Level 1-3 FET provision	Discussion of staff involvement in QA and enhancement
	Parallel session 1, Unaccredited and L 1-3 learning practitioners	Charlotte Douglass	Youthreach	-
		John Minnock	Resource Person - Youthreach	-
		Nuala Donlon	Adult Literacy Longford	-
		Leann Halligan	Community Education Longford	-
		Marie Brazil	Adult Literacy Athlone	-
	Parallel session 2 L4- 5-6 Learning Practitioners	Maria Eliffe	PLC Mullingar CC	-
		Arthur Conlon	CTC Mullingar	-
		Carole Quinlan	VTOS Educator	-
		Ciaran Henson	Youthreach Ballymahon	-
		Deirdre Foxe	BTEI Longford	-
		Helen Johnston	TempleMichael PLC Longford	-
		Paula Lafferty	BTEI Mullingar	-

Date: 26.04.2022				
Theme: TBD (Day 2)				
Time (GMT)	Group	Participants	Roles	Purpose
09.00-09.30	ETB Review Coordinator	Karen Moore	FET Standards Officer	Meeting with ETB Review Coordinator
9.30-10.00	Private Review Team Meeting			Discussion on the strategy and arrangements of TEL and PL&D for staff and stakeholders
10.00-10.45	6. TEL and PL&D Session		AEO - Line Manager for TEL & PL&D	-
		Nicola Galvin		
		Shauna Doherty	AEO - Blended Learning Working Group Representative	
		Tracey Anderson	TEL and PL&D Coordinator	
		Eileen Donnelly	BTEI Coordinator - Longford	
		Ronan Murray	Area Training Manager	
	Felicity English	Educator and Training Support for TEL & PL&D		

10.45-11.15	Private Review Team Meeting			
11.15-11.30	Review Team Break			
11.30-12.15PM	7. Parallel sessions with FET Coordinators			Discussion of QA arrangements, responsibilities and implementation
	7a. Parallel Session 1: Heads of Centre/FET Coordinators Unaccredited/level 1-3 provision	Tricia Egginton	BTEI Coordinator	
		Joan Slevin	Adult Literacy Westmeath	
		Frances Stephenson	Adult Literacy Longford	
		Nuala O'Brien	Community Education	
		Conor McGrath	Community Education	
		Darach Milner	Early School Leavers	
	7b. Parallel Session 2: Heads of Centre/FET Coordinators Level 4-6 provision	Bridget Geagan	YR Coordinator	
		Mark Bannon	Mullingar CTC	
		Maria Ryan	VTOS Coordinator	
		Lorraine Larney	PLC Coordinator	
		Eileen Donnelly	BTEI Coordinator - Longford	
		Maura Greene Casey	PLC Coordinator	
12:15-12.45pm	Private Review Team Meeting			
12.45pm-1.45pm	Review Team Lunch/Break			
1.45-2.30pm	8. Parallel Sessions with Second Providers / Collaborating Providers			8a: Discussion of QA arrangements, responsibilities and implementation 8b: Discussion of quality assurance arrangements for collaborative programmes
	8a. Parallel Session 1: Second Providers	Aoife Joyce	LTI	
		Mary Smith	LTI	
		Sylvia Moriarty	CompuPac	
		Sheila Nangle	NLN	

		Gary O'Neill	NLN	
		Bobby Devery	Cenit College	
	8b. Parallel session 2: Collaborating Providers	Pauline Davis	St Christophers	
		Valerie McHugh	Womens Community Project	
		Ber Fagan	Lus Na Greine Family Resource Centre	
		Anne Carroll/Orla Lynch	Killucan Area Services	
		Eugene Glynn	Community Employment Supervisor	
		Michelle Ledwith	Killoe/Ennybegs CE Supervisor	
		Joe Murphy	Granard Area Action Group CE Supervisor	
2:30-3pm	Private Review Team Meeting			
3:00-3.15pm	Review Team Break			
3.15pm-4pm	9. Parallel sessions with external stakeholders (max 3 groups)			9a: Discussion of collaboration and engagement with HEIs, including consideration of ATP 9b: Discussion of ETB engagement with community groups
	9a. Parallel session 1: (Higher Education)	Patricia Reilly	Adult Guidance	
		Enda Fallon	TÚS	
		Jenny Burke	TÚS Athlone - Access Officer	
		Joe Lawless	AIT Apprenticeship	
		Alan Duffy	AIT Apprenticeship	
		Frank Brady	Staff recipient of Maynooth degree	
		Pat Horan	PLC Coordinator - Pathways for PLC into FE & HE	
	9b. Parallel session 2: Community Providers & Groups, including representatives of Cooperation Hours	Maeve Madden	EDI Centre Longford	
		Donnie Sheehan	LTI Educator	
		Mike Connor	CTC Athlone	
		Mark Bannon	CTC Mullingar	
		Paul Higgins	CTC Educator	
4:00-4.30pm	Private Review Team Meeting			

4:30-4.45pm	Review Team Lunch/Break			Discussion of the relationship between the ETB's quality assurance system and its professional functions
4.45-5.30pm	10. Professional & Administration Services	Sarah Geelan	Head of Finance	
		Antonine Healy	Director of FET	
		Acting: Stephanie Kilmurray	Head of Human Resources	
		Charlie Mitchell	Director of OSD	
		Charlie Mitchell	Head of ICT	
		Denis McDermott	Head of Corporate Services	
		Tracey Anderson	FET Learning Technology Officer	
5.30pm-6pm	Private Review Team Meeting			

Date: 27.04.2022

Day 3				
Time (GMT)	Group	Participants	Roles	Purpose
09.00-09.30	ETB Review Coordinator	Karen Moore	FET Standards Officer	Meeting with ETB Review Coordinator
9.30-10.00	Private Review Team Meeting			Discussion role of local engagement in formulating strategy
10.00-10.45	11. Strategic Regional Planning Sub-group	Sean O'Sullivan	LWETB Youthreach Coordinator	
		Frankie Keane	Westmeath County Councillor	
		Pat O'Toole	Longford County Councillor	
		Lisa McLoughlin	Foroige	
		Michael Nevin	Local Enterprise Office	
10.45-11.15	Private Review Team Meeting			

11.15-11.30	Review Team Break			Discussion of staff involvement in programme development & review
11.30-12.15	12. Learning Practitioners Cross-section of services and programmes Programmes and Review	Nessa Griffin	PLC - Nursing and Healthcare RN	
		Eileen Donnelly	BTEI - Longford	
		Arthur Conlon	CTC - Mullingar	
		Liz Glennon	Enterprise Engagement	
		Anne Maree O'Brien	BTEI - Athlone	
		Patricia Craig Masterson	Adult Education	
12.15-12.45	Private Review Team Meeting			
12.45-1.45	Review Team Lunch/Break			
1.45-2.30	13. Parallel Sessions with Employer and Employer Engagement			13.a: Discussion on engagement of employers and regional skills bodies in strategic planning of programme delivery and QA and enhancement activities 13b: Discussion LWETB approach to, and experience of, employer engagement in responding to local skills needs and QA provision
	13a. Employer Employer representative level Regional skills bodies representatives	Steven Thacker	DPD	
		Rebekka Duffy	Annebrook Hotel	
		Sharon Dolan	Newbrook Nursing Home	
		Marie McCarthy	Centre Parcs	
		Roger Quinn	3M	
		Garett Ghee	Breedon Group	
		Anne Davin	Athlone Extrusions	
		Amanda Hoey	Training Advisor	

	13b. ETB Employer Engagement Function Internal	Liz Glennon	Enterprise Engagement	
		Tom Grennan	Assistant Manager - ATC	
		Terri Clarke	Training Services	
2.30-3.00	Private Review Team Meeting			
3.00-3.15	Review Team Break			
3.15-4.00	14. Session with <u>learners</u> - Apprentices & other WB learners	Thomas Rooney	Employer Engagement Learners	
		Colette McEvoy	Employer Engagement Learners	-
		Gladys Walsh	Recipient of level 5 - Business Administration	-
		Stephen O'Brien	Recipient of level 5 - Business Administration	-
		John Nolan	Electrical and Programmable Automation	-
		Michael Nester	Electrical and Programmable Automation	-
4.00-4.30	Private Review Team Meeting			
4.30-5.15	15. Session with Learning <u>Practitioners</u> - Apprenticeship & other WBL instructors	Colm Mulligan	Instructor - Electrical Programmable Automation	
		Celine Kearney	Instructor - Office Administration	-
		Gerry Wade	Instructor - Metal Fabrication	-
		Declan Kelly	Instructor - Plumbing	-
		Eileen Bellew	Instructor -Healthcare	-
		Richard O'Donovan	Warehouser Operative Tutor	-
5.15-5.45	Private Review Team Meeting			

Date: 28.04.2022

Day 4

Time (GMT)	Group	Participants	Roles	Purpose
09.00-09.30	ETB Review Coordinator	Karen Moore	FET Standards Officer	Meeting with ETB Review Coordinator

9.30-10.00	Private Review Team Meeting			Discussion of arrangements for learner recruitment, access, transfer and progression
10.00-10.45	16. Pathways - Information Recruitment and Guidance	Niamh Penrose	FET Guidance Counsellors	
		Pat Fleming	Recruitment Officer	
		Stephen Gaye	Youthreach Advocate	
		Brian Higgins	Director of Schools	
		Fiona Murphy	FET Guidance Counsellors	
10.45-11.15	Private Review Team Meeting			Discussion of the approach to, and mechanisms for, quality assurance and enhancement
11.15-11.30	Review Team Break			
11.30-12.15pm	17. Quality Council	Antonine Healy	QOG Chairperson (FET Director)	
		Grainne Timlin	TSO	
		Shauna Doherty	AEO	
		Nicola Galvin	AEO	
		Olive Flaherty	QOG Secretary (FETQS)	
		Ronan Murray	Area Training Manager	
		Karen Moore	TSO	
		Brian Higgins	Director of Schools	
12.15-12.45pm	Private Review Team Meeting			
12.45-1.45pm	Review Team Break			
1.45-2.30pm	18. Quality Council Including sub-groups			
	18a Parallel session 1: Programme Governance Sub-Group	Nicola Galvin	PGG Chair	18a: Discussion of role of committee in quality assurance of FET Division
		Olive Flaherty	Secretary	
		Karen Dalton	Assistant Training Standards Officer	
		Karen Moore	FETSO	
		Mark Bannon	CTC Centre Manager	
		William Corrigan	Management Information Systems	

	18b. Parallel session 2: QA Sub-Group	Shauna Doherty	QGG Chair	18b: Discussion of role of committee in quality assurance of FET Division
		Sorcha Ní Donnacha	PLC Principal	
		Seamus Mohan	PLC Principal	
		Hugh Connor	Assistant Manager - Contracted Training	
		Maura Greene Casey	PLC Coordinator	
		Rayon Farrell	FETQS	
2.30pm-3pm	Private Review Team Meeting			Discussion of the operation of the ETB's quality system, including arrangements for monitoring and review of quality
3:00-3:15PM	Review Team Break			
3.15PM- 4.15PM	19. Quality Assurance Support Service Team	Karen Moore	FET Standards Officer	
		Rayon Farrell	Coordinator	
		Olive Flaherty	FET Quality Assurance	
		Grainne Timlin	Training Standards Officer	
		Karen Dalton	Assistant Training Standards Officer	
4:15-4.30PM	Private Review Team Meeting			
4.30pm-4.45pm	Review Team Break			
4.45-5.30PM	20. Heads of FET Support Services	Antonine Healy	FET Director	
		Liz Glennon	Head of Enterprise Engagement	
		Karen Moore	Head of QA	
		Pat Fleming	Head of Recruitment	
		Ronan Murray	Head of Training	
		Tracey Anderson	Head of TEL & PL&D	
		William Corrigan	Head of MIS	
		Caroline Cornally	Head of Guidance and Counselling Services	
5.30pm-6pm	Private Review Team Meeting			

Date: 29.04.2022				
Theme: Wrap-up				
Time (GMT)	Group	Participants	Role	Purpose
9-9.30	21. Free Session			To be used as team needs.
9.30-10.45am	Private Review Team Meeting	QQI representatives will join team at 10.15 for 15 minutes.		
10.45-11.30	22. Free Session			To be used as team needs.
11-11.30am	23. QQI & ETB Review Coordinator/FET Director	Antonine Healy Karen Moore	FET Director FET Standards Officer	QQI gathers feedback on the review process
11.30-11.40	Private Review Team Meeting			
11.40-11.55	24. Initial feedback to CE	ETB Chief Executive Review Team Marie Gould, QQI		Initial feedback is given by the Review Team to the ETB Chief Executive
12-12.30	25. Oral Feedback: Feedback presented by Review Team Chair. Attended by ETB Chief Executive, SMT, Self-Evaluation Steering Group, Group of Learners	Liz Lavery	CE	Oral feedback on initial review findings
		Antonine Healy	FET Director	
		Karen Moore	FET Standards Officer	
		Brian Higgins	Schools Director	
		Charlie Mitchell	OSD Director	
		Tara McComb	Learner Representative	
12.30-1	Review Team Break			
1-5.pm	Private Review Team Meeting			Review team discuss report drafting

Glossary of terms

QQI glossary of terms and abbreviations from this report

Term	Definition/Explanation
2012 Act	Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012
AEO	Adult Education Officer
AIS	Assessment Instrument Specification
AMS	Assessment Management System
ATP	Access, Transfer and Progression
BTEI	Back to Education Initiative
CAO	Central Applications Office
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
COP	Communities of Practice
Core	Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines, developed by QQI for use by all Providers
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
DSP	Department of Social Protection
EA	External Authenticator/Authentication
ESOL	English for Speakers of Other Languages
ETBI	Education and Training Boards Ireland
FET	Further Education and Training
FETQS	Further Education and Training Quality System
HR	Human Resources
IT	Information Technology
IV	Internal Verifier/Verification

KPIs	Key Performance Indicators
LWETB	Longford and Westmeath Education & Training Board
MIS	Management Information System
MMS	Modular Management System
NFQ	National Framework of Qualifications
PGG	Programme Governance Group
PLC	Post Leaving Certificate
PL&D	Professional Development
QAIG	Quality Assurance Implementation Group
QGG	Quality Governance Group
QOG	Quality Oversight Group
QQI	Quality and Qualifications Ireland
RAPs	Results Approvals Panels
SER	Self-evaluation Report
SESG	Self-evaluation Steering Group
SOLAS (formerly FÁS)	The National Further Education and Training Authority (responsible for funding, co-ordinating and monitoring FET in Ireland)
SMT	Senior Management Team
SPA	Strategic Performance Agreement (between the ETB & Solas)
STA	Skills to Advance
TEL	Technology-Enhanced Learning
TSO	Training Standards Officer
UDL	Universal Design for Learning
Youthreach	Service providing early school leavers without and formal qualifications with opportunities for basic education, personal development, vocational training and work experience
VECs	Vocational and Education Committees (which later became ETBs)