

EXCELLENCE THROUGH  
EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Bord Oideachais agus Oiliúna  
Laoise agus Uíbh Fhailí  
*Laois and Offaly  
Education and Training Board*

# Self-Evaluation Report

JANUARY 2021

[www.loetb.ie](http://www.loetb.ie)





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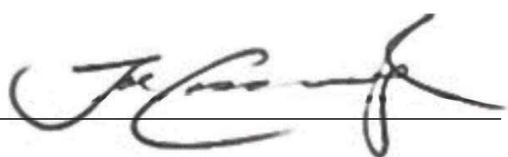
## FOREWORD FROM JOE CUNNINGHAM, CHIEF EXECUTIVE

The FET Service at Laois and Offaly Education and Training Board is underpinned by a commitment to Quality. In every aspect of our service, the provision of a high-quality learning experience is the cornerstone of our approach.

This self-evaluation process has provided us with a comprehensive overview of what we have achieved as an ETB and areas where we need to improve. We have included a set of ambitious actions that we believe will further improve the service we provide. The establishment of a Quality Assurance Support Service is evidence of our commitment to the development of high-quality, consistent policies, processes, and procedures that support our FET staff and learners.

In 2020, LOETB reconfigured the FET Service to reflect the integrated nature of our provision and align with the new national FET Strategy 2020-24. These changes have allowed us to ensure that funding is used more effectively where it is most needed, that FET pathways for learners have become more visible and accessible, that the management of outcomes has become more of a shared process with learners and second providers, and that external stakeholders can contribute to the decision-making process.

From the outset, it was our intention that the self-evaluation report would be a working document aligned with our Statement of Strategy and our agreed Strategic Performance Agreement with SOLAS. Furthermore, the document would reflect and build upon our Executive Self-Evaluation and subsequent Quality Improvement Plans. As Chief Executive, I am pleased that we have achieved this aim and the Self-Evaluation process will contribute to the further enhancement of our FET Service for all stakeholders.



Joe Cunningham  
Chief Executive

## GLOSSARY AND ABBREVIATIONS

<b>AEGIS</b>	Adult Educational Guidance and Information Service	<b>LEO</b>	Local Enterprise Office
<b>AIS</b>	Assessment Instrument Specification	<b>LTI</b>	Local Training Initiative
<b>BTEA</b>	Back to Education Allowance	<b>NFQ</b>	National Framework of Qualifications
<b>BTEI</b>	Back to Education Initiative	<b>NLN</b>	National Learning Network
<b>CE</b>	Chief Executive	<b>OSD</b>	Organisation Support & Development
<b>CAS</b>	Common Awards System	<b>PLC</b>	Post Leaving Certificate
<b>CTC</b>	Community Training Centre	<b>PLSS</b>	Programme Learner Support System
<b>EA</b>	External Authenticator	<b>QA</b>	Quality Assurance
<b>ELC</b>	Early Learning & Care	<b>QASS</b>	Quality Assurance Support Service
<b>ETB</b>	Education and Training Board	<b>QIP</b>	Quality Improvement Plan
<b>ETBI</b>	Education and Training Boards Ireland	<b>QQI</b>	Quality & Qualifications Ireland
<b>FARR</b>	Funding Allocations Requests and Reporting	<b>RAP</b>	Results Approval Panel
<b>FESS</b>	Further Education Support Service	<b>SST</b>	Specific Skills Training
<b>FET</b>	Further Education and Training	<b>STA</b>	Skills To Advance
<b>FMT</b>	FET Management Team	<b>SUSI</b>	Student Universal Support Ireland
<b>HEA</b>	Higher Education Authority	<b>VTOS</b>	Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme
<b>IDA</b>	Industrial Development Authority	<b>TOR</b>	Terms of Reference
<b>IT</b>	Institute of Technology	<b>VEC</b>	Vocational Education Committee
<b>IV</b>	Internal Verification		
<b>LOETB</b>	Laois and Offaly Education and Training Board		

# CHAPTER 1: ETB CONTEXT

## 1.1 Background

Laois and Offaly Education and Training Board (LOETB) was established on 1 July 2013 following the merger of two Vocational and Education Committees (VECs); Co. Laois VEC and Co. Offaly VEC. This was followed by the transfer of SOLAS (former FÁS) training services, including the National Construction Training Centre, from Longford and Westmeath ETB in 2016.

LOETB is one of the main employers in the midlands with over 1,000 staff providing education for over 4,000 post-primary students, and further education and training to over 12,000 beneficiaries. LOETB has responsibility for nine post-primary schools and is also joint patron of five Community Schools located in Mountmellick, Ballinakill, Mountrath, Birr, and Ferbane. Under the Education and Training Board Act 2013, LOETB has a responsibility to support the provision, coordination, administration, and assessment of youth work services in its functional area and, through co-operation with other institutions, provide support to a wide variety of programmes and agencies to deliver education and training programmes that cannot be met by mainstream educational services in counties Laois and Offaly.

LOETB has a long history of working in partnership with various statutory, community and voluntary groups. Management and staff are represented on various boards and committees across the two counties of Laois and Offaly. This partnership approach provides opportunities for the various groups and organisations to share information about services and to work together to identify gaps in provision locally and provide additional services where necessary.

## 1.3 Profile of Laois and Offaly Region

### 1.3.1 Population

The Laois-Offaly region is a predominantly rural area of approximately 3715km<sup>2</sup>, with a population of 162,658 people (Census 2016) stretching from Banagher on the banks of the Shannon to the River Barrow on the edge of Carlow town. The most recent CSO figures (2016) indicate that the population of the region has grown by 3.5% since 2011, just below the national figure of 3.8%. The two counties combined have a slightly younger than average age profile of 35.6, below the national figure of 37.4.

The population change in Laois and Offaly since 2011 is quite varied. Smaller rural towns and villages experienced a considerable reduction in the number of people living in the area, for example the population in Shannonbridge decreased by 12% (2011-2016) whilst the population in some of the more urban settings grew significantly e.g. Portarlinton (15.5%) and Portlaoise (11%) in the last 5 years. Overall, the population grew in Offaly by 1.2% from 2011, with Laois reporting as one of the fastest growing counties in Ireland with an increase of 5.2%.

### 1.3.2 Socio-Economic

The CSO figures show that those under the age of 15 represent 36.9% of the region's total population, compared to an average of 31.5% in the Leinster region. Those aged 0-14 and 65+ (the 'age-dependent groups') represent 53 persons per 100 of the 'active' age groups.

A total of 22,547 (13.8%) of the population of the two counties was recorded as having a disability in the 2016 census, an increase of 2,077 from 2011. Foreign nationals account for 13.35% of the population in the region.

### 1.3.3 Employment

At the time of the 2016 Census, there were 60,624 people employed in the Laois-Offaly region. The main sectors of employment in the region are Professional Services (22.5%), Commerce and Trade (19.7%) and Manufacturing (16.9%). The agriculture, forestry and fishing sector provides employment for over 7% of those working in the region.

Recent data from the Central Statistics Office indicates that there were 7,202 people on the live register in Laois and Offaly (December 2020), with 883 of those under the age of 25 years. There was a further 7,183 people on the Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP), with 1797 of those being under 25.

### 1.3.4 Educational Attainment

Of the population of the two counties, an average of 34% of those aged 15 years and over have completed third level education, compared to the national average of 42%. At the time of Census 2016, an average of 1.25% of the population of the two counties had completed no formal education, whilst 7.8% of the population completed primary education only, compared to a national average of 7%. The average age of ceasing education in Laois and Offaly is 18.5 years compared to a national figure of 19.9 years old.

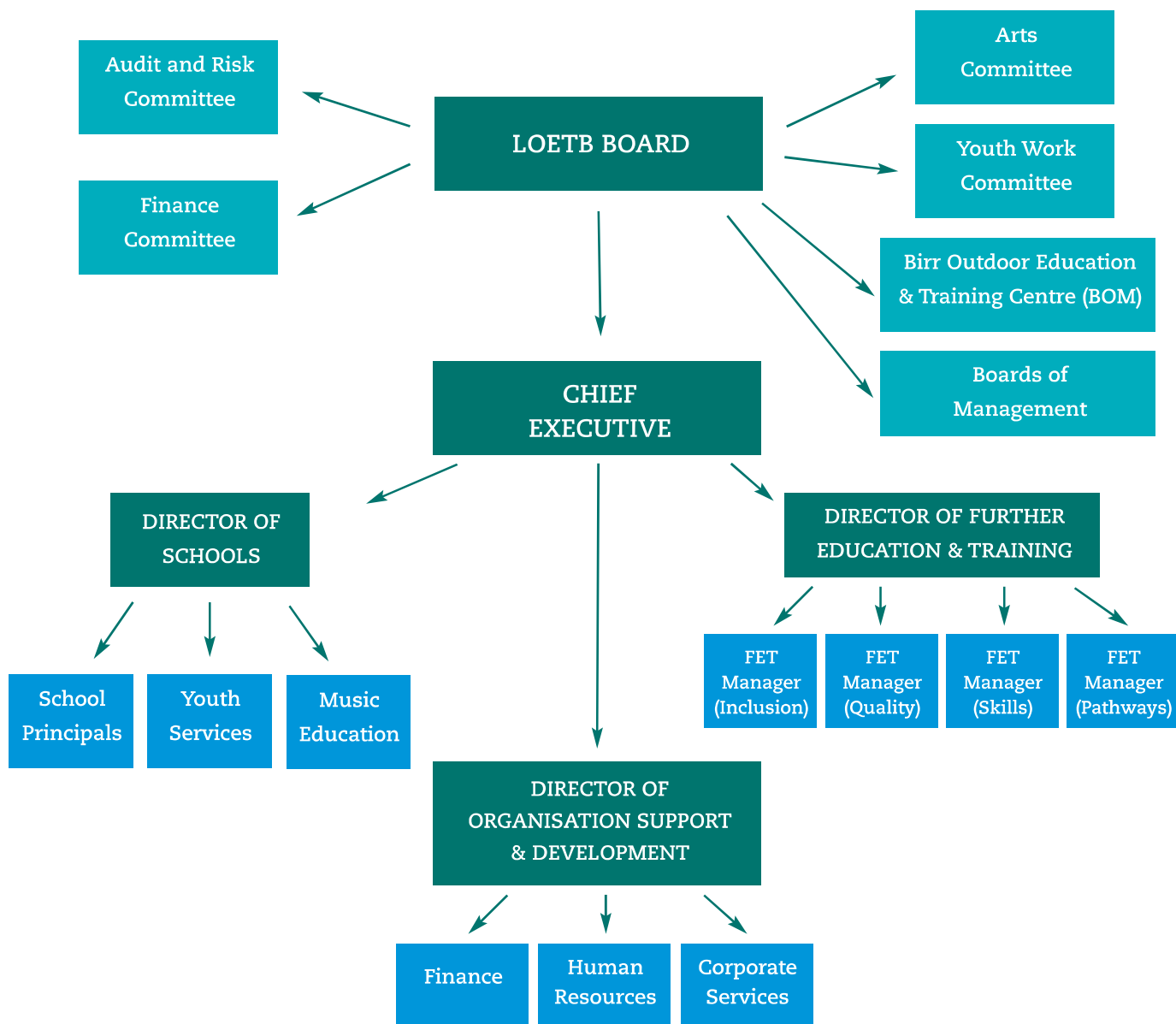
## 1.4 LOETB Governance and Management Structures

### 1.4.1 Governance and Management of LOETB

LOETB is governed by a Board consisting of 21 Members. Reporting to the Board, the Chief Executive (CE) is the Accounting Officer for LOETB and holds responsibility for the executive management of the organisation. In line with the governing legislation, the Board has established a number of Committees, including Finance Committee, Audit and Risk Committee, Boards of Management and other Committees as required. These Committees are composed of Board Members and / or agreed other representation.

The CE is responsible for the performance of the executive functions of the Board and is accountable to the Board for the performance of such functions. The CE must provide information regarding performance to the Board and to the Minister for Education and Skills as may be required.



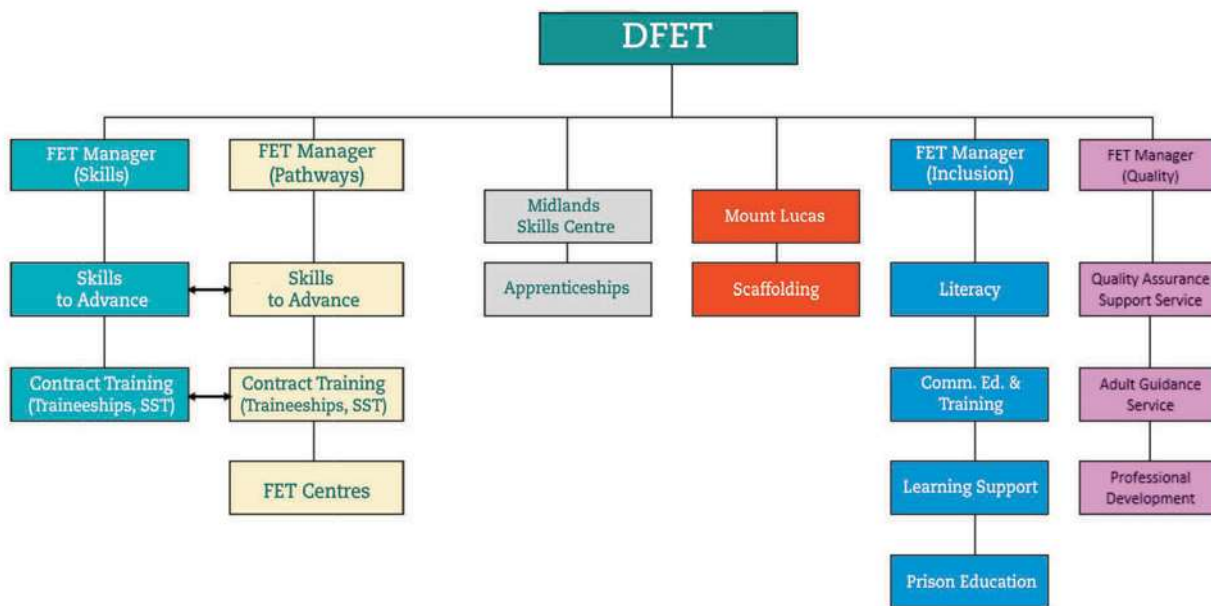


## 1.4.2 Further Education and Training Service

### 1.4.2.1 Governance and Management of FET Services

The governance arrangements in relation to FET Services is outlined in detail in Section 2.2 of this document. The management structure is illustrated in the diagram below. The FET Service is managed by the FET Director. The FET Management Team (FMT), made up of four FET Managers, reporting to the director. In 2020, LOETB’s FET management model was revised and restructured to ensure a greater focus on a number of key themes identified in the national FET Strategy 2020-2024. Each of the FET Managers have distinct responsibilities in line with the Strategy – Skills, Pathways, Inclusion and Quality Assurance. This structure, which has been informed by the aforementioned priorities, is another step in LOETB’s progress in integrating Further Education and Training. It prioritises responsibility at FET Management level for programmes/services based on key themes, regardless of the origin of the programme/service.

The FMT meets weekly to discuss operational and strategic issues. The new management structure ensures the more effective distribution of funding for the benefit of learners. For example, our Adult Literacy, Community Education and Community Training Services will work together as a cohesive unit under the Inclusion pillar, leading to increased cooperation and collaboration, and creating a synergy in targeting learners that need those services the most.



### 1.4.2.2 Range of FET Provision

The Further Education and Training (FET) Service provides a range of programmes and services at thirteen FET Centres, and two Prison Education Centres. FET programmes are delivered to a wide range of target learners: early school leavers, learners with intellectual disabilities, recent school leavers with Leaving Certificate, adults returning to education after many years, and the long-term unemployed. Programmes are offered on a part-time or full-time basis, as appropriate. While most programmes are classroom-based, others, such as Traineeship programmes, combine classroom-based learning with a significant element of work-based learning. Since the onset of the COVID-19 Pandemic, FET programmes have been delivered online or in a blended (a mix of online and face-to-face) fashion.

LOETB offers a comprehensive range of courses from part-time learning to full-time study, leading onto higher education, training or employment. Each of our FET Centres offer a broad range of onsite programmes, as well as outreach supports from our other services (e.g. literacy, guidance). Our FET Centres and Services are outlined on the following page.

**LOETB FET Centres**

Abbeyleix FET Centre

Banagher FET Centre

Birr FET Centre

Birr Outdoor Education &amp; Training Centre

Clara FET Centre

Edenderry FET Centre

Midlands Skills Centre

Mountmellick FET Centre

National Construction Training Centre, Mount Lucas

Portarlington FET Centre

Portlaoise FET Centre

Portlaoise Institute

Tullamore FET Centre

**LOETB FET Services**

Adult Educational Guidance &amp; Information Service

Adult Literacy Service

Apprenticeship Services

Community Education Service

Community Training – Specialist Training Providers, Local Training Initiatives,  
Community Training Centre

Contract Training Services – Traineeships, Specialist Skills Training

Enterprise Engagement Service (Skills to Advance, Skills for Work)

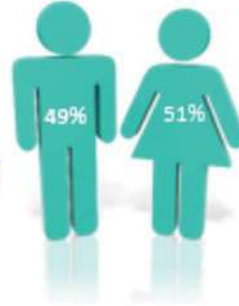
Prison Education (Midlands and Portlaoise Education Centres)

Professional Development

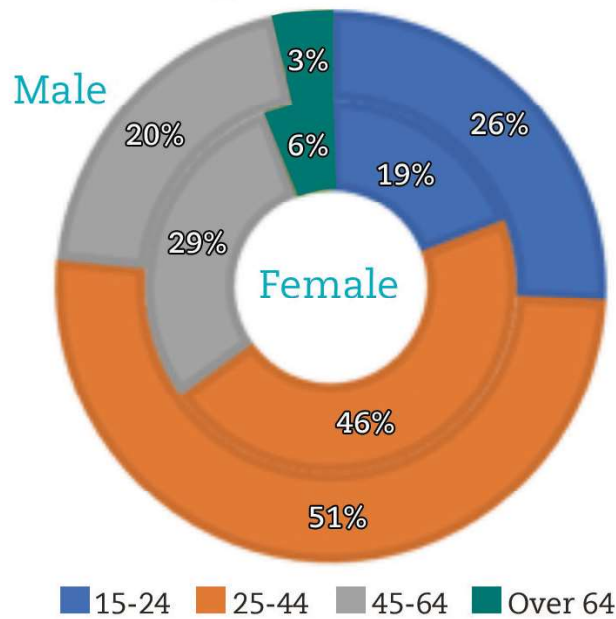
Quality Assurance Support Service

Within our FET provision, over 360 teachers and tutors are directly employed, and approximately 50 tutors are employed by second providers and contract training companies, to deliver accredited and unaccredited FET courses to learners aged 16 and over. In 2019, learners achieved 651 QQI major and 3,603 component certificates from levels 1 to 6 on the National Framework of Qualifications, across a wide range of fields of learning. We also offer courses leading to certification by City & Guilds, ITEC, CIBTAC, CIDESCO and Accounting Technicians Ireland. Learners in the Prison Education Centres can access programmes accredited by Open University, Order of Malta, Environmental Health Officers Association, Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann, Rockschooll, Royal Irish Academy of Music, NALA and Waterford Institute of Technology, and Gaisce.

12,384  
Beneficiaries



## Age Profile



*The statistics above relate to the profile of beneficiaries that accessed the FET Service in 2019*

# SELF-EVALUATION REPORT

## Consultation Process

The consultation process for the Self-Evaluation and the subsequent preparation of the Self-Evaluation Report was planned and agreed by the Self-Evaluation Steering Group on 3rd March 2020. The consultation process commenced immediately but was unfortunately delayed significantly by the COVID-19 Pandemic. The Steering Group and the team assigned to facilitate the consultation process were occupied for the remainder of the academic year 2019/2020 with maintaining FET provision, implementing contingency arrangements and supporting learners to complete their studies during centre closures. The consultation process resumed in October 2020. Unfortunately, the majority of consultation was conducted exclusively online, in accordance with restrictions on holding meetings, and because the majority of the stakeholders (internal and external) were working remotely. This is a cause for disappointment for the consultation team as engagement levels suffered because of the method of consultations (predominantly online surveys). See Appendix 6 for details of Steering Group and Consultation Process.

## Development of Self-Evaluation Report

The Self-Evaluation Report was compiled following the consultation phase. The Report was compiled by the QA Support Service, with input from a range of other staff members. The draft Report was circulated to the Self-Evaluation Steering Group for feedback and approval, and was then then presented to the Quality Council for approval.

## COVID-19

The COVID-19 Pandemic has had an effect on this process, and on how the FET Service has operated since March 2020. The feedback from various stakeholders, especially learners and teaching staff, was undoubtedly affected (both positively and negatively) by the changed circumstances in which we find ourselves at the moment. However, in compiling the Report, a conscious effort was made to describe and evaluate our arrangements as effectively as possibly without extensive reference to the Pandemic. There are some references throughout the document where they were required but this was kept to a minimum. An Interim Report was prepared which outlined LOETB's Response to COVID 19 – the FET Section of this Report is contained in Appendix 5. This report was compiled by an external facilitator who conducted a range of interviews with various staff members of every section of LOETB, and who was given access to all contingency planning arrangements that were devised up to the end of the academic year 2019/2020.

## CHAPTER 2: OBJECTIVE 1: GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT OF QUALITY

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### 2.1 The ETB's Mission and Strategy

#### 2.1.1 Description

##### 2.1.1.1 LOETB's Mission and Core Values

Our vision is to actively lead the provision of high-quality education and training in Laois and Offaly. Our mission is *“Excellence through Education and Training”*. We put learning at the heart of everything we do through the provision of a wide range of education and training programmes, services, and supports to young people and adults across the region. Lifelong learning is key to personal development and wellbeing, social inclusion, and economic prosperity.

Our Core Values as a service provider are as follows:

##### **Equality**

Fairness, respect, and inclusion in the treatment of our students, stakeholders, and staff and a culture where diversity is welcomed and valued.

##### **Collaboration**

Working in partnership with our students, stakeholders and staff to facilitate the sharing of knowledge, expertise and skills.

##### **Innovation**

Remaining a leader in the provision of education and training by encouraging new ideas, trying out different approaches and responding to change.

##### **Professionalism**

Courtesy, efficiency and excellence in our dealings with our students, stakeholders and staff and working to the highest standards in education and training.

##### **Integrity**

Honesty, transparency, and confidentiality and meeting our responsibilities as a provider of lifelong learning in a consistent and ethical fashion.

##### 2.1.1.2 LOETB's Strategic Goals

The development of our Statement of Strategy 2018-2022 was led by the Senior Management Team, and included a consultative process with all sectors within LOETB, and key external stakeholders. The Strategy sets out four strategic goals, with a range of strategic priorities to further the achievement of those goals, through a series of supporting actions.

Our Statement of Strategy informs future decision-making processes and further facilitates the prioritisation of target areas for development, particularly with respect to governance, quality assurance, and the policies and procedures needed to ensure appropriate oversight of all FET programmes.

Our Strategic Goals	
Goal 1	<p><b>Excellent Education and Training Programmes</b> The provision of quality-assured excellent teaching, learning, and assessment for all, with high levels of achievement and accreditation by students.</p>
Goal 2	<p><b>Excellent Experience for Learners</b> The provision of positive learning experiences and environments with suitable resources and facilities for students.</p>
Goal 3	<p><b>Organisation Transformation</b> The promotion of a culture of innovation and improvement within the organisation.</p>
Goal 4	<p><b>Staff Development</b> To recruit &amp; retain a highly-qualified and motivated workforce and to provide staff with support and opportunities for continuing personal and professional career development.</p>

## 2.1.2 Evaluation of LOETB’s Mission and Strategy

### 2.1.2.1 Innovation and Collaboration

#### 2.1.2.1.1 Integrated FET Centre Model

LOETB are successfully integrating the two previously distinct areas of Further Education and Vocational Training. This integrated FET Centre model approach is based on a clear strategy to facilitate progression from one FET programme to another, with Learner Guidance, Literacy (learning) Support and Quality Assurance playing an important role in ensuring potential pathways are transparent from the outset. Each Centre has progressed to date from a single core programme offering, to an integrated service that includes literacy and learning supports, career guidance and a combination of provision that includes both full-time and part-time.

Mountmellick, Banagher and Edenderry FET Centres increased the provision of integrated services in the third quarter of 2019, to ensure that each centre now offers an array of full time and part time programmes for all levels and age groups. Each of these three centres now offer Traineeships in Healthcare, Childcare and/or Barbering depending on the local employment need. In 2019, approximately 70 learners commenced a Traineeship in one of our newly integrated FET Centres.

The success of the integrated model is evidenced by an average retention rate of over 90% on courses in our Integrated FET Centres, and 4,617 beneficiaries progressing to another FET / HE course at the same or higher level in 2019.

### 2.1.2.1.2 Innovative Provision

The FET Service collaborates with local industry to meet labour market demands by the provision of responsive and innovative programmes. Examples of innovative provision introduced in 2020 include:

#### **Nearly Zero Energy Building (NZEB) Retrofit Training Programme**

A Nearly Zero Energy Building (NZEB) Retrofitting training programme was recently launched that introduces the learner to NZEB regulations and simultaneously offers the learner the first step on a pathway focusing on deep retrofit. We are liaising with its partners on the Midlands Just Transition to explore how a Midlands Deep Retrofit Pilot can offer sustainable employment opportunities while enhancing the carbon footprint of mid-Ireland. The programme is designed as a short programme offering a QQI Level 5 Component Award in Thermal Insulation Installation, but has the potential to form the basis of a major award in Construction Technology. In 2020, LOETB hosted two pilot courses with a total of 28 learners participating. These courses were very successful despite delays caused by restrictions due to the pandemic.

#### **Enhanced Peatland Rehabilitation Traineeship**

A Peatland Rehabilitation Traineeship has been developed for Bord na Móna employees who, with upskilling, may be presented with the opportunity to extend their employment with the company by a minimum four-year period. The work being undertaken will also contribute to Ireland's carbon commitments under the Paris Agreement and ensure the peatland communities are left – post-Bord na Móna – with a landscape that enhances the environment and the quality of life of local residents.

#### **Infection Prevention and Control**

Due to the COVID-19 outbreak, the HSE made an urgent request in March 2020 for people in Ireland to register to be on call to help care for the people affected by the virus during this emergency. LOETB committed to attempting to respond to this urgent need, particularly in the Midlands region, by providing online training in Infection Prevention and Control to current QQI Level 5 major award holders, and learners that are currently on QQI Level 5 Healthcare Support/Health Service Skills/Nursing Studies programmes.

Training Officers and QA Staff engaged collaboratively with contract training companies to devise an appropriate online programme which effectively facilitated the learners to achieve the specific learning outcomes associated with the award, with a particular emphasis on COVID-19 related information as it was becoming available. Significant efforts were made to ensure that assessments could be completed by learners in their home while also protecting the integrity of assessment.

The programme was delivered online, with a minimum duration of five days' course delivery. Learners received access to online lectures, notes and workshops, on a flexible basis, and were supported on an ongoing basis by experienced, qualified tutors. Assessment were conducted during and on completion of the course content.

#### **Remote Working**

We, in collaboration with IDA Ireland, SOLAS, and Grow Remote, have developed two new online national training programmes that aim to develop the capability and capacity of those wishing to become remote workers and those wishing to lead remote teams. Remote Work Ready is aimed at employees and unemployed people hoping to transition to a remote working role, leading to WorkPlaceless certification. Leading Remote Teams is aimed at line managers leading a team that includes remote workers. It consists of LeadPlaceless



certification and a QQI Level 6 minor award in Project Management. Both programmes are delivered online, available nationally and are of seven weeks' duration.

### 2.1.2.1.3 Webinars

In recent months, the Employer Services Department has hosted a "Future Proof your Business" Webinar series, aimed at local employers, to assist them in their digital transition. Webinar topics have included resilience and coping strategies, nurturing your existing customers online, cybersecurity and data analytics. Webinars generally feature an expert in the area accompanied by a local employer who provides some insight into their business experience in the area. The webinars have been very well received – feedback has been excellent.

### 2.1.2.2 Integrity and Professionalism

The establishment of a Quality Assurance Support Service has led to a greater emphasis being placed on the professional and transparent delivery and assessment of Further Education and Training. The resourcing of the department since its inception in 2016 gives an indication of the importance the organisation places on ensuring that adequate support is provided to FET Centres and Services, and that appropriate policies and procedures are in place and are implemented across the service. Robust assessment procedures and processes are in place to ensure that there is fairness and consistency in assessment of learners on certified programmes. LOETB takes its quality assurance agreements with certifying bodies very seriously.

Furthermore, the appointment of a Professional Development Coordinator in 2018 is further testament to our commitment to providing education and training delivered by professional and competent staff. Significant resources have been invested in upskilling and professional development of LOETB's teaching and support staff.

### 2.1.2.3 Equality and Diversity

The Adult Literacy Service has a nominated staff member in each county to liaise with local Disability Groups and to support people with disability, in line with the Guidelines for People with Disability in Adult Literacy. Adult learners with disability have a range of supports to assist learners attending mainstream classes. As part of discussions with local services a recent programme was also developed to take into account the needs and interests of learners following consultation with local Disability groups. Certified Programmes in Art, Drama and Music are now being offered in Laois and Offaly at QQI Levels 1 and 2.

LOETB provides training for those with additional supports needs through the National Learning Network Centres (NLN) in Tullamore and Portlaoise. The programmes are aligned with progression routes to mainstream LOETB courses at Levels 4 and 5. In addition to this, the NLNs obtain regular feedback from local employers to ensure the courses are responding to local skills needs. NLN also plan to introduce a pilot programme called 'Launch your Future' to address issues with resilience, confidence and motivation. These issues have been identified in factors that lead to drop out across its courses. This links firmly with mainstream delivery and will include Assessment of Needs, Transversal Skills and Building Appetite for Work phases. It is anticipated that learners will avail of this intervention to support them in defining their career paths and embarking on their learning journey with LOETB.

As part of our involvement with the Resettlement Working Groups in both Laois and Offaly, 47 families who were resettled in the region were provided with ESOL classes in 2019/2020. These classes are provided in six locations across the two counties; Birr, Tullamore, Portlaoise, Portarlington, Mountmellick and Rathdowney.

We are collaborating with the interagency support workers to ensure the refugees' educational needs are being met. All learners are assessed using the European Framework and placed on an appropriate programme, with some learners being placed on higher level courses due to their relatively high language proficiency levels. LOETB also provide outreach space for the support workers to meet the learners after their classes. In addition to ESOL, a range of classes have been offered to promote integration of language and social skills such as sewing, maths and bread making.

Portlaoise Prison Education Unit are constantly reviewing FET Programmes in consultation with learners to deliver appropriate innovative programmes such as Peer-to-Peer Literacy Tutor Training (in conjunction with NALA and WIT). Seven learners in Portlaoise Prison have achieved level 6 Initial Literacy Tutor Training Certification recently.

In January 2020, LOETB hosted an international seminar on 'Best Practice in Supporting Active Inclusion and Diversity among the Migrant Community'. The event featured speakers from Belgium, Germany, Sweden, the United States and LOETB as well as representatives from SOLAS.

### 3.1.2.4 Strategic Goals

LOETB's strategic goals have provided the FET Service with a framework for its development and expansion, and as such, the FET Service's development and planning for provision and quality improvement has been informed by the themes identified in the Statement of Strategy. Quality Improvement Plans (QIPs) have been developed under the categories of each of the strategic goals. The FET Service has made significant progress since 2018 in the achievement of specific actions linked to each of those goals, and the progress of those actions have been documented in our Progress Report on Implementation of QIPs.

### 2.1.3 Conclusion

The FET Service operates very much in tune with the overall mission and core values of the organisation. The strategic goals of the organisation have provided the Service with a roadmap for progression and improvement. The numerous examples of our innovation and responsiveness demonstrates an ability to connect and collaborate with local industry and agencies in order to ensure the relevance of FET provision. The management and staff are dedicated to contributing towards the achievement of our goals, and this is evident in their day-to-day provision. FET Centre and Service Managers and their staff teams are to be commended for their enthusiasm and creativity, particularly since the start of the Pandemic.

#### Identified Actions

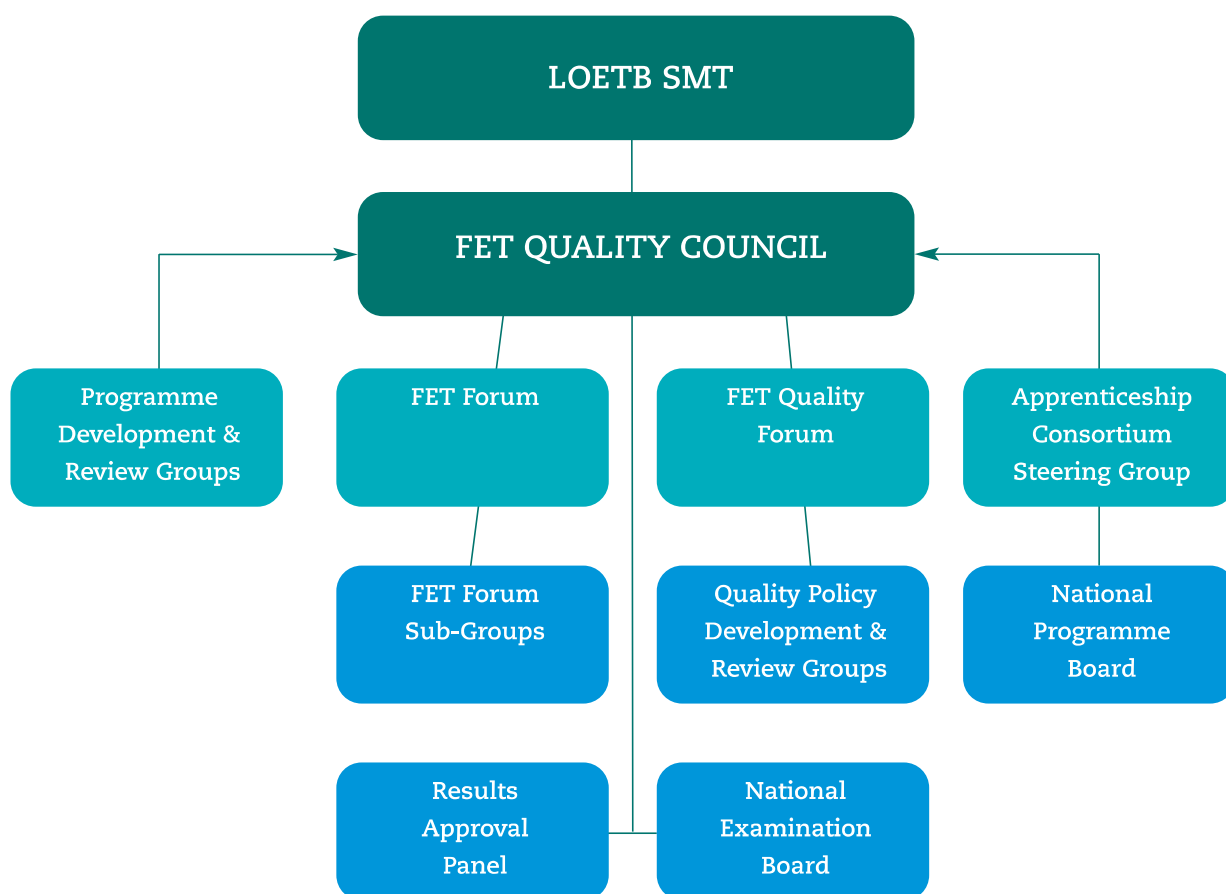
- Agree new Strategic Performance Agreement with SOLAS (2021-2024)
- Participate in the reviewing the implementation of LOETB's Statement of Strategy
- Develop Quality Improvement Plan for 2021 and Service Plan for 2021, in line with goals and actions identified above.

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

### 2.2.1 Description

#### 2.2.1.1 Governance Structure of FET Service

In 2020, LOETB formalised a robust FET governance structure. Up to 2020, some of the governance groups had already been in existence – the FET Forum, Forum Sub-groups, Quality Forum (formerly the QA Working Group) but in 2020, following significant consideration and review of Terms of Reference of different groups, the structure set out in the diagram below was formalised. This structure provides a platform for strategic planning and the continuous formal review of provision. Terms of Reference for each of the governance groups are contained in Appendix 1.



Within this structure, the **FET Quality Council** provides leadership and oversight for all aspects of the FET services. The FET Quality Council was established and had its first meeting in October 2020. The Council is made up of representatives from industry, higher education, staff and the FMT.

**Programme Development and Review Groups** are established on a sectoral or needs basis which provides a forum for the ongoing review of existing provision and a mechanism for an evidence-based approach to developing new courses and programmes. Proposals for new programmes, or review of existing programmes,

are submitted to the FET Quality Council for consideration and approval. Development and Review Groups may include external members (e.g. Regional Skills Forum Manager, Employers, Third Level Institutions reps), which provides an essential independent voice in the planning process. In 2018/2019, an extensive review of Healthcare provision across FET Services was conducted (See Section 4.2.1.2), leading to approved short, medium and long term actions to be implemented across the service. This was a very worthwhile project with several successful outcomes.

We had intended to focus on the area of Childcare provision next in a review of its current programmes. Dublin and Dun Laoghaire ETB are currently leading a project for the development of new Level 5 and 6 awards in the area of Early Learning and Care. LOETB has seconded a teaching staff member to work on this project, and LOETB's FET Director is involved in the Quality Strategy Group that is overseeing that development process.

The function of the **FET Forum** (chaired by a FMT member and composed of FET Centre/Service Managers and managers of NLN and CTC) is to strategically plan changes to provision and oversee the implementation and review of the FET Strategy. The FET Forum meets quarterly and holds an annual two-day planning workshop for all Centre and Service management.

In order to implement the actions identified in LOETB's Statement of Strategy, a number of **FET Forum sub-groups** were established in 2018. Each of the sub-groups had a specific area to focus on, and membership of the groups was made up of staff and management from across the FET service, as appropriate to their roles. In September 2019, each of the sub-groups facilitated information workshops at a FET Staff Event attended by over 200 FET staff. This was an opportunity to showcase the projects that each of the sub-groups had engaged in since their inception. The workshops were very well received.

The purpose of the *Active Inclusion sub-group* is to facilitate and support the development of an integrated Literacy and Numeracy strategy across FET Services. By consulting with colleagues within the organisation on the development work and sharing feedback received with the FET Forum, the group aims to raise awareness of, and support, the integrated literacy model within LOETB.

The *Learner Information/Communications sub-group* was established in order to improve communications processes, both internally in the organisation and externally to learners and potential learners. From an internal communications perspective, the group aims to explore methods of improving communication systems within the organisation to ensure that all staff members are aware of the services and supports that are provided by LOETB. The group is focused on raising awareness of FET provision and the roles of all staff in the FET Service. To date, the group has;

- established a standard admissions process for relevant programmes across the FET service to ensure clarity and consistency
- commenced a project which aims to establish transparent progression pathways for learners from programme to programme

The purpose of the *Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL) sub-group* is to ensure that the national TEL Strategy is implemented locally. Using the SOLAS Baseline & Action Plan as its starting point, the sub-group reviewed LOETB's capacity under four key headings within the strategy: Infrastructure including ICT, Pedagogy and ongoing CPD, Content creation, access and sharing, and Organisational structures and practice. The group has

adopted a twin-pronged approach in planning actions that address structural deficits, but simultaneously implementing actions that address the immediate TEL-related training needs of LOETB staff, with a particular emphasis on those that enhance the blended and IT-based learning opportunities for all learners.

The *Employer Engagement sub-group* was established in order to enhance the quality of service to employers in Laois and Offaly who currently engage with LOETB. This group ensures that FET staff members share information on levels of engagement with individual employers to reduce duplication. The group aims to

- provide training for staff in conducting, interpreting and responding to Training Needs Analysis and in Occupational Skills Profiling
- develop key actions that enable, facilitate and support employer participation in programme development.

A representative from each FET Centre and Service is on the **FET Quality Forum** and it is this group that considers and recommends for approval new quality policies or amendments to policies as proposed by **Quality Policy Development and Review Groups**. The new or amended policies may be proposed as a response to identified corrective action required, or from policy development that takes place nationally through ETBI.

The **Apprenticeship Consortium Steering Group** and **National Programme Board** relate to the new Scaffolding Apprenticeship that will be established in 2021, following its successful validation in late 2020. A Consortium Steering Group has already been in existence during the development stage of the Apprenticeship, but this will be the first National Programme Board that LOETB will have, and it will be chaired by the National Programme Manager.

The **Results Approval Panel (RAP)**, and the **National Examination Board** have responsibility for consideration and formal approval of certified FET programmes, and Apprenticeship programmes, respectively. The RAP process is well established in LOETB for QQI programmes at Levels 1 to 6 (see Section 2.7.1.2.3). The National Examination Board will be established for the purposes of approving results from the National Apprenticeship in Scaffolding. This Board will be established in 2021 in line with the Terms of Reference set out in LOETB's Apprenticeship Quality Assurance Procedures.

## 2.2.2 Evaluation

### 2.2.2.1 Newly-established Governance Groups

Some of the governance groups are in their infancy and therefore it is too early to evaluate their effectiveness. Such groups include the FET Quality Council, and the groups that relate specifically to post-2016 Apprenticeships. However, we recognise the importance of raising awareness of the newly established governance structure and of ensuring that all relevant staff members, and participants who are not LOETB staff members, are aware of their roles and responsibilities and take them seriously. There are some participants, particularly those involved in the Apprenticeship groups that would not have prior experience of participating within such a governance structure. It is therefore incumbent on those with responsibility for governance groups to ensure that appropriate training/briefing is provided to different group members appropriate to their role. Furthermore, it is important that FET Centre and Service Managers and Staff understand how the governance structure operates in order for them to understand how decisions are made and by whom.

### 2.2.2.2 Programme Development and Review Groups – Programme Approval Process

The establishment of formal Programme Development and Review groups is a relatively new concept in LOETB. The Healthcare Review Group conducted a very effective review of healthcare provision in 2018 and 2019 (Section 4.2.1.2). This required significant input from healthcare teaching staff, external facilitator and members of the QA Support Service, and resulted in identified actions in the short and medium term. While this is very positive, such an extensive review is very resource-intensive, so it would not be possible to conduct a review of that extent of every area of provision.

LOETB is very fortunate to have a team of enthusiastic and innovative Centre and Service Managers that are keen to introduce new provision that is responsive to the needs of learners and of industry. However, the FMT are conscious that new provision needs to be planned carefully and well-considered to ensure that it is in line with LOETB's strategic goals, is appropriate to the needs of the region and that it doesn't lead to duplication across the service. With this in mind, the FMT developed a Programme Development and Approval Process, (Appendix 2) which sets out the stages that the Programme Development Group should follow in the development of a new FET programme before it is presented to the FMT or Quality Council for approval. This process places a responsibility on the Programme Development Group to consider all aspects prior to submission, but aims not to be too onerous, in order to avoid stifling creativity or preventing flexibility or responsiveness. The Programme Approval Process has been in place since September 2020 and is starting to gain momentum. While it is realistically too early to evaluate its effectiveness, it would seem that the Process, and associated templates, assists Programme Development groups in compiling a comprehensive programme.

### 2.2.2.3 FET Forum

The membership of the FET Forum had grown substantially in recent years due to the expansion of the FET Service and the establishment of new roles. Furthermore, NLN Centre Managers and a CTC Manager were invited to join the Forum. In 2019, we engaged the services of an external facilitator to meet with the FET Forum group in order to determine the future direction of the group and to establish training needs of the group. Feedback from the facilitator indicated that there was an appetite amongst the group to take more ownership of the group, that they saw the group as more than an opportunity to just meet for updates – that this was an opportunity to share ideas, to troubleshoot and to shape the future direction of the FET Service. Following this facilitation session, a number of PD sessions were facilitated – training was provided in areas of leadership, stress management, understanding personality difference, etc. The series of training sessions was unfortunately interrupted by the onset of the COVID-19 Pandemic, but it is intended to continue with this series as soon as possible.

The FET Forum is made up of all Centre and Service Managers in order to ensure that there is active communication from the FMT to the Centres and Services, and between Centres and Services. It is important that relevant information flows from staff to Centre/Service Managers and is fed into the FET Forum for discussion, and equally, that relevant information discussed at FET Forum is fed back to staff appropriately. Given that the information to be shared is learner- and centre-focused, this two-way flow of information would ensure that all parties are aware of, and have a better understanding of, issues that affect the FET Service at a local and ETB level.

### 2.2.2.4 Quality Policy Development and Review Group

The Quality Policy Development and Review Group is a new group that will have responsibility for the development and review of policies relevant to quality assurance. Prior to the inclusion of this group in the

governance structure and the revision of TORs, the development or review of QA policies was done by members of the QA Support Service who would work together on a specific policy area, as policy development or review needs were identified. The draft policy would then go to the QA Forum (now the Quality Forum) for consideration before formal adoption. This process worked relatively well – however, the effectiveness of the old process relied on the representative member of the QA Forum communicating the draft policy back to their colleagues and then for feedback to be brought back from each centre/service for consideration before the policy was finalised. This did not always happen; with the result that new policies and procedures would be introduced without enough consultation with staff who are generally tasked with their implementation. Feedback from staff surveys in recent months would suggest that staff members would like more involvement at an early stage of development or review of policies and procedures. While it is acknowledged that it is not possible to develop policies that will always please everyone, it is certainly true that more consultation and involvement with teaching staff would lead to a broader view and greater understanding by all of the rationale for various policies and procedures, and as a result, greater buy-in.

LOETB is confident that the establishment of Quality Policy Development and Review Groups will help to develop well-considered, robust and effective policies and procedures that will be more willingly accepted by staff who feel that they have had a voice or input in the development process.

## 2.2.3 Conclusion

### 2.2.3.1 Newly-established Governance Groups

FET Governance Structures will be very well-established by the end of 2021. Briefing and training of members will be provided for governance group members and Chairpersons. All relevant stakeholders will be kept informed of the progress of the various groups. Relevant information will be published on the LOETB website.

### 2.2.3.2 Programme Development and Review Groups – Programme Approval Process

The outcomes of the new Programme Development and Approval Process (ie new programmes and revised existing programmes) will be delivered in 2021. It is hoped that this new formal process will lead to a more coordinated approach to the introduction of new programmes that complement LOETB's already comprehensive FET provision.

### 2.2.3.3 Quality Assurance Policy Development and Review Groups

The QA Policy Development and Review Groups will have a greater level of representation from the FET Centres and Services which should lead to well-considered and effective policies and procedures. It is important that Centre and Service Managers make relevant staff available to participate effectively in such groups as needed, in order to ensure that the policies take into account the various nuances of different programmes that affects the implementation of new policies and procedures.

### Identified Actions

- Training provided for Governance Group Members
- Implement the Programme Development and Approval Process fully
- Establish QA Policy Development and Review Groups, ensuring sufficient teaching staff representation
- Put processes in place to improve internal communications



## 2.3 The Documentation of Quality Assurance Policy and Procedures

### 2.3.1 Description

Since the establishment of the QA Support Service, QA policies and procedures have been developed and reviewed by QA staff working on specific policy areas, with the draft documentation then taken to the QA Forum for consultation. Each QA Forum member was expected to bring information back to their colleagues in their centres and services and to gather feedback on draft policies and procedures before final versions were agreed.

Since 2016, a number of policies and procedures in relation to Quality Assurance have been formally documented. Every effort is made to ensure that new or revised policy documents, and their associated procedures and related documentation, are as straightforward and user-friendly as possible. Recently developed or revised policies and procedures include:

- Reasonable Accommodation Policy
- Deadline Extension Request Procedure
- Examination Policy
- Learner Assessment Malpractice Policy
- Results Appeals Policy
- Learner Admissions Procedure
- Learner Induction Procedure
- Internal Verification Process

With the introduction of a new FET governance structure, and specific Terms of Reference for each group, the role of developing and reviewing QA policies will now become the responsibility of a Policy Development and Review Group. The membership of the groups will vary depending on the policy area – the need for the development of a new policy or the review of an existing policy will be identified by the FET Quality Forum, and suitable nominations of staff will be sought.

### 2.3.2 Evaluation

The development of specific policies and procedures for FET programmes has led to an increased level of consistency across all FET programmes. Before their development, there was a risk of learners experiencing inequality due to FET Centres taking alternative approaches. Centre and Service Managers and staff are satisfied that the documentation of policies and procedures provides clarity and certainty as situations arise throughout the duration of a programme. The policies and procedures aim to cater for all eventualities but this is difficult to achieve – hence, the need for regular review of documentation. The Centre and Service staff appreciate the support that QA Support Service provide – briefings are provided to explain any new policies, and each Centre and Service has a designated QA Support contact person that they can make contact with if they are unsure of any policy or procedure.

Feedback from teaching staff surveys conducted in 2020 indicates that teaching staff involved in implementation of policies want more involvement in the development and review process for policies and procedures. When asked what teachers thought has hindered the cultivation of a real culture of quality in their centre/service, one response was *“Teachers have no voice in relation to best practice, decisions made by people who don’t teach and may not understand the impact of these decisions”*. While it should be noted that 50% of

the QA Support Service staff have direct experience of FET programme delivery, such feedback indicates a level of frustration from teaching staff which identifies the need for greater consultation and involvement at early stages of policy/procedure development and review.

Significant effort has been invested during policy development and review to ensure that policies and procedures are as straightforward and uncomplicated as possible. Another teacher commented that teachers are “*laden down with paperwork and box ticking*”. This is something that the QA Support Service has always attempted to avoid, in order to allow teaching staff to be able to concentrate their efforts on the effective delivery and assessment of programmes to learners. A number of forms have been simplified and merged where possible in order to reduce any duplication. However, perhaps the lack of involvement of teaching staff in the devising and revising of forms causes a lack of understanding of why the information requested is required.

The Terms of Reference for the new Policy Development and Review Groups requires the groups’ membership to include representation from FET Centres/Services. Increased involvement of Centre/Service Managers and teaching staff (who ultimately have responsibility for the implementation of policies and procedures on FET programmes) will lead to greater buy-in and an increased level of consistency as centres would be more likely to have a shared understanding for the rationale for the policy/procedure and how it is to be implemented.

A schedule of policies for development and review is required. Once a schedule is established, this will enable the Policy Development and Review Groups to be formed, with representation from FET Centres and Services.

### 2.3.3 Conclusion

The involvement of teaching staff from FET Centres and Services on QA Policy Development and Review Groups should lead to a smoother and more consistent implementation of new policies and procedures on all FET programmes. Their involvement in the process will also have other benefits; the teaching staff will become more aware of all quality assurance considerations involved in policy development, and the QA Support Service staff will gain a greater insight into how policies and procedures are communicated and implemented at Centre and Service level.

#### Identified Actions

- Identify policy areas for review and development
- Establish QA Policy Development and Review Groups as needed, ensuring adequate representation of teaching staff on groups
- Ensure policies and procedures are regularly reviewed to ensure they cater for all circumstances

## 2.4 Staff Recruitment, Management and Development

### 2.4.1 Description

#### 2.4.1.1 Staff Recruitment Process

All courses provided by LOETB are delivered by fully qualified staff, and all teaching staff that teach on certified programmes are registered with the Teaching Council. Trainers on Training programmes (NLN, CTC, Traineeships, etc.) must have a training qualification, at a minimum, as well as subject-specific qualifications or industry-related experience.

The HR Department are responsible for administration of the process of recruiting suitably qualified teaching, management/coordination, administrative and support staff for FET Programmes. All staff are employed in line with our Recruitment and Selection Policy (Appendix 3). An applicant for a teaching position will not be shortlisted for the post unless they have evidence of suitable Teaching Council registration. Where centres propose a new programme to be delivered by existing staff, they must always confirm that the person is suitably qualified for that subject area. The HR Department also liaises cooperatively with the FET Director and the FMT in relation to staff contracts, which is of particular importance where a staff member is required to complete their hours across a number of centres, and sometimes between a second-level school and a FET Centre.

Staff on Community Training programmes (NLN, CTC, and LTIs) are recruited and selected by the relevant Second Provider. LOETB is often represented on the interview panels for Community Training roles. Contract Training programme staff are employed by the training company. The training company provide the CVs and evidence of qualifications of the proposed teaching staff to the Contract Training Officer for approval prior to commencement of the programmes.

#### 2.4.1.2 Induction of New Staff

On appointment, reporting lines are clarified so that each new staff member is clear who they report to. The Centre/Service Manager is responsible for centre-specific induction of new staff members. Procedures are in place with the OSD Department in relation to organising for the setting up of email addresses, access to IT devices, etc.

The Centre/ Service Manager will inform QA Support Service of any new staff members that will be teaching certified programmes in order for them to be invited to an induction session (one-to-one, or in groups depending on demand) in relation to QA policies, procedures, and presentation of learner evidence for submission. New staff members are encouraged to make contact with the relevant QA contact person if they require clarification or support in relation to delivery and assessment.

Induction is provided to Contracted and Community Training staff by the relevant Training Officer in relation to operational policies and procedures (invoicing and payments, course coordination, learner registration and monitoring of attendance, etc). The QA Support Service also meets with new Community and Contract Training personnel to introduce the QA policies and procedures. There is a designated QA contact person for both Community and Contract Training that the staff members can contact at any time with QA-related queries. The designated contact person was introduced in 2019 and has been working very effectively as it leads to greater consistency and more efficient resolution of issues.

### 2.4.1.3 Professional Development

LOETB is committed to growing as a learning organisation, and ensuring that all staff have access to professional development (PD) opportunities. PD includes enabling staff to enhance their skills, update competencies, explore modern teaching methods and collaborate with colleagues.

Our Professional Development Policy (Appendix 4) is in place which facilitates support for staff (financial support, study leave, and time off from work to attend courses) who wish to engage in PD activities that are relevant to their role. A FET Professional Development Coordinator was appointed in December 2018, with responsibility for coordinating and recording all PD activity, certified and uncertified, and on a group and individual basis. Prior to the appointment, participation in professional development opportunities, either formal or informal, was not systematically recorded, so it was not possible to establish the extent to which these opportunities are availed of. A FET PD Calendar is issued on a monthly basis (sample linked here), which informs management and staff of PD activities (in-house training, external training, online, eCollege and face-to-face training and national events hosted by FESS, other ETBs etc.).

Since the appointment of the PD Coordinator, the level of interest and participation in PD activities has increased significantly. Teaching staff at all levels have participated in both certified and uncertified training. We have provided opportunities for participation on a range of different HE programmes at NFQ Levels 6 to 9 – including a MA programme in Teaching and Learning in IT Carlow (completed on a modular basis), a Diploma in Business (Change Management) in NUI Galway, and a Certificate in Technology Enhanced Learning with the National College of Ireland, all of which have been hugely beneficial to staff, especially since the start of the Pandemic when teaching and learning moved online. Since the onset of the Pandemic, a wide variety of group training sessions have been provided on the transition to blended and online learning, the use of Microsoft Office applications such as Teams, Sharepoint, etc. The QA Support Service has also offered support to staff members via a booking system who require some one-to-one assistance in the use of Microsoft Teams and Moodle.

In early 2020, a series of “lunch-and-learn” sessions were organised – this consisted of staff who had benefitted from PD activities providing short workshops to ETB colleagues in topics related to their area of study. The initial sessions were very successful, both in terms of the skills the staff member could share with their colleagues, and as a networking opportunity for staff. Furthermore, it is an opportunity for staff members who have availed themselves of PD opportunities to showcase their skills and to build their confidence. Unfortunately, these events have been paused because of the current Pandemic. While they could be continued online, the opportunity for colleagues to meet face-to-face would be lost. The sessions will resume when it is safe and when restrictions have been lifted.

### 2.3.1.4 QA Topic-Specific Briefings

The QA Support Service provides refresher training for staff on an ongoing basis. From time to time, a teaching staff member returns to teaching in FET after a period of teaching in second-level or after a career break, and sometimes teaching staff members will start teaching at a different level of the NFQ and may need some refresher training in relation to QA policies and procedures.

A need was identified in recent years for topic-specific and subject-specific briefings/in-service to be provided by the QA Support Service or by external parties (e.g. FESS). This was responded to and sessions have been organised on a regular basis. For example, the need for interviewer training was identified when an interview

was included as part of assessment for the Work Experience modules – this training was well-received and well-attended by staff members. Following that training, an external facilitator delivered a session on modern CV-writing in order to help achieve a level of consistency in CV-writing style delivered by teachers to all learners. The FET PD Calendar for September and October 2020 included a number of online briefing sessions (via MS Teams) on Reasonable Accommodation, Plagiarism, and Referencing. While it was assumed that all teaching staff were aware of the intricacies of the different policies, it became apparent that a knowledge gap had existed. This reinforces the need for continuous briefings on such topics. The online briefings were recorded and have been made available for teachings staff to view at their convenience and as required throughout the year.

## 2.4.2 Evaluation

### 2.4.2.1 Staff Recruitment Process

The process of recruitment of new staff works very effectively. From time to time, the demand for new staff on a flexible and responsive basis creates a delay for establishment of new programmes. The FMT and Centre/Service Managers benefit from a very healthy communicative working relationship with the HR Department where staff shortage issues can be avoided or remedied quickly to avoid delays where possible.

### 2.4.2.2 Induction of New Staff

The procedures in place for the induction of new staff members are well-established and work effectively. However, from time to time, a new staff member may be reluctant to ask questions or seek clarification from their Centre/Service Manager, colleagues or the QA Support Service if they are unsure of something. This may be due to lack of experience of the new staff member, or sometimes a lack of confidence. This sometimes leads to issues at the end of the academic year / course. Feedback from staff consultation process would indicate that there is a need for a Mentoring system for new staff members. This feedback came from experienced staff who were willing to partake in such a scheme but suggested that the system needs to be formalised to ensure a consistent approach that benefits all new staff members.

### 2.4.2.3 Professional Development

Feedback from staff indicates that the provision of PD opportunities has significantly improved over the last two years – “...considerable and marked improvement in last year or so...”, “...there is a great variety of courses on offer...”. The majority of staff feel supported and that the PD opportunities presented to them are relevant and worthwhile. However, some feedback would suggest that there is an issue with the timing of PD activities – there may be an issue with Centre/Service Managers making staff available to attend PD activities, and other staff members feel that they are not consulted with about what PD is needed. However, the feedback in relation to timing of PD sessions is varied – some staff members commented that it should not be outside of teaching hours, while others said teaching staff can’t afford time off teaching hours. It is difficult to schedule PD activity at a time that suits everyone. In 2020, a lot of the training sessions provided online were recorded so that staff could watch the videos at their convenience. While this made training sessions more accessible, it is not ideal as the person watching the video does not have the opportunity to participate or ask questions.

Tutors and Coordinators on Training programmes (not direct LOETB employees) are invited to attend all PD activities, and there has been a significant level of participation from these organisations. This is very beneficial as sometimes they can feel quite isolated so this provides an opportunity for them to network with colleagues from LOETB, particularly on programmes where there may be some crossover so that resources may be shared,

or where there are opportunities for learners to progress from one programme to another. A common theme from the consultation survey of teaching staff is that subject-specific PD is needed, and that teaching staff would like the opportunity to participate in Communities of Practice for their specific subject areas.

#### 2.4.2.4 QA Topic-Specific Briefings

The provision of QA Topic-Specific Briefings has been a very positive step in ensuring that all staff are aware of QA policies and procedures and how they should be implemented. The provision of online sessions, while originally planned to avoid gathering large groups together to prevent spread of COVID-19, had the added advantage of making the sessions more accessible to all staff – as participants did not have to travel to a central location and did not have to miss classes. The subsequent availability of these recorded online sessions was even more beneficial as it meant that teaching staff that may have missed the live session could watch the session at any time and the QA Officer did not have to repeat the session multiple times. Furthermore, a new staff member who may have started later in the year would be able to access all sessions. This style of delivery of briefings should be expanded further to save time and resources, and to build up a bank of briefing sessions that are accessible throughout the academic year.

### 2.4.3 Conclusion

#### 2.4.3.1 Induction of New Staff

A Mentoring Programme for new staff is required in order to ensure that all new teaching staff are confident and comfortable in their new roles. This would require input from Centre/Service Managers, QASS, and some experienced teaching staff (either on voluntary or time-off-in-lieu basis) and therefore would be resource-intensive. The Programme should be for the duration of a full academic year and requires some group participation as well as one-to-one support.

#### 2.4.3.2 Professional Development

The appointment of the FET PD Coordinator has made a very positive difference to the provision and uptake of PD activity by staff and second provider staff, which has, no doubt, enhanced the quality of FET provision. The monthly FET PD Calendar is enthusiastically received and staff eagerly anticipate the return of the “Lunch and Learn” sessions, with several staff members having volunteered to host a session in their centre to demonstrate newly-developed skills as a result of PD funding. It is intended to continue to develop the PD provision for the benefit of staff, which in turn will benefit learners.

While there is no doubt that provision in relation to PD has significantly improved in recent years, it is acknowledged that consultation with staff is required in relation to PD topics, how they are delivered and when they are delivered. It is important to make PD sessions available during the day and in evenings. Finally, in order for the effective roll-out of PD activities, Centre/Service Managers must facilitate staff to participate as far as is practicable.

## Identified Actions

- Offer training in Mentoring to staff that are willing to participate in a New Staff Mentoring programme.
- Survey staff to establish PD needs
- Establish Communities of Practice for staff teaching in specific areas
- Set out a plan for subject-specific areas (informed by Communities of Practice)

## 2.5 Programme Development, Approval, and Submission for Validation

### 2.5.1 Description

#### 2.5.1.1 Programme Development and Approval Process

Before the Programme Development and Approval Process was formalised in September 2020, the general practice was that a Centre or Service Manager would seek approval from the FET Director or their line manager (one of the FET Managers) if they wanted to offer a new course. This process was flawed by its informality – often, approval would be sought at a very late stage, with little consideration for a FET Centre in a neighbouring town that was offering the same or a similar programme. Further, formal consultation may not have taken place with external stakeholders (e.g. DEASP, local employers, Higher Education Institutions etc) to establish the specific skills needs required of the programme so the programme may not have led to very successful employment or progression outcomes.

From September 2020, Centre and Service Managers that wish to offer a new course (certified or uncertified) for the first time must seek approval to do so via the newly-established Programme Development and Approval Process. This process outlines a number of steps that must be followed in the programme development process which aims to ensure that all stakeholders are considered in the development of the programme, that there is a clear rationale for the introduction of the programme, and that all necessary resources are available to ensure that the programme is delivered in a quality-assured manner. The Programme Proposal is submitted to either the FET Quality Council or the FMT (depending on circumstances such as whether the programme is certified or not, the level of urgency, etc.). Consideration will be given to the Proposal in order to ensure that it is in line with LOETB's overall strategic plan for programme delivery and identified local needs.

#### 2.5.1.2 Scaffolding Apprenticeship

In December 2017, LOETB's proposal for a Scaffolding Apprenticeship was approved by the Apprenticeship Council which saw the establishment of a Consortium Steering Group tasked with the development of a validation application to QQI for a certified Scaffolding Apprenticeship programme. This was our first experience of applying for validation other than as part of the ETBI Shared Programme Development process in 2011. The Programme Development process was a lengthy one, involving the CSG (members from industry, SIPTU, Health and Safety Authority and Construction Industry Federation), and an external subject matter expert.

LOETB did not have any staff members with specific scaffolding expertise during the programme development phase. Subject matter expertise was both procured and given on a voluntary basis. We have responsibility for the National Construction Training Centre in Mount Lucas (Offaly) so the programme seemed a good fit for the centre, having been approached by the Construction Industry Federation who had undertaken research which indicated that there was sufficient demand from the industry for such an Apprenticeship. The QA Support Service was heavily involved in the compilation of the validation application and significant support was provided from ETBI's FET team during the programme development process, and in preparation for the Validation Panel event.

The application was completed by late 2019 and was approved by the FMT to be submitted to QQI for approval. The Validation Panel meeting was scheduled for April 2020, but was rescheduled as an online panel in September 2020. The application was approved with some conditions. The response to the Validation Panel's



Report was presented to the FET Quality Council at its first meeting before being submitted. Final approval was granted in December 2020.

### 2.5.1.3 Programme Validation

LOETB's FET Centres and Services mainly deliver QQI-certified programmes. Programmes from Levels 1 to 3 were developed and validated under a Programme Approval Agreement with Co. Westmeath VEC prior to VEC amalgamations. Programmes at Levels 4 to 6 were developed and validated under the ETBI Shared Programme Development Process, which led to a very comprehensive range of awards.

When validation applications were made to QQI following the introduction of the Common Awards System, all centres were listed as named centres for each programme at Levels 1-3. At Levels 4-6, where programmes had specific validation requirements, only the centres that could meet those requirements were included as named centres. Despite the fact that centres are listed as named centres, they must still request approval to provide a programme that hasn't previously been run in their centre. At that point, the suitability of the centre to provide the programme is assessed – including reference to available physical resources, suitably qualified staff, etc. They will be asked to provide evidence that, where they are delivering any modules with special validation requirements and/or regulatory and professional requirements, these are fully met, or will be fully met, before commencement of the programme.

In general, up to relatively recently, the programmes developed and validated under those processes have largely met the programme needs of LOETB's FET Centres and Services. However, from time to time, the need for a new programme has been identified, either at FET Management level, or at centre level, in response to a locally-identified need. In recent years, this has led LOETB to seek other awards where QQI CAS Awards were not available in specific subject areas. This has included programmes in the areas of Construction, Engineering and Beauty. Other Awarding bodies have programmes that are up-to-date and recognised by the specific industries and therefore, decisions were made for either LOETB to establish a relationship with those bodies (e.g. City and Guilds, with Mount Lucas and Tullamore CTC as approved centres) or for LOETB to request for a Contract Training Company to establish a relationship with that awarding body for the purpose of delivery of a specific award (e.g. ITEC).

## 2.5.2 Evaluation

### 2.5.2.1 Programme Development and Approval Process

While it is too early to accurately assess the effectiveness of the newly-established Programme Development and Approval process, early feedback would indicate that the process has led to programmes which are more well-considered with clear objectives, and have also led to improved relationships with external stakeholders, who have appreciated the increased level of consultation.

### 2.5.2.2 Scaffolding Apprenticeship

The experience of submitting an application for Validation of a National Apprenticeship, and achieving that validation, has had the effect of improving LOETB's confidence in the area of programme development and application for validation. While the process was a huge task, it was a very useful learning journey and has led to the establishment of a very strong and collaborative working relationship with the parties that were involved. The next step in the process is to launch the Scaffolding Apprenticeship programme, which is planned for

Spring 2021. The experience of preparing a Programme Validation application has created an awareness of the significant amount of time, expertise and resources it takes to undertake such a project.

### 2.5.2.2 Validation Applications

LOETB have limited experience of making validation applications as up to relatively recently, the programmes that were validated under the ETBI Programme Development Process have largely satisfied LOETB's needs. However, as different needs are identified, and as programmes need to be reviewed and revalidated, the requirement to make validation applications will increase. Personnel in the QA Support Service, and teaching staff with specific subject matter expertise, will require training and support in the area of programme development and validation criteria in order to ensure that validation applications are properly prepared and that LOETB presents the validation application appropriately to validation panels.

The current Childcare awards at Levels 4, 5 and 6 will be deactivated in 2022, and therefore new ELC awards are currently being developed as part of a project led by DDLETB. We have seconded a Childcare teacher to that project for the 2020/2021 academic year. Once the programmes have been developed, LOETB will apply for differential validation. The programmes developed by the project team will be considered by LOETB to ensure that they meet our needs and will be approved in line with our governance structure prior to making the differential validation application to QQI.

### 2.5.3 Conclusion

LOETB has limited experience in the process of validation as prescribed by QQI's Policies and Criteria for Validation of Education and Training Programmes. While some members of the FET team have participated as Validation Panel members (for FET, HE and Apprenticeship programmes), our only experience as a validation applicant has been for the Scaffolding Apprenticeship. LOETB will need to make validation applications as the need for new programmes, or revalidation of existing programmes, arise.

#### Identified Actions

- Training in area of programme development and validation processes required for QA staff and relevant teaching staff
- Make application for differential validation of ELC awards

## 2.6 Access, Transfer and Progression

### 2.6.1 Description

#### 2.6.1.1 Learner Referrals

Learners engaging with FET services generally engage with the services through one of two referral routes; self-referral, or referral by another agency. Self-referral has been a significant feature within the former VEC sector for many years, with many learners engaging with PLC, Adult Literacy, and Community Education by identifying the programmes and options most appropriate to their needs, and engaging directly with the programme providers/centres. Self-referral was not a feature of training services until relatively recently; however, this aspect is increasing significantly as applicants proactively seek to develop their skills for personal development, or to prepare themselves for employment, or promotion.

LOETB has a network of referral agencies and partners throughout the two counties. A referral protocol is in place with the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (DEASP) and the local Case Officers have built up links with coordinators at a local level. Learners on CTC and NLN programmes must be referred to the ETB through DEASP, if the applicant is a DEASP client. Regular meetings are held with DEASP and members of the FMT at county level in order to keep lines of communication open. However, in recent years, the level of referrals from DEASP Officers is relatively low, and in the case of training, where all referrals previously had to come through DEASP, the level of referral has sharply reduced. Up to March 2020, this was due to the low numbers of people on the live register. However, since the onset of the Pandemic and the consequent rise in the number of unemployed people (whether unemployed or on Pandemic Unemployment Payment), communication has been very strong and regular with DEASP locally to ensure that any identified local FET needs are met. An inter-agency group was established, with representation from LOETB, LWETB, DEASP, IDA, LEO and Regional Skills Forum, who meet monthly to share information in response to Pandemic.

Second level guidance counsellors provide a referral mechanism for students into some FET programmes, in particular PLC courses, apprenticeships and traineeships. LOETB's Adult Educational Guidance and Information Service (AEGIS) provides another avenue of referral for learners into FET services, in particular those learners in need of basic education supports. In 2019 in Laois, over 330 people engaged with AEGIS for the first time, with the service facilitating another 500 appointments for existing clients. Other services, including HSE agencies, community development groups, probation services, etc., also act to refer learners into FET services. The importance of "casual referrals", i.e. referral based on word of mouth or personal recommendation, is hard to quantify, however, it is believed to account for quite a sizeable number of those accessing FET services. We expect that the establishment of the Learner Information Hubs in Portlaoise and Tullamore in 2021 will result in an increased level of referrals of learners to suitable programmes, as they are provided with a welcoming opportunity to explore their options.

Top Ten Clusters - 2019 (by participation)	
1. Core Personal	6. Hairdressing & Beauty
2. Health, Family, other Social Services	7. Food and Beverage
3. General Learning	8. Sport and Leisure
4. Business, Administration	9. Engineering (Mechanical)
5. Built Environment	10. Sales and Marketing

*The table above shows the top ten subject areas by cluster that FET learners participated in, in 2019*

### 2.6.1.2 Admissions Process

LOETB recognises the importance of ensuring that learners are placed on the programmes that best suit their needs and abilities. This, in turn, will affect the retention and completion rates of courses. Significant effort has been invested into developing a common Admissions Process to be used across all FET Centres and Services at appropriate levels.

A very important element of the Admissions process is the assessment and interview stage. Initially there was resistance from Centres and Services as the staff were concerned that the requirement for applicants to complete an assessment and an interview as part of the admissions process would serve as a disincentive or would be intimidating for potential learners. Centre and Service Managers were also concerned that this process could negatively influence their enrolment numbers – as some applicants would inevitably be deemed unsuccessful for the programme for which they had applied. However, the interview and assessment is not intended to intimidate learners, and is used as a means of identifying if learners will require additional support during the programme.

### 2.6.1.3 Transfer

LOETB do not have any formal transfer arrangements in place with any external organisations. However, from time to time, the need for an internal transfer, from one FET programme to another, arises, and takes place quite smoothly, with the support of the Adult Education Guidance and Information Service (AEGIS). For example, a learner may be struggling with, or may be disinterested in, the content of their original chosen programme and may be referred to an AEGIS team member for a discussion. The Guidance Counsellor will be equipped to advise the learner and advocate on behalf of the learner in order to facilitate a transfer to a different FET programme in the same or another centre, at the same or a lower level, provided the Centre Manager and Course Coordinator is confident that any time lost can be made up without causing too much difficulty for the learner.

Learners are facilitated to transfer from one programme to another relatively seamlessly when transferring from one prison to another. Both prisons on the Midlands campus cooperate with each other and with other prisons to ensure that learners can continue on with their QQI and other programmes without too much disturbance.

#### 2.6.1.4 Progression

The integrated FET Centre model operated by the FET Service enables a smoother progression pathway for learners from one programme to the next. A large proportion of our learners progress through the service, either from unaccredited to accredited programmes, or from one level to the next (eg progression from Youthreach or CTC programmes at Levels 3 and 4 to PLC or Traineeship programmes at Level 5 and beyond).

We have developed Cooperation Agreements with two local third level institutions – Athlone Institute of Technology (IT) and IT Carlow. A large proportion of LOETB learners that progress to Higher Education from LOETB FET courses tend to progress to either of the two local HE Institutions. In the 2019/2020 academic year, 58% of learners on progression-focused programmes in Tullamore FETC moved on to Higher Education, and 40% of those progressed to either Athlone IT or IT Carlow.

### 2.6.2 Evaluation

#### 2.6.2.1 Admissions Process

During the learner consultation phase, learners were asked if they had been required to undertake an assessment and/or participate in an interview as part of the admissions process for the programme that they had applied for. The feedback provided to these questions indicates that the Admissions Process is not being implemented consistently across all programmes. A significant number of learners responded in the surveys that they had not been interviewed or had not undergone an assessment prior to entry onto their course. This is disappointing considering the amount of time and resources that has been invested to ensure a consistent approach. More time and resources are clearly required to support Centre and Service Managers in the implementation of the Admissions Process.

The majority of those that did complete the assessment and/or the interview were satisfied with the process and did not feel any extra pressure or stress as a result. This is very positive and reassuring feedback to receive from learners, as this had been a concern of Centre and Service Managers.

#### 2.6.2.2 Tracking Progression

We do not have a formal process in place for tracking learners' progression once they have completed their course. Often, information relating to progression is gathered informally, through word of mouth, or from learners contacting their teachers, the Centre Managers, or the Guidance Service to let them know where they have progressed to. Some Centres make enquiries of past learners when they are organising graduation events. A formal process needs to be put in place whereby contact is made with a learner after a specified period of time to find out if learner has gained employment, had progressed to another FET programme or to a HE programme, or if they would benefit from more support.

### 2.6.3 Conclusion

Arrangements must be in place to ensure that all applicants experience a similar admission process regardless of the FET Centre or Service they are associated with. Evidence suggests that the outcomes associated with a programme improve significantly when a proper Admissions Process is in place - it ensures that the learner is on right programme for them, which leads to improved retention rates, and improved certification and progression outcomes.

There may be various reasons for not implementing the Admissions Process – lack of resources, lack of knowledge, or fear of not filling classes. Training and support must be provided to those Centres and Services to ensure its proper implementation.

### Identified Actions

- Provide support to Centre and Service Managers to support the consistent implementation of Admissions Process
- Identify and promote appropriate progression pathways for learners
- Establish tracking process to identify learner progression outcomes

## 2.7 Integrity and Approval of Learner Results

### 2.7.1 Description

#### 2.7.1.1 Integrity of Assessments and Assessment Process

The integrity of assessment materials is ensured in different ways in different centres, depending on their context and infrastructure. Second providers on training programmes must have lockable, secure storage for Assessment Instrument Specifications (AISs) and other assessments. Teaching staff are encouraged to amend their locally devised Assessment Briefs from course to course, to prevent the integrity of assessments being affected by the same assessments being used year on year.

The integrity of assessment processes is monitored through the IV/EA/RAP processes across all services (Section 2.7.1.2). Any issues that are identified throughout the duration of a course which could compromise the integrity of the assessment are immediately reported to the QA Support Service. Issues are documented in line with the Assessment Malpractice Policy and corrective action is taken where required. The QA Support Service consider the issues periodically and the log of issues is used as a basis for determining PD/training needs, and also informs if policy/procedure review or development is required.

All learners sign statements of authenticity when they submit an assessment. When submitting assessments on Moodle, they must confirm when uploading the document that the work is their own. Instances of plagiarism are addressed via the Assessment Malpractice Policy, the majority of which was mainly developed by the ETBI Assessment Procedures Working Group. We gained access to similarity checking software (Urkund) on Moodle through SOLAS in 2018, and since then, have been gradually rolling the software out to teaching staff for their use with their groups.

From the start of the 2020/2021 academic year, all learners and teaching staff on programmes at Levels 5 and 6 were required to use Moodle, in order to better prepare learners for online learning in event of further lockdowns. This also had the added advantage of automatic use of Urkund, so therefore this software is fully in use throughout our Levels 5 and 6 provision. The software scans the submitted text, aiming to identify if the text is similar to publications which already exist or any previous texts that have been scanned through the database. The software has been found to be very useful in helping to identify plagiarism, which is often unintentional on the part of the learner – if detected at an early stage, the situation can often be resolved by the teacher or tutor having a firm but informal conversation with the learner, whereby the learner is given the opportunity to make a resubmission of his/her assessment and does not repeat the behaviour again. If plagiarism re-occurs the situation is dealt with in a more official way.

LOETB considers the proper conduct of assessment events as a priority in ensuring the integrity of the assessment process. As such, it is our policy that no examination should be supervised by the person who has had responsibility for teaching the module, or setting the exam for a particular group. In general, FET Centres and Services coordinate the invigilation of exams so that teaching and support staff supervise other class groups; however, the QA Support Service supports this process by making QA staff available for invigilation where Centre/Service staff are not available to do so. A process is in place whereby teaching staff notify the QA Support Service via an electronic form about the scheduled date of the exam and whether or not supervision is required. Teaching staff are required to use the form even when an invigilator is not required. The advantage

of this process is that it enables the Centre Manager and the QA Support Service to be aware of when an exam is taking place in the event that they want to conduct a monitoring exercise.

Since the COVID-19 Pandemic started to affect FET provision, arrangements were made to enable learners to complete exams online via LOETB's Moodle platform. Due to restrictions, learners had to complete exams online from their homes. This presented a particular challenge in protecting the integrity of the assessment. The QA Support Service coordinated the process and took responsibility for remote supervision of exams, initially through Teams, Zoom, WhatsApp, initially and more recently exclusively through Teams.

### 2.7.1.2 Stages of the Certification Process

The Quality Assurance Support Service take a very active role in each stage of the certification process for all FET Centres and Services.

#### 2.7.1.2.1 Internal Verification Process

Internal Verification (IV) procedures are in place to ensure that assessments have been undertaken in a quality-assured fashion, the correct assessment instruments have been used, learner details and results have been correctly entered onto the QBS, etc. and for a sample of learners, marks are checked. Prior to the June 2017 certification period, FET Centres took individual responsibility for the IV process and submitted their IV Reports to the QA Support Service for filing.

In 2017, it was decided by the FMT to implement a new IV process in order to achieve consistency across the service. FET Centres now submit estimates to the QA Officer well in advance of the certification period. The QA Officer then schedules dates for the IV process and selects an internal verifier(s). The IV process is conducted by members of the QA Support Service who have undergone training and familiarisation with the IV process. At present, we have a panel of eleven trained internal verifiers.

The same guidelines, checklists and report templates are used in every FET Centre. After the IV process has been conducted, the IV Report is then provided to the Centre, where identified corrective actions are remedied where required. The final IV report is made available to the External Authenticator.

Contracted and Community Training provision is internally verified by the second providers, using documentation developed as part of the Transition Quality Assurance System (TQAS), and internal validation is undertaken by the QA Staff when the Assessment Pack is submitted to the QA Office.

In planning for the certification rounds during the early stages of the COVID-19 Pandemic, the QA Support Service were conscious that there may be a higher level of calculation and transcription errors because of the fact that teaching staff were working under increased pressure. It was decided that 100% of the learner portfolios would be checked for calculation and transcription errors to ensure that the errors were eliminated. This meant that the IV process was more labour-intensive – but it was a beneficial exercise as a significant number of errors were identified. In the June round, totting errors were identified in 9.9% of learner portfolios and transcription errors were identified in 2.4% of portfolios. This led to a decision to continue to check 100% of learner portfolios for the foreseeable future, with a view to exploring ways to reduce the level of error.



### 2.7.1.2.2 External Authentication Process

The External Authentication process is a core element of ensuring the quality and integrity of the assessment processes. It is the role of the External Authenticator (EA) to review the IV Report, to ensure that assessment has been undertaken in a quality-assured manner, to review the learners' assessments to ensure that they have been assessed in a fair and consistent manner, and to authenticate that the grades given are in line with the national standards for that level.

We operate a panel of EAs, selected from ETBI's panel of recently-trained EAs. The EAs on this panel have attended a briefing and a two-day training session, and, depending on their qualifications and experience, may be deemed suitable for acting as EA for all FET programmes (including training programmes using AISs) in a range of subject areas at Levels 1 to 6, and Apprenticeships. Guidelines have been developed for FET Centres preparing for the External Authentication process, as well as for EAs, and these are sent to EAs when they agree dates for External Authentication. EAs are chosen for the training programmes from this EA panel also. It is the relevant QA Officer that selects an appropriate EA for each centre/service/programme. This ensures a level of transparency across the service. Furthermore, on occasion, the same EA has visited a number of centres that offer similar provision in order to ensure a common standard. The QA Officer endeavours to appoint EAs that are experienced in the direct delivery and assessment of the relevant subject area, or who has satisfactory industry-related experience in the subject area. It is the practice of the QA Support Service to organise for all modules to be examined by an EA for each certification round. (For the June and July certification rounds, it was very difficult to appoint EAs that could come to centres to view physical learner portfolios – therefore, it was decided that EAs would only be sought for modules where there was a new or inexperienced teacher, and for common subject areas across the FET Service.)

The EAs send their reports directly to the QA Officer. EA reports are reviewed by the Results Approval Panel within the centre, and by the QA Department. Collated feedback from all EA reports is reviewed by the FMT. Collated anonymised feedback is shared with all teaching staff in order to share learning across all centres. It is the responsibility of each Centre/Service Manager to ensure that individual teaching staff members receive their own specific feedback from the IV and External Authentication processes. From time to time, a member of the QA Department will meet with individual teaching staff members, with the Centre/Service Manager, to discuss feedback in order to ensure that the required corrective action is taken.

### 2.7.1.2.3 Results Approval Panel Process

The Terms of Reference for the Results Approval Panel (RAP) have been formally adopted as part of the FET Governance Structure. The RAP must always be chaired by a member of the FMT. The QA Officer organises the RAP meeting, sets the Agenda and makes all documentation available to the members of the RAP, prior to the meeting. The Panel are reminded of the importance of confidentiality at the start of each RAP meeting, and they must sign a Confidentiality Statement. A separate RAP meeting is held for each Centre/Service as it is our view that it is not productive, nor appropriate, for each Centre/Service Manager to be privy to the individual issues that have arisen in specific Centres/Services during the Certification process. The RAP process provides an opportunity for the Centre/Service Manager, a member of the FMT, and a member of the QA Support Service to review the results of a given assessment period, identify issues arising, and decide on recommendations for future actions to be taken. These IV/EA and RAP procedures facilitate the fair and consistent assessment of learners, and support academic decision-making which reflects the interests of learners and the maintenance of standards.

From time to time, a teacher or tutor may join the RAP meeting in order to provide context to a particular situation, particularly if they were unhappy with the feedback or recommendations provided by the EA. An EA may have recommended a change of grade for a learner(s), which the teacher/tutor may wish to dispute, especially if they have not had the opportunity to speak to the EA on the day of the EA visit. It is our policy that teaching staff be informed of any recommended grade changes for their learners in the modules they have taught, and teaching staff are given an opportunity to respond – either to accept or to dispute the change. It is an opportunity that is seldom availed of by teaching staff – however, it is deemed an important step in the process as often the information and context they provide at RAP stage is relevant to the decision that the Panel makes in relation to approving the change of grade or otherwise.

## 2.7.2 Evaluation

### 2.7.2.1 Internal Verification Process

The advantages of our approach to IV include:

- In centres where IV was previously conducted by teaching staff, teachers/tutors felt uncomfortable reporting issues with their colleagues' work. The provision of independent internal verifiers removed any potential tension between colleagues.
- As the panel of internal verifiers is quite small, this ensures that a very consistent standard is maintained in all FET Centres. The internal verifiers meet before and after each certification period to consult on various issues, in order to ensure that a consistent approach is taken. The QA Officer monitors all IV Reports to ensure that feedback and recommendations are appropriate and consistent.
- As the IV process is scheduled on a specific date(s), this means that adherence to deadlines must be observed in all FET Centres. In the past, when the IV process was conducted in-house by a centre staff member, there was a tendency for a more casual attitude to deadlines, which often resulted in delays to the EA process or issues not being identified or rectified in a timely fashion.
- The timely provision of IV findings to centres provided staff with ample opportunity to remedy any errors or omissions prior to the EA visit.
- Feedback from External Authenticators has been very positive since this IV approach has been taken. A consistent and effective IV approach ensures that the External Authenticator's time isn't wasted on administrative issues on the day of the EA visit.

Internal Verification, by its nature, can be perceived quite negatively, as it is a mechanism to identify errors. Teaching staff can sometimes be quite unhappy that the IV Report is not more positive and does not acknowledge the excellent work and the enormous efforts that they have invested in presenting the learner evidence. *"I think it (IV) acts as a good solid check on whether evidence is there, can be viewed, are marks correct etc. from a teacher perspective, there can be a perception of 'nit picking' sometime – and the comments that focus on all negatives can come across (probably unintentionally) as very harsh. I would prefer to see a more balanced IV, positives with negatives."* This is difficult to overcome because it would be too time consuming to acknowledge all of the good work individually.

The level of errors in calculation and transcription of marks and grades in learner portfolios is an issue which requires consideration. Our Sampling Strategy has been in place since 2015. The level of error identified in certification rounds preceding the COVID-19 Pandemic was much lower which suggests that the increased level of errors may be, partly at least, due to increased pressure and less than ideal working from home conditions that teaching staff experienced in the early stages of the Pandemic. However, considering that the Pandemic still continues to affect teachers' working conditions, which may lead to levels of concentration being affected, the approach of checking all portfolios will continue for the foreseeable future. The QA Support Service is working on developing spreadsheets which will replace the traditional Learner Marking Sheets – the advantage of this will be that the marks will be calculated automatically removing the chances of calculation errors. This is a sizeable project - it is hoped that the spreadsheets will be used by teaching staff for all programmes at Levels 5 and 6 from the June 2021 certification rounds.

In relation to the Contracted and Community Training provision, the IV process has proven to be problematic. The templates used by the second providers and contract training companies date back to the TQAS, and do not seem to provide the opportunity for internal verifiers to identify issues as they arise. The QA Support Service has commenced a process of overseeing the IV process with the second providers and contract training companies with a view to identifying the keys steps that are needed in the process. The templates are in need of review which is an opportunity for the QA Support Service to work collaboratively with the second providers and contract training companies to establish the best process. It is anticipated and hoped that the new process will mirror, as much as possible, the approach taken in FET Centres, albeit taking into account the slightly different approach to assessment using Assessment Instrument Specifications (AISs).

### 2.7.2.2 External Authentication Process

Despite the very labour-intensive and resource-intensive project undertaken by ETBI and FESS to create a new panel of trained EAs, finding appropriate EAs in specific subject areas is still a significant challenge for us, especially given our policy not to engage the same EA for more than three times in a row. This issue arises particularly for the June certification round each year. Furthermore, the issue of the lack of consistency between EAs is problematic. Often, feedback provided to a teacher from one EA will completely contradict the feedback given by another EA for the same module in the previous academic year. This is very frustrating for the teacher. *"I feel that the External Authenticator's assessment can be quite subjective and can vary from year to year"*.

### 2.7.2.3 Results Approval Process

The RAP process operates well, with the relevant people present at meetings to ensure that the process is completed efficiently and that the appropriate corrective actions are identified in order to ensure continuous improvement. However, feedback from surveys would suggest that teaching staff feel removed from this stage of the process. *"...teachers are never aware when it happens or the dates students receive their results..."*, *"there should be a three-way process whereby the teaching staff have an input also..."*.

It appears that there is little awareness amongst teaching staff that they may, in certain circumstances, attend the RAP meeting to contribute to a specific agenda item. The reason for this may be that the RAP meeting for the most commonly-used certification rounds – the June and August rounds (and July round in 2020) – generally takes place when the majority of teaching staff have started their summer holidays, or have finished teaching for the academic year. Unless an exceptional situation arises, teaching staff are generally not contacted during their time off so this may mean that they miss out on the opportunity to participate in a RAP meeting, leading to teachers feeling excluded from the process.

### 2.7.3 Conclusion

The hands-on approach taken by the QA Support Service contributes significantly towards the robust assessment process that is in place in LOETB. Huge amounts of time and effort are invested by QA staff, and Centre and Service management and staff, in ensuring that the IV, EA and RAP processes are conducted with integrity and transparency.

#### Identified Actions

- Provide briefings and refresher training for teaching staff regarding assessment processes
- Reinforce importance of IV and EA feedback being provided to teaching staff in a timely manner
- Highlight and acknowledge areas of good practice during the assessment processes
- Develop and provide training for teaching staff in use of learner marking spreadsheets

## 2.8 Information and Data Management

### 2.8.1 Description

#### 2.8.1.1 Programme Learner Support System

The introduction and rollout of the Programme Learner Support System (PLSS) has been invaluable in providing a standardised application system for all FET provision. Furthermore, the system has the capacity for internal referral – whereby a learner can be referred from one course to another without difficulty, and that learner's basic information goes with the referral for ease of making contact. The capacity of the PLSS to communicate with learners is also invaluable – a SMS text or email can be sent to a learner or group of learners within seconds, or a standard letter can be easily generated.

All planned provision is scheduled on PLSS by each Centre/Service Manager. Each course must then be approved by the relevant QA staff member, who is the designated contact person for that Centre/Service. Before being approved, the details on PLSS are checked to ensure accuracy. Particular attention is given to start dates, the title of target award to ensure that the Centre/Service is validated to offer the award, and the modules chosen to ensure they meet the requirements of that major award. Once approved, the scheduled programme is visible to DEASP and the public (if the option to make visible to the public is selected), and applications/referrals are enabled.

An applicant may self-refer, either online or in person, and at that point they are required to provide basic details in order to enable communication to occur. The system is capable of recording the applicant's progress through the admissions process ie their attendance and success or otherwise at interviews, assessments, etc, and ultimately whether their application has been successful, unsuccessful, or withdrawn. Once a learner has been referred to a particular course by their DEASP Case Officer, they will be subject to the usual LOETB Admissions processes, and their Case Officer can track their progress through the Admissions Process for the purpose of ensuring that their client has participated in the process.

If the application is successful, the learner's start date is recorded – this is very important in some instances as it is linked to payments systems (learners in receipt of a trainee allowance must be recorded as started on PLSS for successful processing of trainee payments). Regardless of when a learner leaves a course (either at the natural end of the course, or prematurely), their finishing date and details of their status upon cessation is recorded, including certification and completion outcomes. It also allows for an XML file with the Learner's details and Course Modules to be created and uploaded to the QQI Business System (QBS).

#### 2.8.1.2 Other Data Management Systems

We use other data management systems, such as the QQI Business System (QBS) used by FET Centres and Services to enter learners for certification, and the RCCRS (Results Capture and Certification Request System), which is used to upload results from training programmes on to the QBS. The training services also use the AppClient Management System for apprenticeship programmes and SAP for administration and reporting purposes.

A range of information storage/document repository systems are in place, both to address current and future as well as legacy needs. The Staff Section of our website is available to all FET teaching staff and hosts the latest versions of programme and module descriptors, assessment resources, and all templates and policies which

have been revised since amalgamations. A Quality Assurance Sharepoint site is being developed which is intended to replace the Staff Resources Section of the website as all staff will have access to it once logged into their Office 365 account.

### 2.8.2 Evaluation

The PLSS system is a fantastic resource for all ETBs. Centre and Service Managers and their staff have adapted to using the system very well. SOLAS (and the FMT) uses the information provided on PLSS as a means of collecting information relating to learner intake, learner retention, completion and certification outcomes. This information is very useful. However, when a Centre or Service Manager is finishing a learner on PLSS, it is often too soon to be able to provide information on outcomes relating to progression to employment or to another FET or HE course. Therefore, the data gathered by SOLAS soon after the end date of a course is not always a true reflection of the outcomes of the course.

Learner data is entered onto PLSS based on the information provided by learners on their Learner Detail Form. Often, learners don't complete the form fully – either by choice, due to lack of understanding of the questions, or because they do not understand why such information is required. This leads to a lack of important information which helps to inform us and SOLAS about the profile of learners that avail of FET Services. FET Centre and Service staff are requested to encourage the full completion of Learner Detail Forms, and the level of data gaps has decreased- however, it still remains an issue.

We make very good use of PLSS as a tool for communicating information to learners via text and email. The messaging service has been particularly useful during the COVID-19 Pandemic as a means of communicating information in relation to assessments, changes timetables, online learning etc.

As FET Centre and Service staff have become increasingly more experienced in using Office 365 applications, it is most appropriate that these applications are used as an effective means of storing and communicating information in a consistent way. Providing information in different formats on different platforms gives rise to the potential for inconsistent information being circulated. The Sharepoint application should be developed to provide up-to-date information to those that need it.

### 2.8.3 Conclusion

The systems available to store and manage information aid management and staff in the performance of their roles and in the collection of important data. Staff are adequately trained on the systems, and support is provided by the QA Support Service on request.

#### Identified Actions

- Develop Sharepoint site for QA resources
- Proactively address data gaps on PLSS

## 2.9 Public Information and Communications

### 2.9.1 Description

#### 2.9.1.1 Communications via Social Media and Printed Publications

The LOETB website ([www.loetb.ie](http://www.loetb.ie)) provides information on the range of services available to learners, including links to its various FET Centres and Services, and contact details. A range of information is made publicly available on the website. This includes the Statement of Strategy, service plans, financial statements and a range of policies, including QA-related policies.

In addition to the website, some FET centres have their own websites, in which they provide information about courses, admissions criteria, progression opportunities etc. Many of the centres run open days at which the public can get information on the range of courses offered, and many centres also publish details of courses in the local media, and through leafleting in the local community. We also have a strong social media presence, on both Facebook and Twitter, where course information is regularly posted.

All FET courses are scheduled on the National Course Calendar, and this information is made publicly available through the FETCH website ([www.fetchcourses.ie](http://www.fetchcourses.ie)). This contains a range of information such as entry requirements, target award, modules included, scheduling, work experience requirements, centre facilities etc. Relevant staff members in the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (DEASP) are able to access the information contained on the FETCH website and can electronically refer their clients to a particular course as they deem appropriate.

The FET Service invests significant time and resources into ensuring that relevant and timely information is provided to the public about its programmes and services. Any promotional material (online or print) designed at centre or service level must be approved by the QA Support Service prior to publication.

- Annual Course Brochure
- Social Media: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn
- Local media: Newspapers and radio
- Promotional videos
- Guidance information

The QA Support Service currently maintains responsibility for providing relevant course information on social media platforms, including Facebook and Twitter. Our Social Media Policy is in place, including a requirement for login details for all social media platforms to be provided to the IT Department at time of setting up so that accounts can be accessed and shut down in the event of any inappropriate access to the accounts. A process for communicating information via our social media platforms has been established. These measures ensure that accurate, appropriate and timely information is provided, and safeguards against any activity which may damage the reputation of LOETB or any of its schools, Centres or Services.

#### 2.9.1.2 FET Information Hubs

In 2021, we will open an 'Information Hub' in Tullamore and Portlaoise for potential learners to enquire about, or apply for, further education and training courses and to get advice from the Adult Guidance Service who are based on site. It had been intended to open the Information Hub in Portlaoise in 2020 but the development has been delayed due to the Pandemic. The premises will provide a modern environment that will allow users to

self-access information on courses or to receive assistance on the kind of course that's right for them. In 2019 in Laois, over 330 people engaged with the Adult Guidance for the first time, with the service facilitating another 500 appointments for existing clients. Therefore, the potential is apparent for us to capitalise on a local need for this service by way of providing a more visible presence. The locations of the hubs are very convenient for local enterprises to drop in and learn what training and education supports are available for their employees, or to arrange a visit from our Employer Services Team. It is hoped that the Portlaoise facility will open in the second quarter of 2021.

### 2.9.2 Evaluation

Based on feedback from staff, while they believe that the public perception of our Centres and Services is positive or very positive, a lot were of the opinion that there isn't a strong awareness in local communities about what Centres and Services have to offer. *"Those that know what we do may have a positive perception, but I feel there are huge numbers in both Tullamore & Portlaoise who have no idea about what is on offer."*

Staff indicated that while word of mouth is the most effective promotional tool, updating of websites, a greater effort on social media, and more marketing in local communities is also important. The use of testimonials from past learners who have successfully progressed from our Centres and Services, either to employment or to FET/HE, was also suggested. *"For those who come through successfully and 'make it' we need to create lots and lots of short snappy Instagram/TicTok videos from all courses. Spread the good word of LOETB. I can think of 2 or 3 of my past learners who would happily do a short video."*

Feedback from learner surveys appears to support the opinions provided by staff which indicates that word of mouth and promotional information are the most effective tools to provide information to the public about what LOETB has to offer. Learners were asked in the survey about how they became aware of the course that they are currently doing. 37% of learners at Levels 1 to 3 that responded heard about their course from a friend or family member and 27% became aware of the course through social media, FETCH website or through the Course Brochure. Responses from learners on courses at Levels 4 to 6 were similar, with 27% hearing from a friend or family member, and 45% learning about the course from social media, FETCH website or the course brochure.

### 2.9.3 Conclusion

LOETB have received sanction to appoint a Communications Officer, who commenced the role in January 2021. The Communications Officer will be dedicated to promoting the LOETB brand and will have responsibility for maintaining the LOETB website, social media pages and publications to ensure that we are communicating effectively with its external stakeholders. The Communications Officer will support FET Centres and Services to ensure that provision is promoted effectively and that the excellent work of the FET Service is made known to the general public.

The planned establishment of the FET Information Hubs in Tullamore and Portlaoise will be an excellent way of increasing the level of interaction with the general public. The Portlaoise Hub is located in the centre of the town, where there is a lot of footfall, and therefore will be very accessible to people shopping in the main county town who may have general or specific queries.



## Identified Actions

- Establish role of Communications Officer
- Gather testimonials from past learners to aid promotion of FET Centres and Services
- Open FET Information Hubs in Tullamore and Portlaoise

## CHAPTER 3: OBJECTIVE 2: TEACHING, LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT

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### 3.1 The Learning Environment

#### 3.1.1 Description

##### 3.1.1.1 Moodle

Moodle is available to ETBs nationally through SOLAS, and up to 2020, was being introduced to FET Centres on an incremental basis. Prior to the Pandemic, the main motivation for teaching staff to use Moodle was to gain access to the similarity-checking software that had been integrated into the Moodle platform. Teaching staff were keen to find an effective mechanism of detecting plagiarism as it has become more common in recent years.

When FET Centres and Services were forced to close in March due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, a need was identified for a means to hold online exams to replace traditional written exams. Moodle was identified as the most reliable option available to the Centres at the time. Almost 100 online exams took place using Moodle between April and July 2020 while FET Centres were closed. A mammoth task of setting up learners and creating exams on Moodle was completed by the QA Support Service staff, and learners were then supported to ensure they could overcome issues with logging in, etc.

At the start of the new academic year 2020/2021, it was decided that all Level 5 and 6 courses should use Moodle from the start of the year. The reason for this was to ensure continuity in the event of further lockdowns. This necessitated setting up of user accounts for all Levels 5 and 6 learners and teaching staff, and a huge amount of training and support provided to enable teachers to upload their course content and assessments, and for learners to be able to navigate the system. Since September 2020, over 1,200 learner Moodle accounts have been set up and are now in use.

It was also decided that all written examinations would now become online exams, conducted on Moodle - the intention was that learners could still complete the exams in the FET Centre, but the exam would be conducted online. This meant that if there was another lockdown, there would be less panic – as learners would be comfortable with Moodle and may have already completed an exam on that platform so it wouldn't represent a major change or cause any extra stress. During the first term of the new academic year, Laois and Offaly experienced two different lockdowns – a localised lockdown specific to Laois, Offaly and Kildare, and a national lockdown in November. The preparation work that was done in having everybody set up, trained and confident on Moodle in September was very worthwhile as course delivery, and assessment, could carry on relatively seamlessly.

##### 3.1.1.2 Induction

Our Learner Information and Communications sub-group completed a very comprehensive project over two academic years aimed at standardising the approach to Learner Induction on FET programmes. The group was made up of staff members from a range of different roles – Guidance, QA, Recruitment, Centres and Services –

and therefore, explored all aspects of the induction process from different perspectives. A really positive outcome of the project has been the publication of an animated video which provides learners with a general overview of the information they should know when starting a programme, and policies that are common to all programmes. The group also developed a PowerPoint presentation template for Centres and Services to use when providing course-specific and centre-specific information to new learners. The project provided an opportunity for Centre and Service staff to become more aware of the nature of information that learners require, and the need for clear unambiguous language to be used in communicating with learners. The induction sessions were piloted on specific courses and their effectiveness was evaluated via learner and teacher surveys. Feedback was excellent, as learners were satisfied that they were receiving information in a timely manner, and teachers were satisfied that the information provided at induction stage helped to prepare learners for the course.

### 3.1.1.3 Improved Facilities

Facilities in FET Centres have been significantly improved in recent years. In 2018, Centre Managers were asked to identify what their Centre needed in terms of improvement of facilities, infrastructure, IT equipment, etc. The needs were addressed according to their priority in line with funding availability. FET Centres have benefitted from new windows and doors, new computer lab and subject-specific equipment, improved canteen facilities, car parking, more comfortable facilities, etc. A similar audit of facilities will be undertaken in 2021, to identify the priority areas for development for the coming years.

FET Centres reopened to learners in September 2020 following a prolonged closure due to the COVID-19 Pandemic. On their return, learners were reassured of their safety because of the very clear and specific provisions and procedures in place to implement social distancing and maintenance of hygienic and safe conditions for all staff and learners. This has made learners feel very safe and assured in returning to learning during what is a very difficult time for everyone.

## 3.1.2 Evaluation

### 3.1.2.1 Moodle

Learners have adapted very well to using Moodle as part of their everyday learning. As it is used for all of their modules, they have become very familiar with the system and appear to be confident in using it. It is too early to fully evaluate learners' satisfaction with the approach of using Moodle, as learners have only completed one semester and haven't been fully assessed in their modules yet. However, the feedback so far indicates that the learners have responded well to it.

### 3.1.2.2 Learner Feedback / AONTAS Learner Forum

When surveyed about learner experiences, 100% of teaching staff at Levels 1-3 and 89% of teaching staff at Levels 4 to 6 are of the view that learners in their Centre/Service enjoy a positive learning experience. This was confirmed by the very positive feedback from learners that responded to a similar question in their survey. The average rating from learners on their experience to date on the course was 4.63 out of 5 from learners at Levels 1 to 3 and 4.28 out of 5 from learners at Levels 4 to 6.

*"I really love every aspect of the course. I find it very interesting The tutor is very helpful and everyone is included and treated with respect, irrespective of their learning ability. Nobody is made to feel different."*

*"The teacher has made this an enjoyable experience so far. Easy to approach and speak to, and always willing to explain if someone doesn't understand. Even with all the assignments she makes sure we have all the information and we can always ask for more help."*

*"I think both the tutors are absolutely excellent! They are both very knowledgeable, are very nice and are also really approachable. They go that extra mile as they really want us to do well in the course and to become competent Healthcare workers. They honestly really make learning a joy and I always look forward to going into class! I'm really enjoying the course thanks to them. "*

In December 2020, AONTAS conducted three online Learner Forum events with our learners at all levels. Forty learners participated in the sessions. The feedback in relation to learner experiences was extremely positive, particularly their experiences during the Pandemic. Although learners found the abrupt transition to remote learning challenging, overall, they praised the staff, particularly their tutors, for being supportive and available. Learners across all levels felt that their tutors were patient, communicative, and stayed in touch with them during the period of remote learning. One learner stated, *"our teachers have to be commended. They have been so available to us"*. Others boasted that they *"couldn't speak highly enough"* of their tutors. In particular, the one-to-one support tutors provided was appreciated, with one learner sharing that *"even the silliest question – they make you feel like it's the most important question they have heard all day"*. Learners also described how their tutors were supportive of their mental health and wellbeing. One learner explained how *"the tutor never shamed people who didn't turn-up online, or who 'disappeared' during classes"*. These interactions made a significant difference to the overall learning experience. These findings are validated even further by the Learner Survey where nearly 90% of learners who gave applicable responses to the survey question on staff supports answered that they were either "very satisfied" or "satisfied" with the staff support they had received. One survey respondent commented that staff were, *"excellent, from the teachers to the school admin staff"*.

### 3.1.2.3 Facilities

Overall, learners were satisfied or very satisfied with the facilities and services. The data suggests that the possible areas for improvement are the canteen, or food and drink facilities, and the sports and recreation

facilities. Twenty-two out of 64 valid responses (i.e. 34%) indicated that learners were not satisfied with the canteen or food and drink facilities. Similarly, 21 out of 38 valid responses (i.e., 55%) pointed out that they were not satisfied with the sports and recreation facilities. In addition, full-time learners were less likely to be satisfied with the computer rooms in their centres than part-time learners, though the number of non-satisfactions was still relatively low. The chart below illustrates responses to “How satisfied were you with the computer rooms in your centre?” per full-time / part-time group.



### 3.1.3 Conclusion

The introduction of Moodle onto all Level 5 and 6 programmes seems to be progressing well, and has been well received by learners so far. Further evaluation is required at the end of the academic year so that any issues identified can be addressed.

The feedback from learners in relation to their experience so far on a FET programme is excellent – and is testament to the hard work and dedication of FET Centre and Service management and staff. The FET Service is very fortunate to have a team of staff who always put the welfare of learners to the forefront.

Feedback in relation to facilities is also positive. It should be noted that canteen facilities have been curtailed during the Pandemic to reduce the risk of spread of infection. However, there is still some potential to improve facilities in specific Centres, which will be a focus in 2021.

#### Identified Actions

- Evaluate learner (and teacher) experiences of using Moodle at end of academic year
- Conduct a follow-up audit of facilities to identify projects for next three years

## 3.2 Assessment of Learners

### 3.2.1 Description

#### 3.2.1.1 Assessment to Support Standards Based on Learning Outcomes

In module descriptors used in FET Centres, and the Assessment Instrument Specifications (AISs) used on former FAS Training programmes, assessments are mapped to the individual learning outcomes as published in the QQI component specifications. These learning outcomes are reflected in the assessment guidelines and marking sheets, so that learners are marked on their achievement of the learning outcomes. Assessments leading to non-QQI awards are generally developed by the awarding body. Centres that provide certification from other providers (eg. IBTAC) manage their own QA and Certification arrangements. The QA Support Service holds a record of the various agreements that are in place with these awarding bodies and offers support in invigilation of assessment events.

#### 3.2.1.2 Assessment to Support Effective Teaching and Learning

Formative and summative feedback, which occurs during and after assessment tasks, are crucial elements of effective teaching and learning. The different QA agreements in operation have different procedures for ensuring it occurs, and for documenting it, but the IV process monitors that it takes place. Currently there is no systematic procedure across all FET Centres and Services for feedback to be given on summative assessments that take place at the end of the course, such as the final exam.

The IV/EA/RAP processes provide an opportunity to reflect on the effectiveness of teaching through a review of the assessment submitted for certification, grades achieved, and whether they were in line with the national standard etc. Identification of any issues arising, allows for CPD to be put into place to ensure effective teaching and learning in the future.

#### 3.2.1.3 QQI Assessment Processes

Teaching staff are required to prepare assessment plans/schedules to ensure that they deliver the programme, and that the learners have the opportunity to complete all the required assessments in the time allocated for the delivery of the course. The assessment plans/schedules are included in an accompanying Assessor Pack which is monitored as part of the Internal Verification process. There is a common template for assessment plans/schedules.

The QA Department have devised a common Assessment Checklist which is used by teaching staff (the Checklist varies slightly depending on whether assessment was locally devised or based on AIS). The purpose of the checklist is to ensure that all teaching staff submit the documentation that is required for IV, EA and RAP processes with the learner assessment material. The checklist requires the teachers/tutors to present the information in a prescribed format to ensure consistency and to reduce the amount of time wasted in seeking this information at various stages of the process. All FET Centres and Services are provided with a calendar of dates for the relevant certification periods at the start of each academic year, so that assessment plans can be compiled in accordance with deadlines.

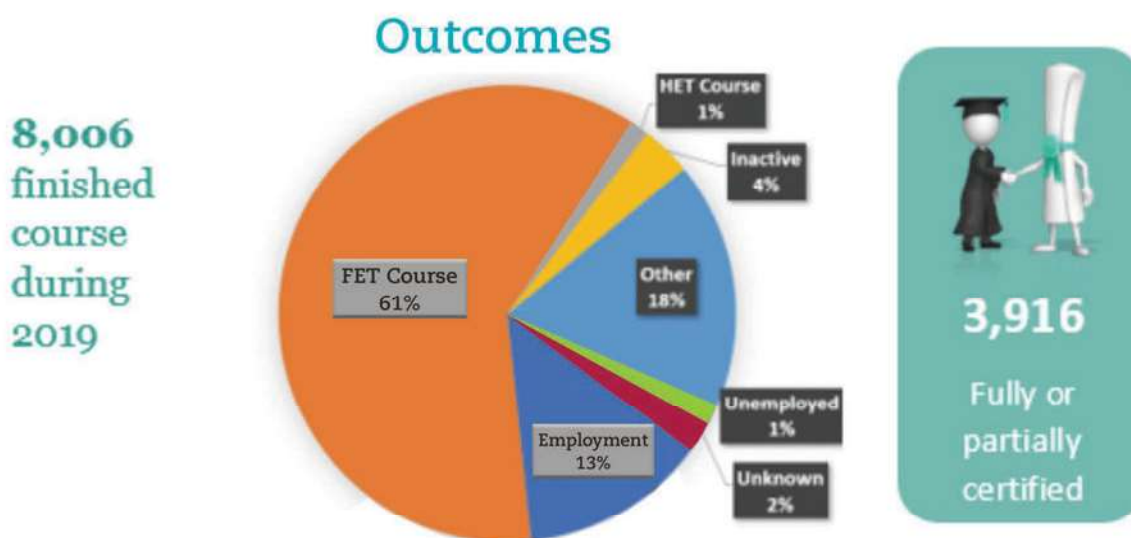
Learners are provided with Assessment Briefs appropriate to the NFQ level for all assessments they are asked to undertake. These include details of the assessment task at hand, criteria, marking schemes and deadlines,

where appropriate. Currently, in FET Centres, teachers and tutors are expected to devise their own Assessment Briefs and Marking Scheme based on the Guidelines for Assessment, Assessment Criteria and Marking Sheet provided in module descriptors. Monitoring of those Assessment Briefs currently varies across centres. In some centres, briefs are reviewed by the course coordinators or the centre QQI coordinator. In other centres, a department or programme team may either devise briefs communally, or they may review briefs that have been developed individually. Where it occurs, the sharing, or common development of Assessment Briefs facilitates the maintenance of standards across the centre.

Assessments delivered on training programmes use the standardised Assessment Instrument Specifications (AISs) for each module, which include briefs, marking schemes and other documentation for all assessment instruments, which are issued by the QA Support Service. These AISs originated from SOLAS. As quite some time has passed since their development, some have become quite outdated and in need of review. The QA Support Service and the relevant Training Officers have commenced a process of providing training to contract training company staff and second providers in brief writing, with a view to allowing them to devise their own Assessment Briefs and Marking Schemes. Once written, we will employ the services of a relevant subject matter expert to evaluate the assessment materials prior to the delivery and assessment of the module. This first started when needs were identified for modules for which AISs didn't exist but has expanded further into modules where AISs have become outdated and unworkable. The process is being approached incrementally and will take some time to establish fully.

### 3.2.1.4 Assessment Procedures

An ETBI Assessment Procedures Working Group, made up of FESS staff and QA personnel from a range of ETBs, developed a set of common procedures in 2017/2018. Framework documents in the areas of Assessment Deadlines, Reasonable Accommodation, Compassionate Consideration, Assessment Malpractice, Assessment Security and Storage, and Exam Regulations were developed and made available to ETBs. It was then up to each ETB whether to adopt them as they were, or to adapt them for their own use. We made some small amendments to some of the policies to allow for a smoother implementation phase at local level. Changes made mostly related to titles and roles to allow for a range of different contexts.



The statistics presented in the infographic above relate to completion and certification rates in 2019

### 3.2.2 Evaluation

Assessors in FET Centres are competent and confident in the development of locally devised assessments which ensure that learners have the opportunity to demonstrate evidence of achievement of learning outcomes. Feedback from External Authenticators in each certification round and contributes to planning for PD and QA topic-specific briefing events, demonstrating our ethos of continuous improvement that exists in FET Centres and Services.

The introduction of locally-devised assessments on training programmes where traditionally AISs were used will be a gradual process and will require significant resources in terms of time and expertise. The process will be overseen by the relevant QA Officers and support will be provided throughout. The completion of this process will lead to a much more robust assessment process where we can be fully confident in the integrity and security of assessments.

The implementation of Assessment Procedures is a gradual process but is working well. Support is provided by QA staff members. The inclusion of teaching staff members on the Policy Development and Review Groups will ensure that teaching staff are fully consulted with, and therefore better understand the rationale for specific assessment policies and procedures.

### 3.2.3 Conclusion

The main body of work that needs to be tackled in relation to Assessment is the replacement of AISs on training programmes with locally-devised assessments. This is a huge task which should be approached incrementally, on a programme by programme basis. The schedule for replacement of AISs should be on the basis of programmes that are most commonly used, and level of obsolescence of current AISs.

#### Identified Actions

- Devise schedule for replacement of AISs with locally devised assessments
- Continue to provide PD and support to all teaching staff to ensure that assessments are relevant and appropriate



## 3.3 Supports for Learners

### 3.3.1 Description

#### 3.3.1.1 Reasonable Accommodation and Learning Support

Every reasonable effort is made to support learners with difficulties, either before admission, or once they have started on the programme. Learners are encouraged, both verbally and through the PLSS Learner Detail Form, upon application for admission, to disclose whether they have any special needs or disabilities, in order that appropriate supports or reasonable accommodations may be put in place. The various assessments that are used as part of the admissions processes for FET programmes also help to identify learner support needs. Where such a disclosure is made, an appropriate staff member will meet the learner to discuss the nature of the supports that may be required. The nature of the supports may involve application for a HEA grant in the context of a PLC student (e.g. for laptop, sign language interpreter etc.) and other reasonable accommodations, such as extra time in an exam.

All staff are aware of our Reasonable Accommodation Policy, and the provisions in relation to Reasonable Accommodation are explained in detail to learners at the Induction stage. LOETB engages with stakeholders to provide relevant specialist supports for all learners, including those with a disability. Learners are supported to access the Fund for Students with Disabilities. We provide a range of IT supports for learners with disabilities. The supports needed will be agreed in consultation with the learner, and could include one-to-one learning supports around additional literacy, or numeracy/mathematical needs, or other additional tutoring where this may be required.

The disclosure by a learner of a learning difficulty or disability will not affect their application for a particular programme – rather, it enables supports to be put in place at an early stage to try to prevent difficulties arising throughout the course. However, it is acknowledged that not all support needs may be able to be met within the physical, financial, and staffing restrictions within which the Centre/Service and LOETB must operate.

#### 3.3.1.2 Support for Apprentices

LOETB's Senior Training Advisors have responsibility for over 300 trainees that are in the process of completing apprenticeships (both traditional Craft Apprenticeships and post-2016 Apprenticeships) with Laois and Offaly employers. In 2018, we commenced delivery of Phase 2 of the Electrical Apprenticeship in Mountrath and Tullamore. Feedback from the Instructors on the Electrical programmes, and from the Senior Training Advisors, indicates that a significant number of apprentices that are engaged on apprenticeship programmes locally are struggling with the training programmes, in particular from a literacy, numeracy and study skills point of view. As a result, we have organised, through its Adult Literacy service, to provide additional supports to those apprentices through the provision of Maths and English classes. The aim of this initiative is to support apprentices on their journeys to successfully complete all phases of their apprenticeship.

#### 3.3.1.3 Expansion of Guidance Team

LOETB's AEGIS provides guidance support to learners and to members of the public. The range of supports available include:

- Accurate information: opportunities available for engaging in full or part time programmes, how to apply

- Up to date information on financial supports available when returning to education or training eg SUSI, BTEA etc
- Opportunity to complete a range of assessments including interest inventories and personality based assessments or exploration of interests and aptitudes using guidance tools
- Assistance with application forms, e.g. FETCH courses, CAO etc.

Following the transfer of responsibility for training services to LOETB in 2016, the scope and range of guidance support needs increased significantly. Furthermore, the need for guidance support for learners at lower levels became even more apparent. This meant that the Guidance Service was under considerable pressure to meet demand. While extra Guidance teachers were employed to specific centres, there was a specific need for extra Guidance Counsellors in AEGIS to provide a quality service to both learners and to the general public. Thankfully, in August 2020, sanction was received for two full-time Guidance Counsellors to be appointed to AEGIS. The new staff members commenced their roles in late 2020. The expansion of the Guidance team will undoubtedly lead to an enhancement of learner supports within the FET Service.

#### 3.3.1.4 IT Supports for Learners

All learners are provided with a LOETB Office 365 account which includes access to their own email address, and to a range of applications that will aid them to participate on their course. This account provides them with the facility to store their coursework securely via OneDrive, which reduces the risk of losing files which had been an issue when learners were using USB memory keys and common drives in FET Centres. Prior to the onset of the COVID-19 Pandemic, access to Office 365 accounts was much more limited but the centre closures identified a need for universal access to accounts for learners to aid online and blended learning.

When online learning became a necessity in March 2020, it emerged that a lot of learners did not have access to, or exclusive access to, an IT device to enable them to participate in online learning. Some learners had no device at all, while others only had access to a device that was shared amongst family members (who were also engaging in online learning in school, FET or HE, or who needed the device to continue to work from home). At the time, some Centres and Services had access to some spare devices that were made available on a temporary basis to those most in need, but a more formal arrangement was required. In September 2020, LOETB formalised a Laptop Loan Policy and procured a significant number of devices to make available to learners under the conditions of the policy.

### 3.3.2 Evaluation

#### 3.3.2.1 Guidance Support

The feedback from learners that participated in the AONTAS Learner Forum and related survey was highly complementary of the support provided to learners. For some Level 5 learners, this service has been crucial to their success in learning remotely during COVID-19. Similar to level 5 learners, learners at level 6 also described benefiting from the adult guidance service at their centres. One learner shared, of the guidance counsellor, that *“you know you can talk to her, she’s always there in the background”*. Another learner described guidance staff as very helpful and supportive, stating, *“she would point you in the right direction, give her professional opinion”*. This open culture within guidance made the service invaluable to learners during COVID-19 when these general supports were needed.

*“The career guidance has been exceptional. I ring her and she is there. She took so much time to help me come up with a plan for my future. I can’t express how grateful I am. She helped me get on the course. Before I started this course, I had lost my job. It was February, just before COVID-19, and I was so lost, until I spoke to her”.*

### 3.3.2.2 Disability Supports

Feedback provided by learners during the AONTAS Learner Forum would suggest that teachers are not always aware of the supports that can and should be available to FET learners. Learners felt that, while their tutors were available and supportive, *“there is a need for improvement with learning supports”* for learners with disabilities and learning difficulties. One learner shared that they discussed their learning disability with the tutors, but felt it was not acknowledged or understood. Learners would like there to be greater acknowledgement of learning disabilities, such as dyslexia, and for additional learning supports, such as notes on course content, to be provided to learners. Learners would also like information on the disability supports available to be more widely shared, with one learner concluding that *“these supports need to be visible”*. Based on this feedback, there is a need for information about disability supports to be made more available to both teaching staff and learners.

### 3.3.3 Conclusion

Our learners benefit from a broad range of supports, from literacy and numeracy support, to guidance and IT supports. The support provided by the Guidance Service appears to be a key component in supporting learners at all levels. With the recent expansion of the Guidance team, it is important that the level of support offered to learners is consistent across the service so that all learners can benefit.

A greater focus is perhaps required on raising awareness amongst teaching staff of the incidence of disability support needs, and the range of support options that are available to learners. Often, learners depend on their individual teacher to provide them with such information and may not be proactive in seeking support elsewhere so it is imperative that teachers have the information and make it available to learners as part of induction and throughout the course.

#### Identified Actions

- Raise awareness amongst staff of disability supports available to learners

## CHAPTER 4: OBJECTIVE 3: SELF-EVALUATION, MONITORING AND REVIEW

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### 4.1 Self-Evaluation, Monitoring and Review

#### 4.1.1 Description

##### 4.1.1.1 Self-Evaluation

Self-evaluations were conducted by FET Centre and Service Managers on a cyclical basis in the past, but this practice has dwindled over the past couple of years. Currently, the main form of evaluation is the mid- and end-of-course evaluation, but that is not as systematic as a formal self-evaluation, does not typically result in an improvement report, and is not fed back to ETB-level. The Executive Self-Evaluation Report in 2017, and subsequent Quality Improvement Plans (2018, 2019 and 2020) was the first systematic self-evaluation to be undertaken at ETB level, and as such, has been a very useful tool in identifying key areas of improvement to be focused on.

##### 4.1.1.2 Monitoring of FET Provision

On Contract Training programmes, where a course is delivered by contracted trainers, very tight monitoring procedures are in place; contracted trainers are monitored regularly on each programme by the relevant ETB Training Officer, and training companies' performances are measured against specific Key Performance Indicators.

Monitoring of Community Training programmes (STP, LTI and CTC) courses are conducted mid-course and at the end of course, by the relevant Training Officer. Currently, courses in FET Centres are monitored at centre-level, but practices differ widely from centre to centre. It usually takes place as part of a mid-course and end-of-course evaluation. However, course coordinators have responsibility for managing a course on a daily basis; whilst this is not considered monitoring per se, it does allow issues to be identified quickly and to be acted upon, and further supports to be put into place, should these be necessary. The RAP meeting provides an opportunity for Centre Managers and FMT to monitor results and issues arising from that particular assessment period. RAP meetings are convened, and minutes are recorded, by the relevant QA Officer, which facilitates the identification of long-term trends.

There is currently no common approach to monitoring, and it is not enforced at ETB level. The QA Support Service have compiled documents which identify the responsibilities of teaching staff and of centre managers in relation to quality assurance. Currently, any information gathered as part of the monitoring process stays at centre level, and that information is not fed back to ETB level.

#### 4.1.2 Evaluation

##### 4.1.2.1 Evaluation of Integrated FET Centre Model

The integrated FET Centre Model has been implemented in some FET Centres for approximately three years.

While it appears that this model is working very well, and is leading to increased levels of internal progression and improved learner supports, perhaps an evaluation of the effectiveness of the model needs to be conducted by an external facilitator. This would present an opportunity to identify the strengths and challenges associated with the model, and how we can further improve the learner experience.

#### 4.1.2.2 Review of Approach to Monitoring

Since we assumed responsibility for former FÁS training services, monitoring has been conducted as per the original TQAS documentation. While the QA Support Service has worked with second providers and contract training companies to revise several TQAS documents, the monitoring documentation has not changed. This documentation is outdated, and requires an update in order to better reflect the objectives of the monitoring process as identified by the QA Support Service, given the benefit of experience of using the current documentation for almost five years. Once updated, the documentation should be communicated to the second providers and training companies so that they are aware of our expectations of them in relation to the monitoring function.

#### 4.1.3 Conclusion

Our ethos of continuous improvement is such that the practice of regular self-evaluation and monitoring is welcomed. While the practice of self-evaluation of FET programmes has dwindled in recent years, LOETB is very enthusiastic about the idea of evaluating FET activity on a macro level in order to ensure that infrastructures are in place to facilitate improved learner experiences and outcomes.

The review of monitoring procedures and documentation for second providers and contract training companies is a positive step and should not be interpreted as a lack of trust in those providers. It is important to ensure that the providers are aware of our expectations and share our common goals, and monitoring is one way of ensuring that this is reflected in practice.

#### Identified Actions

- Evaluate the effectiveness of integrated FET Centre model
- Review documentation and practices in relation to monitoring of second providers and contract training companies

## 4.2 Programme Monitoring and Review

### 4.2.1 Description

#### 4.2.1.1 Programme / Course Review

Courses are reviewed at the end-of-course evaluation at Centre/Service level. Such reviews provide an opportunity to review assessment loads, assessment methods, and other aspects of course delivery, and, where necessary, amend these based on learner and staff feedback. These reviews also provide an opportunity for past module options to be considered and, if appropriate, new module options to be identified. The modular nature of the current ETB programme development model allows for modules to be changed from one iteration of the course to the next, so as to respond quickly to changing local employment needs or learner demographics. If a required module is not on the programme descriptor, a request can currently be made to the QA Support Service to have it included to the programme under the 20% rule.

#### 4.2.1.2 Healthcare Review

In 2018, we initiated a comprehensive review of provision of further education and training in the area of Healthcare. The Healthcare Review group was coordinated by a QA Officer and included healthcare teaching staff from the FET Centres and Services, and an external subject matter expert who compiled the report and recommendations. The group aimed to compile recommendations aimed at ensuring consistency and appropriate standards in the delivery and assessment of Healthcare programmes, to include best practice in delivery, and in assessment. The recommendations of the group are outlined below.

#### Short-term Recommendations:

1	Establish a Healthcare teacher/ tutor Community of Practice directed / supported by the healthcare review group.
2	Develop an agreed Scheme of Work to succinctly reflect both the assessment standards of the major award and its delivery schedule/outline. Supplementary Schemes of Work would then be designed to capture the learning criteria standards and grading criteria for each individual component (module).
3	Review assessment formats and weightings within selected modules and if necessary recommend changes in these areas for review through the Programme Approval Group.
4	Develop sample Assessor Packs with standardised layout of Assessment Briefs
5	Develop Healthcare-Programme Specific Induction Programme for learners to allow Teachers/Tutors to emphasise the priority areas relating to learning standards and expectations of participation and completion on healthcare programmes.
6	LOETB investment in dedicated, resourced healthcare skills assessment rooms that can be made accessible to all providers of healthcare courses where local venue resources may not be sufficient.

**Medium-term Recommendations:**

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1 | Review healthcare modules to determine where there is overlap in learning criteria and outcomes. Provide training to teaching staff on how to integrate modules for assessment and delivery. Establish a best practice schedule, mapping the ideal sequence of assessments for the most commonly offered healthcare modules. Reflect this in the overarching Scheme of Work. |
| 2 | Application process: Minimum standards in academic and vocational suitability for healthcare courses should be determined and applied consistently across all centres.   |
| 3 | Develop a dedicated workbook and Learner Passport/Work Experience Competency document. The workbook would 'house' a range of learning activities and tasks as well as assessment briefs, guidelines and marking criteria. The 'Learner Passport' would document and endorse learner completions of assessment, module success and competency.                                |

Several of the Recommendations have already been implemented and a plan is in place for implementation of others. The implementation has been delayed slightly by FET Centre Closures caused by the COVID-19 Pandemic. The Healthcare Teachers/Tutors COP will resume as soon as possible. At the moment, teaching staff are focused on the delivery of essential skills to learners to prepare them for the healthcare industry.

**4.2.1.3 Apprenticeship Programme Board**

We will establish a Programme Board for the Scaffolding Apprenticeship, in line with the Governance Structure, now that the Scaffolding programme has been officially validated. The Programme Board will be chaired by the Programme Manager.

**4.2.1.4 Review of Module Descriptors**

Where a teaching staff member identifies that there are issues with a module descriptor, this is relayed to the QA Support Service. In the case of a minor issue (typing error etc.), this can be corrected quickly. Where a major issue is identified which requires attention, all teaching staff members who are involved in delivery of the module are consulted with to rectify the issue. The proposed change goes to FMT for approval. A document control process is in place with respect to all Programme and Module Descriptors. The Staff Resources section of our website always has the latest version of a given descriptor, and any changes are communicated as they occur by email to FET Centres and Services for circulation to the relevant teaching staff.

**4.2.1.5 Review of Assessment Instrument Specifications (AISs)**

Issues identified with an AIS are logged by the QA Support Service. Depending on the module in question and how often it is used, changes may be made to the AIS. Most AISs are quite outdated and in need of a comprehensive review. In late 2019, the QA Support Service, with the assistance of an experienced external External Authenticator, commenced the process of reviewing the four most commonly used AISs at Level 4 – namely Work Experience, IT Skills, Communications and Mathematics. These modules are delivered and assessed on CTC, NLN, and LTI programmes at a minimum, and on other training programmes from time to time.

The original plan to populate the AIS with more up-to-date tasks and materials was a sound one based on the problems identified. The biggest perceived problem was that the outdated tasks and approach were seriously affecting the quality of the overall module. Learners were deriving little value from it, and it was likely frustrating for tutors to deliver. Theoretically, updating the tasks by replacing them with good-quality

assignments that had been tried and tested by other tutors should have solved the problem, at least in part. However, given that the main issues with the assessments were that the content had become outdated, it became clear that merely updating the AISs would lead to the same issue of obsolescence arising at a later date. As a result, it was decided that the QA Support Service and the relevant Training Officers would commence a process of allowing contract training company staff and second providers to receive training in, and start the process of, devising their own Assessment Briefs and Marking Schemes. Once written, we will employ the services of a relevant subject matter expert to evaluate the assessment materials prior to the delivery and assessment of the module. This first started when needs were identified for modules for which AISs didn't exist but has expanded further into modules where AISs have become outdated and unworkable. The process is being approached incrementally and will take some time to establish fully.

## 4.2.2 Evaluation

### 4.2.2.1 Programme Review

The Healthcare review carried out by the review team was a very positive step and has yielded several very positive outcomes. Teachers in the healthcare area are now part of a Community of Practice and work together and support each other in this group. The assessment rooms have been developed and extra equipment is being purchased on an ongoing basis, which helps the teachers to provide a more true-to-life experience for learners, leading to the learners being better prepared for work placements. Standardised Assessment Briefs have been developed and teachers are in agreement with assessment criteria to be used which aids in the fair and consistent assessment of learners.

It is intended that the model used to review healthcare provision can be replicated for use in other subject areas. The business and IT area is a popular area of provision across the FET Service and as such, has been identified as a potential area to be reviewed next. Using the learning from the healthcare review, the FET Service is better equipped to plan how the review will be conducted and what resources will be required to execute the review.

### 4.2.2.2 Review of AISs

There is no doubt but that the AISs currently used on training programmes need to be reviewed, or preferably replaced with locally-devised assessments. This is a huge task which should be approached incrementally, on a programme by programme basis. The schedule for replacement of AISs should be on basis of programmes that are most commonly used, and level of obsolescence of current AISs.

## 4.2.3 Conclusion

We are very proactive in reviewing provision and processes. The TQAS documentation review process has commenced with considerable success but there are several other aspects of the TQAS that require attention. This will be a focus of the QA Support Service, in collaboration with Second Providers and Contract training companies for the foreseeable future. Furthermore, the use of AISs to assess learners on training courses requires attention and review. This will be a very important process but due to its scale, will have to be approached incrementally.



## Identified Actions

- Conduct a review of another area of provision e.g. Business and IT
- Review outdated AISs with a view to replacement with locally devised assessments
- Review remaining TQAS documentation

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

### 4.3.1 Description

#### 4.3.1.1 Employers

##### 4.3.1.1.1 Employer Services Team

We have established an Employer Services team to ensure the ETB becomes a key resource for enterprise, working with employers to help them understand their future skills requirements, develop a future pipeline of talent to meet these needs, and provide the up-skilling and the professional and management development support required by their existing employees. Effective employer engagement is a key element of our focus on continuous, pre-emptive workforce development that can help foster and sustain resilient enterprises.

This is facilitated by a single point of contact – initiated for each sector within the region - and a co-ordinated approach to employer engagement, to ensure that enterprise needs are understood and met in an efficient and effective manner. The approach will ensure that FET graduates have the key skills and competencies required to help enterprises operate and flourish. Our contact person will also ensure employers are aware, and avail, of opportunities to engage in a range of FET support activities, including work placement, programme development and quality assurance, to ensure alignment between provision and employer needs. Our Programme Approval Process illustrates a core focus on participation by employers in both the formal and informal exploration and implementation of Programme Development.

Those employing Apprentices in the region are allocated an Authorised Officer who monitors progression of the apprentice throughout the Apprenticeship process and monitors the work-based learning phases; including the employers (mentors) verification process.

We proactively participate in numerous national and regional fora focussed on enterprise support, and involving employers, as well as engaging with sectoral representatives from the CIF to the HSE, and from Grow Remote to the IDA, to initially explore needs and ultimately collaborate on provision that responds to current labour market skills gaps and/or develops the future skills required by the Irish economy and the communities it serves.

##### 4.3.1.1.2 Supporting Businesses in Changing Times

We have been proactive in working to support employers to prepare for the consequences of Brexit on their businesses. We consulted with local employers to develop a five-day programme - Lean Management Green Belt - that promotes greater efficiency and enhanced productivity to counteract some of the effects of Brexit. The programme includes a company project to be completed by participating companies that must implement savings of at least €25,000. This programme also encourages and facilitates sharing of best practice by participating companies - including site visits - and has proven extremely beneficial. Participants are awarded a Green Belt Certificate through Andy Brophy, a locally-based Lean and Innovation Improvement Advisor who has been working in the Lean field for the last 20 years with a diverse range of organisations' including manufacturing, construction, government, services, online, software development, and hospitals. In 2019, We worked with employees from approximately 30 companies across the region to deliver Frontline Lean Leadership workshops, White Belt in LEAN Construction and Operational Excellence. At the early stages of the Pandemic, a bespoke Lean programme was delivered to local hospitality businesses to help them to prepare for reopening their businesses after a period of shutdown.

LOETB and Bord na Móna (BNM) have collaborated on the development of a range of programmes for their staff, most recently a unique Traineeship for BNM employees that supports the company to maximise the carbon capture and storage potential of its peatlands and play a key role in attaining Ireland's climate and biodiversity goals. This programme will aid over 160 BNM employees in sustaining their employment as the company transitions from brown to green. It is designed to provide BNM employees with a skillset that will enable them successfully undertake the work required to restore the bogs of mid-Ireland and ensure they gain transferable skills for employment or further studies in other sectors such as construction, forestry, sustainable agriculture and tourism, and the wider green economy.

#### 4.3.1.2 Contract Training Companies

We work closely with three Contract Training Companies to provide a range of flexible and responsive training programmes that we don't have the staffing allocation or expertise to deliver within existing staffing structures. Contractors are encouraged to be creative and innovative in collaboration with our staff to design programmes which meet identified needs in the Laois/Offaly area. Feedback from contractors during consultation phase indicates that they are satisfied with how LOETB operate in an open-minded and collaborative way to design programmes.

Training Officers with responsibility for Contract Training conduct regular monitoring visits of courses provided by Contract Training companies to monitor the progress of the course. The course may be visited at any stage and as often as required to ensure quality of service provision. During the monitoring visit, the Training Officer establishes learner feedback with regard to training delivery, assessment, premises and equipment, and areas for improvement. The Training Officer also discusses a range of issues with the Tutor/Contractor, including training delivery, QA requirements (Training Officer having linked with QA Officer prior to visit), and individual learner issues.

The Contractor must complete a weekly report which is submitted to the ETB at each invoice period. The report contains details of the daily training activities, any changes to the timetable/syllabus, and the number of learners in training for the reported training period.

#### 4.3.1.3 Higher Education Institutions

We have developed Cooperation Agreements with two local third level institutions – Athlone Institute of Technology (IT) and IT Carlow. A large proportion of our learners that progress to Higher Education from LOETB FET courses tend to progress to either of the two local HE Institutions. In the 2019/2020 academic year, 58% of learners on progression-focused programmes in Tullamore FETC moved on to Higher Education, and 40% of those progressed to either Athlone IT or IT Carlow.

Both IT Carlow and Athlone IT have always been very accommodating and welcoming to our staff and learners. Learner groups have been provided with familiarisation sessions, tours and guest lectures from both institutions. A Hospitality PLC Group attends Athlone IT for ten days per year to complete a Food Preparation module. The Computer Science Department have facilitated IT learners to complete an on-site course-relevant project which contributes towards work experience hours for their course. This helps learners to become more familiar and more comfortable on the campus. IT Carlow have worked with PLC Coordinators to offer staff from both organisations to network with each other, to consult on programme content, and to organise a Taster day for students.

## 4.3.2 Evaluation

### 4.3.2.1 Employers

Feedback from employers on our efforts to provide support and relevant training opportunities has been very positive: BNM appreciate LOETB's collaborative approach and experience; *"We work very closely with LOETB and greatly value the expertise they provide. These training programmes are important for Bord na Móna, providing our people with the new learnings and skills needed for peatland restoration and rehabilitation, and will ultimately help us deliver on our climate action objectives."*

The relationships that have been developed with local businesses are very healthy, and are strengthened by the level of satisfaction that employers have with the quality of training programmes provided to their staff teams. We have an opportunity to further develop this relationship by establishing agreements whereby current FET learners could be matched to local employers to complete work placements, with a view to gaining employment on completion of their programmes. This arrangement would benefit all parties involved; learners would gain access to valuable work placements with a viable chance of future employment, employers would save time and money on recruitment processes, and we would gain further insights into the employability skills required of potential employees which could be built into current and future FET programmes.

### 4.3.2.2 Higher Education Institutions

The support and cooperation that we receive from local HEIs is extremely beneficial and much appreciated. Our learners progress from our courses to third level with confidence and assurance that the course they are embarking on is the right one for them. Many of our learners have excelled in their chosen pathways, and have progressed as far as Masters level, and progressed to very successful careers in their chosen areas.

Many of the HE courses that our learners progress to through our links with local IoTs are very STEM-focused, eg Science, IT, Engineering. While these courses are very relevant, and learners have been very successful, LOETB now needs to review and explore other potential subject areas for progression, in partnership with HEIs, to ensure that we are meeting the needs of local industry and catering for our learners' interests.

## 4.3.4 Conclusion

The level of support offered to employers, and the scope of collaboration that has taken place with local employers to date is testament to the hard work and dedication of the Employer Services team. There is a potential opportunity for us to further develop these relationships by establishing a model whereby employers facilitate work placements for current learners, and perhaps have an opportunity to offer feedback on programme which could inform choice of modules and range of training that is provided on the programme.

### Identified Actions

- Explore new subject areas with HEIs for learner progression to HE from LOETB programmes
- Explore potential for formal work placements for current FET learners with local employers through Employer Services Team

## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS

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The Self-Evaluation process conducted by LOETB in the completion of this stage of the Inaugural Review of ETBs has been extremely valuable. While the consultation process was undoubtedly affected and curtailed by the restrictions imposed due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, it was a worthwhile and educational process nonetheless. The various topics explored under each of the Objectives required the FET Service to engage in a very insightful period of self-reflection.

It is evident from the findings of this report that we have come a long way in the short period since our establishment in 2013, and from a quality assurance perspective, since the development of the Quality Assurance Support Service in 2016. Significant progress has been made in the development and nurturing of a culture of quality in the FET Service. Developments in the provision of professional development and support to staff has contributed towards an ethos of continuous improvement in the delivery of FET programmes. The supports offered to learners has enhanced the learning environment and learners' overall experience of FET. The approach to the development and provision of responsive, relevant and quality-assured FET programmes has become more coordinated and strategic.

Of course, there are always areas for us to improve, and this Report quite honestly identifies some areas that need further development. Our experience of completing the Executive Self-Evaluation of Governance and Management of QA has taught us to be more realistic in our expectations. The first Quality Improvement Plan (2018) was very ambitious and identified actions to be achieved that were outside the reach of a relatively small organisation in just one year. The subsequent QIPs were more realistic and considered other factors and ongoing projects that were to be completed alongside the identified improvement actions. The Identified Actions that are listed at the end of each section in this Report are realistic and achievable, but yet still reflect our commitment to continuous improvement to achieve our main aim of providing excellent education and training opportunities for our learners.

We look forward to embarking on the next stages of this process, and engaging in meaningful and mutually-beneficial dialogue with QQI and with the Review Panel.

# APPENDIX 1: TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR GOVERNANCE GROUPS

## LOETB FET Quality Council

### Terms of Reference

#### Role:

The role of the FET Quality Council is to oversee the quality, development and improvement of further education and training offering of the ETB.

#### Membership:

**Chairperson:** Member of FET Senior Management Team (rotated amongst SMT members)

**Secretary:** Quality Assurance Staff Member (to be assigned)

**Members:** Remaining FMT members  
 LOETB staff member, as the CE (DFET) determines appropriate  
 A representative from industry  
 A representative from the National (Apprenticeship) Programme Board  
 A representative from Higher Education

**External Members:** The Chairperson of the FET Quality Council may from time to time recommend to the DFET the appointment of additional external members to the Council. These will be persons who can bring an external perspective to the working of the Council, such as employers or experts in FET or in quality systems. Persons with expertise from other ETBs may also be invited to join the FET Quality Council for a defined period.

**Accountable to:** LOETB SMT

#### Schedule of meetings:

The FET Quality Council will meet at least 4 times a year. In order for a quorum to be established, 50% of members plus one additional member must be in attendance.

The meeting agenda and supporting documentation will be made available to members at least one week in advance of a scheduled meeting. Meeting outcomes are recorded and circulated in draft form within two weeks of a meeting. The minutes of meetings are approved at the beginning of the subsequent meeting of the FET Quality Council.

Decisions are made by consensus or by the exercise of a vote if necessary; the Chairperson has the deciding vote in the event of a split decision.

In some cases, at the discretion of the Chairperson, an incorporeal meeting of the FET Quality Council may be held where reports can be circulated virtually and accepted by the FET Quality Council without the FET Quality Council having to meet.

### Responsibilities:

The SMT (DFET) of the ETB has delegated certain governance responsibilities to the FET Quality Council, as detailed below. The FET Quality Council is accountable to the SMT (DFET) for carrying out its functions, regardless of whether it forms governance sub-groups or working groups to advance these tasks.

The FET Quality Council is responsible for the following:

#### *QA policies and procedures*

- Approving the FET quality assurance policies and procedures of the ETB, as recommended by the Quality Forum

#### *Programme responsibilities*

- Recommending proposals to the SMT (DFET), as appropriate, for the amendment of, or introduction of new provision that are consistent with the mission and strategy of the ETB
- Approving programme documentation prior to its submission to the awarding body for validation
- Making recommendations to the SMT (DFET) for the establishment of appropriate structures to support new or existing programmes
- Presenting a CPD Plan to SMT (DFET) to facilitate the improved delivery or development of programmes
- Monitoring and Review responsibilities
- Establishing a framework for the formal review of all FET provision
- Noting the annual schedule of reviews
- Approving programme review documentation (received from Programme Advisory Forum) prior to its submission to the awarding body
- Approving reports from the QA Forum of progress against action plans arising from quality reviews
- Receiving observations arising from programme feedback reports and other internal and external stakeholder reports, as appropriate

#### *Assessment responsibilities*

- Ratifying the agreement of persons to act as External Authenticators
- Noting assessment reports received and confirming they are in line with agreed assessment processes and procedures
- Receiving quarterly reports of assessment results and final results presented by the QA Staff

#### *Apprenticeship-specific responsibilities*

The FET Quality Council will reserve a section of its agenda to fulfil the role of “Apprenticeship” FET Quality Council. In doing so, it undertakes the following responsibilities:

- Considering reports from the Consortium Steering Group established by the Apprenticeship Council on matters affecting apprenticeship programmes
- Considering proposals from the National (Apprenticeship) Programme Board and from the Consortium Steering Group for new partnerships and for new members of partnerships
- Ensuring that the proposals received from the National (Apprenticeship) Programme Board and the Consortium Steering Group for new partnerships conform to the requirements of the programme and that suitable Memorandums of Agreement are in place
- Fulfilling any reporting requirements to external authorities on apprenticeship activities
- Receiving named annual and biannual reports from the National (Apprenticeship) Programme Board
- Noting examination results from the National Examination Board

*Operational Matters:*

- Working with the FMT to implement the operational FET elements of LOETB's Statement of Strategy
- Agreeing its operating procedures
- Establishing sub-units of governance, as required, and delegating responsibilities to those groups through defined terms of reference
- Establishing ad-hoc working groups to assist it in fulfilling its functions
- Take appropriate action, where necessary, on reports and/or observations received
- Receiving recommendations from sub-units of governance on specified matters to inform its functions
- Receiving annual reports from sub-units of governance on their activities
- Providing a FET Quality Council Annual Report to the SMT (DFET), identifying key decisions and actions taken by the FET Quality Council and making any recommendations to the SMT (DFET), as appropriate
- Participating in the review of its terms of reference and formally making recommendations to the SMT (DFET) for amendments and additions, if required
- Reviewing the outcomes of reviews of terms of reference by its sub-groups and making recommendations to the SMT (DFET) as appropriate
- Exercising any other functions, which may be formally delegated to it by the SMT (DFET)



## LOETB FET Programme Development & Review Group

### Terms of Reference

#### Role:

The purpose of the LOETB FET Programme Development & Review Group is to develop new programmes to complement LOETB's FET provision.

#### Membership:

The membership of the FET Programme Development Group is designed to enable relevant LOETB management and staff to collectively contribute to the development of new programmes.

<b>Chairperson:</b>	The Chairperson will be appointed by a member of the FMT
<b>Secretary:</b>	The Secretary will be appointed by a member of the FMT
<b>Ordinary Members:</b>	At least one Subject Matter Expert Relevant staff members involved in delivery of the discipline in question, where available

**Learner Representation:** The process of developing new FET programmes may involve facilitating Learner Focus groups

**Accountable to:** FET Programme Advisory Forum

#### Responsibilities:

- Proposing the development of validation applications for new programmes
- Developing draft programme documentation
- Collating programme validation documentation for submission to Programme Advisory Forum
- Identifying requirements (resources, etc) for the establishment of new/revised programmes
- Reporting on progress of action plans to Programme Advisory Forum

## LOETB Further Education and Training (FET) Forum

### Terms of Reference

#### Role:

The purpose of the FET Forum is to fulfil the role and responsibilities delegated to it by the FET Quality Council, for the development and quality assurance of LOETB's FET provision.

In doing so, it assists the FET Quality Council in protecting, maintaining and developing the standards of education and training programmes and the related activities of LOETB.

#### Membership:

The membership of the FET Forum is designed to enable professional colleagues to collectively contribute to the oversight, planning, coordination, development and quality of the Further Education and Training programmes.

<b>Chairperson:</b>	The FET Forum has significant responsibilities. The Chairperson will be a member of the FET Quality Council
<b>Secretary:</b>	The Secretary will be appointed by the DFET and will liaise closely with the sub-units of governance that are providing information to the FET Forum.
<b>Ordinary Members:</b>	Centre/Service Managers will be members of the FET Forum.
<b>Accountable to:</b>	FET Quality Council

#### Schedule of Meetings:

The FET Forum will meet at least 4 times a year. In order for a quorum to be established, 50% of members plus one additional member must be in attendance.

The meeting agenda and supporting documentation will be made available to members at least one week in advance of a scheduled meeting. Meeting outcomes are recorded and circulated in draft form within two weeks of a meeting. The minutes of meetings are approved at the beginning of the subsequent meeting of the FET Forum. Confirmed minutes are submitted for noting to the next meeting of the FET Quality Council.

Decisions are made by consensus or by the exercise of a vote if necessary; the Chairperson has the deciding vote in the event of a split decision.

In some cases, at the discretion of the Chair, an incorporeal meeting of the FET Forum may be held where reports can be circulated virtually and accepted by members without the FET Quality Forum having to meet.

#### Operational Matters:

The FET Forum is responsible for the following:

- Working with the FET Quality Council to implement the FET elements of LOETB's Statement of Strategy
- Carrying out its operating procedures as outlined by the FET Quality Council
- Establishing sub-groups to advance programme-related matters, if required, and as approved by the FET Quality Council

- Making recommendations to the FET Quality Council to inform its decision-making and in line with its terms of reference
- Reporting to the FET Quality Council and preparing a FET Forum Annual Report for the FET Quality Council on key decisions and actions taken by the FET Forum and making any recommendations to the FET Quality Council, as appropriate
- Receiving recommendations from working groups of governance on specified matters to inform its responsibilities
- Receiving annual reports from sub-units of governance on their activities, where requested
- Participating in the review of its terms of reference and formally making recommendations to the FET Quality Council as appropriate
- Reviewing the outcomes of reviews of terms of reference by its sub-units of governance and making recommendations to the FET Quality Council as appropriate
- Proposing a framework for the formal review of all FET provision, for approval by Quality Council.
- Exercising any other functions, which may be formally delegated to it by the FET Quality Council or SMT (DFET)

## LOETB FET Quality Forum

### Terms of Reference

#### Role:

The purpose of the FET Quality Forum is to oversee the development of FET QA policies and procedures in LOETB. This includes the establishment of new policies/procedures and the ongoing review of existing FET QA policies and procedures.

#### Membership:

The membership of the FET Quality Forum is designed to enable LOETB management and external stakeholders to collectively contribute to the development and quality of the LOETB's Further Education and Training provision.

<b>Chairperson:</b>	The FET Quality Forum has significant responsibilities. The Chairperson will be a member of the QA Department.
<b>Secretary:</b>	The Secretary will be appointed by the FET Quality Council and the members of QA Policy Development & Review Groups.
<b>Ordinary Members:</b>	Representatives from FET Centres/Services QA Staff Members
<b>Accountable to:</b>	LOETB FET Quality Council

#### Schedule of Meetings:

The FET Quality Forum will meet at least 3 times a year. In order for a quorum to be established, 50% of members plus one additional member must be in attendance.

The meeting agenda and supporting documentation will be made available to members at least one week in advance of a scheduled meeting. Meeting outcomes are recorded and circulated in draft form within two weeks of a meeting. The minutes of meetings are approved at the beginning of the subsequent meeting of the FET Quality Forum. Confirmed minutes are submitted for noting to the next meeting of the FET Quality Council.

Decisions are made by consensus or by the exercise of a vote if necessary; the Chairperson has the deciding vote in the event of a split decision.

In some cases, at the discretion of the Chair, an incorporeal meeting of the FET Quality Forum may be held where reports can be circulated virtually and accepted by members without the FET Quality Forum having to meet.

#### Responsibilities:

##### *Policies*

- Reviewing proposals for the development of new policies and procedures and making recommendations to the FET Quality Council
- Appointing the QA Policy Development & Review Group to develop draft policy documentation and

identifying the expertise required for its membership

- Reviewing proposals for the provision of new QA policies and procedures and making recommendations to the FET Quality Council
- Making recommendations to the FET Quality Council for the establishment of appropriate structures to support new or existing provision

#### *Monitoring and Review*

- Reviewing feedback reports on existing policies and making recommendations, including staff development and learner support requirements, to the FET Quality Council
- Assigning the QA Policy Development & Review Group the responsibility to implement minor modifications and additions to policies/procedures recommended as a result of policy reviews, where these do not affect module outcomes
- Approving modified policy documentation submitted by the Policy Development & Review Group and submitting to the FET Quality Council
- Receiving reports of progress against action plans arising from policy/procedure reviews and reporting issues arising to the FET Quality Council

## LOETB FET QA Policy Development and Review Working Groups

### Terms of Reference

#### Role:

The purpose of the LOETB FET QA Policy Development and Review Working Groups is to develop new policies and procedures, and review existing FET policies and procedures.

#### Membership:

The membership of the FET QA Policy Development and Review Working Groups is designed to enable relevant LOETB management and staff to collectively contribute to the development of new, and review of existing, policies and procedures.

<b>Chairperson:</b>	The Chairperson will be a member of LOETB's QA Support Service
<b>Secretary:</b>	The Secretary will be appointed by a member of the FMT
<b>Ordinary Members:</b>	One industry representative from all LOETB FET/Centre Services Relevant LOETB staff members involved in the delivery of the discipline in question, where available

**Learner Representation:** The process of developing new, and reviewing existing, FET policies may involve facilitating Learner Focus groups

**Accountable to:** LOETB FET Quality Forum

#### Responsibilities:

- Proposing new or revised QA policies and procedures (as per an identified schedule, and as the need arises) to the Programme Advisory Forum
- Developing draft QA policy documents
- Identifying required resources, staff development and learner support requirements to support the implementation of new QA policies and procedures
- Evaluating the effectiveness of existing policies/procedures
- Implementing minor modifications/additions to policies and procedures as a result of new or revised policies and procedures
- Reporting on progress of action plans (arising from introduction or review of policies/procedures) to Advisory Forum

## Results Approval Panel

### Terms of Reference

#### Purpose:

The purpose of the Results Approval process is to confirm that the assessment of learner evidence and authentication of assessment results has been carried out in line with LOETB's Quality Assurance Agreement with QQI. It confirms fairness, transparency and consistency in LOETB's assessment process and ensures the validity of the results produced.

#### Scope:

The LOETB Results Approval process applies to all assessments leading to QQI awards. LOETB convenes a Results Approval Panel (RAP) for the purpose of approving of QQI assessment results delivered under its Further Education and Training (FET) provision. All results are provisional until approved by the panel and all learner results must be considered by the RAP before submission for certification.

#### Role and Responsibilities:

The role of the Panel is to formally review and approve results prior to submission to QQI for certification.

The Panel is responsible for ensuring:

- All learner results are reviewed
- The findings of Internal Verification and External Authentication reports are reviewed
- The outcomes and recommendations of the reports (including changes to assessment grades), are discussed and agreement reached on any response/actions required, including changes to learner grades
- LOETB assessment procedures were observed
- Appropriate evidence and records are available
- Suspected irregularities are investigated
- Confirmed assessment irregularities are addressed appropriately and corrective action taken where necessary
- Appropriate decisions are taken regarding the outcome of the assessment, verification and authentication processes
- Results are fully quality assured and signed off by authorised staff in LOETB prior to submission to QQI
- All discussions and documentation are confidential and subject to LOETB's Data Protection Policy and statutory requirements

#### Membership:

The membership of the RAP may consist of fixed and occasional members. A minimum of three people are required to ensure the assessment decisions are valid. Members of the Results Approval Panel must include the following:

**Chairperson:** Member of the LOETB FET Senior Management Team

**Secretary:** A QA Support Service Staff Member

**Other Members:** LOETB staff listed below may be invited to participate on the panel or for a particular section of the meeting as appropriate e.g.:

- Chief Executive
- Director of FET Services

- QA staff member
- Further Education Manager
- Training Services Manager
- FET Centre Manager / Exam Secretary for courses from their centre
- Principal / Deputy Principal / Exam Secretary for courses for their school
- Assessor / Teacher / Tutor / Instructor / Programme Coordinator
- Internal Verifier(s)
- Representatives of second provider
- Independent External Authenticator(s)

### Schedule of Meetings:

The Results Approval Panel meeting takes place following completion of the Internal Verification and External Authentication Processes for all QQI qualifications offered through FET.

### Assessment Results Approval Procedures: Overview

1. The QA Support Service convenes RAP meetings as required in line with QQI submission requirements and dates.
2. Each centre or service submitting in a particular certification round is notified of their Results Approval Meeting details by the QA Support Service.
3. All learners' results must be considered at a RAP meeting before they are approved on the RCCRS (in the case of training courses) and submitted through QQI Business System for certification.
4. The RAP members sign a Confidentiality Agreement that is retained by the QA Support Service.
5. Relevant documentation is presented for each programme or learner group. This documentation may include, but not limited to:
  - IV Reports
  - EA Reports
  - IV and EA Report Summaries
  - Submissions from centres, where relevant
6. The Panel discuss the reports and other documentation including any concerns, irregularities or breach of assessment regulations and advises on appropriate corrective or improvement actions, if required. Decisions are made by group consensus with reference to the quality assurance responsibilities for LOETB under its QA agreement with QQI.
7. Minutes of the Results Approval Meeting are recorded, outlining the issues discussed and decisions reached.
8. The Panel considers the reports and approves the final results. Panel decisions are recorded and outcomes are notified to third parties where appropriate.
9. The Panel authorises centre personnel to inform learners of their approved results and their right to appeal.



10. For Training courses, the Course Summary Assessment and Results Approval Form (F12), Approval of Results Section is completed and signed by the RAP Chairperson.
11. All documentation is returned to the Secretary at the end of the meeting.
12. For all programmes a copy of the meeting minutes is forwarded by the QA Support Service to Centre/Service Managers for comment. Once feedback is received the final version is compiled by the QA Support Service, signed by the Chairperson of the RAP and forwarded to Centre/Service Managers.
13. Recommendations arising from the Results Approval process are detailed in minutes of the Results Approval meeting. These minutes form part of the assessment record and are retained by the QA Support Service and by the relevant Centre/Service Manager. Minutes are available for monitoring purposes.
14. Results which have been approved are submitted to QQI for certification in accordance with approved procedures.

## Apprenticeship Consortium Steering Group

### Terms of Reference

#### Role:

The key function of the National Consortium Steering Group (CSG) is to ensure the National Apprenticeship Programme conforms to and evolves with the requirements of the occupation. It is industry led and acts to bring together the employers, the Co-ordinating Provider and other collaborating providers involved in the programme.

#### Membership:

It comprises of the National Apprenticeship Programme's key stakeholders including SOLAS as the Statutory Regulating Authority, employers, occupational associations, any occupational regulators and Co-ordinating Provider.

**Chairperson:** Person of Authority from an enterprise or the community of practice involved in the occupation

**Secretary:** The Co-ordinating Provider should provide secretariat for the committee

**Ordinary Members:** The majority of the Consortium Steering Group will comprise of representatives from enterprises, employer's associations, community of practice or relevant professional bodies. The Co-ordinating Provider as well as representatives from other "off-the-job" providers shall also be members.

**Accountable to:** LOETB FET Quality Forum

#### Responsibilities:

- The Consortium Steering Group is part of the overall national development structure of all new apprenticeship programmes. The role, membership and purpose of the CSG are set out in QQI Topical QA Guidelines for New Apprenticeships
- The Coordinating Provider for the Apprenticeship plays a lead role in liaising with the employers and other providers through the Consortium Steering Group. The role of the Consortium Steering Group is to ensure the Apprenticeship Programme complies with the requirements of the occupation. The CSG has a key role in the development and review of the occupational profile and in promoting public awareness of that profile
- Develop in conjunction with relevant stakeholders binding MOAs/MOUs which commit all parties to the implementation process
- The CSG contributes to the decision-making process in collaboration with the ETB and national stakeholders on the expansion of apprenticeships, and the addition of new employers and providers. Approval for establishment of the CSG is vested in the Apprenticeship Council
- The governance and operating processes for the CSG are being further developed by SOLAS in collaboration with national stakeholders. This may change some of the relationships and operations outlined below.
- On validation of the programme, the role of the CSG will transition from the developmental role in the establishment of the occupational profile and the appointment of a Coordinating Provider, to a continuing role in supporting and improving the validated apprenticeship programme
- To carry out this role the CSG will interact with employers, the regulatory authorities, the occupational

bodies, the National Programme Board and the Coordinating and Collaborating Providers

- Seek to ensure that recruitment and delivery arrangements adequately support equity and inclusion of applicants and provide relevant learning support for these groups if needed.

#### Operational Matters:

##### *Consortium Steering Group – Inputs*

- The Consortium Steering Group will receive its information from a number of sources
- During the development and validation phase of the programme the CSG will receive ongoing reports on the structure and outcomes of the programme
- LOETB will inform the CSG of issues pertaining to the management and delivery of the programme.
- SOLAS will inform the CSG on developments in labour market conditions both regionally and nationally as reports are generated by state bodies. The SOLAS Authorised Officer may also liaise with the CSG on issues concerning the statutory apprenticeship system. A particular area of concern might be the management of fluctuating demand for apprentices and for dealing with deficits in an individual apprentice's training
- Employers, through membership of the CSG, may communicate concerns over the programme, its delivery or management or the apprenticeship itself. This will also be achieved by formal surveys of employers initiated by the CSG
- Apprentices, through feedback mechanisms, can bring their concerns to CSG using the reporting system referred to in the LOETB QAP document
- The review of the occupational profile gives industry in general the opportunity to inform the CSG of particular and also broad changes in the sector that might require the CSG's attention

##### *Consortium Steering Group – Outputs*

- In its operation, the CSG will report to the Coordinating Provider, SOLAS, the public and the employers. Some of this activity may be delegated to the Coordinating Provider through the secretariat
- The CSG provides the Coordinating Provider with the approved Occupational Profile for the apprenticeship
- During the development phase, it will comment and agree the structure of the programme and the MIPLOs. Pending the establishment of LOETB's Apprenticeship Quality Council, it will also agree the final submission to QQI
- It will comment on reports received from the National Programme Board on the recruitment and assessment of learners and on the delivery of the programme. It may advise the ETB to take specific action on foot of feedback from employers or apprentices
- The CSG will act to support SOLAS by informing it of local and regional demand for apprentice programmes, by assessing capacity of employers and enterprises to train apprentices in conjunction with SOLAS and by suggesting new employers and providers
- The CSG has a public role in supporting the promotion of the occupation and the apprenticeship. It will do this by providing information on the programme to the potential apprentices and to the media
- Through its employer members and professional bodies, it will inform the industry of matters relating to the programme
- Through surveys and reports on surveys, it will inform the industry of shared and particular issues in relation to the programme.

## National Programme Board

### Terms of Reference

#### Role:

The National Programme Board is the single national entity with responsibility for the effective management, operation, monitoring and review of the National Apprenticeship Programme.

#### Membership:

**Chairperson:** National Programme Co-ordinator for the Apprenticeship Programme

**Secretary:** Coordinating Provider Programme Leader

**Other Members:**

- At least one instructor from the Coordinating Provider and one instructor or representative from each of the Collaborating Providers
- Two employers who are occupationally qualified in the areas, - nominated by the Consortium Steering Group
- Two persons who will act as Mentors of apprentices in employment, nominated by the group of employers
- One representative of apprentices (who may be a graduate) nominated by the apprentices

**Accountable to:** Consortium Steering Group

#### Schedule of Meetings:

At least three times per year on commencement of the new apprenticeship programme. Additional meetings may be required during the set-up phase of the programme.

In order for a quorum to be established, 50% of members plus one additional member must be in attendance. The meeting agenda and supporting documentation will be made available to members at least one week in advance of a scheduled meeting. Meeting outcomes are recorded and circulated in draft form within two weeks of a meeting. The minutes of meetings are approved at the beginning of the subsequent meeting of the CSG.

Decisions are made by consensus or by the exercise of a vote if necessary; the Chairperson has the deciding vote in the event of a split decision.

In some cases, at the discretion of the Chair, an incorporeal meeting of the CSG may be held where reports can be circulated virtually and accepted by members without the CSG having to meet.

#### Responsibilities:

##### *Day to day oversight of the operation of the validated apprenticeship programme*

- Establish a Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Committee, where required, to manage the operation of RPL as it applies to the programme, as validated
- Devise the assessment strategy and types of assessment to be used in a programme cycle to ensure that the module outcomes are being assessed, that cumulatively the MIPLOs are assessed

- Generate a bank of assessment resources
- Agree the assessment schedules for the programme on the advice of the National Programme Co-ordinator
- Consider inputs from the External Authenticator on issues of delivery and assessment. This will be done on receipt of the External Authenticator's report and in advance of new cycle starting
- Consider reports from Collaborating Providers, Workplace Mentors and instructors/tutors, on the progress of apprentices and on delivery and assessment of the approved programmes
- Encourage the sharing between workplace mentors and providers of best practice in the delivery and assessment of apprentices
- Consider the effectiveness of the teaching, learning and assessment strategies being implemented as per the validated programme
- Ensure as far as possible that the apprentices in each centre get an equivalent experience

### *(2) Programme monitoring, review and improvement*

- Agree and implement minor modifications and additions to the programme where these do not affect module outcomes. This will include suggestions from the External Authenticator, or improvements suggested by mentors or by instructors/tutors
- Monitor the on-going operations of the programme nationally
- Monitor examination and continuous assessment results nationally to ensure an appropriate mix of learning modes and associated assessment methods
- Seek feedback from the significant stakeholders on the delivery of the programme and on possible minor modifications
- Regularly consider results of surveys of apprentices and other stakeholders of programmes
- Contribute to the occupational review process
- Suggest necessary equipment and facilities requirements and upgrades as well as skills enhancement initiatives
- Examine the effectiveness of support services such as administrative services and Moodle
- Make recommendations on the use of existing resources and the need for new resources
- Introduce improvements in the programme arising out of the monitoring and review process
- Perform a detailed self-evaluation of the operation of the National Programme Board periodically (usually every five years)
- Suggest appropriate external experts to play a role in designing, monitoring and reviewing programmes
- Recommend appropriately qualified persons as External Authenticators

### **Reports:**

The following reports will be submitted to the National Programme Board by relevant stakeholders

#### *After each new intake*

- Admissions Reports from each Collaborating Provider submitted by the Collaborating Providers Programme Leader (and the Coordinating Provider's Programme Leader)

#### *Annual Reports*

- Consolidated Admissions Report
- External Authenticators Report
- On-the-job Site Visit Reports
- Apprentice Feedback Reports from each Collaborating Provider

- Consolidated Apprentice Feedback
- Apprentice Graduate Reports from each Collaborating Provider
- Consolidated Apprentice Graduate Report
- Staff and Mentor Feedback Report
- Provider Reports from each Collaborating Provider
- Draft Annual National Programme Board Report

#### *Biannual Reports*

- Examinations Report from each Collaborating Provider (dependant on number of intakes per year)
- Consolidated Examinations Report

#### *Standing Committee of the National Programme Board*

The National Programme Board, may establish a Standing Committee, which would meet between scheduled meetings of the Programme Board, at the request of the National Programme Co-ordinator, to discuss urgent items that may require some action before the next scheduled meeting of the Programme Board. The National Programme Co-ordinator will act on the decisions of the Committee.

Membership of the Committee could include:

- National Programme Co-ordinator
- Programme Co-ordinator
- One instructor on the programme from the Co-ordinating Provider
- Representative from one of the Collaborating providers, who is a member of the Programme Board
- One employer who is a member of the Programme Board
- One representative of apprentices who is a member of the Programme Board

## National Examination Board

### Terms of Reference

#### Role:

The role of the National Examination Board is to meet and to consider the delivery and the assessment of the national apprenticeship programme. It will also ratify the results of the National Apprenticeship Programme. Following and separate from the formal business of the meeting, instructors and assessors will be afforded an opportunity to reflect on the programme and to share experiences.

The size and membership are dependent on the range of providers involved in the consortium and the number of collaborating providers.

#### Membership:

**Chairperson:** National Programme Co-ordinator

**Secretary:** Coordinating Provider Programme Leader

**Other Members:**

- At least one Instructor from the Co-ordinating Provider. At least one teacher/trainer/instructor/tutor from each Collaborating Provider
- At least one nominated mentor(s) from employers
- A representative from the ETBI's External Monitoring and Enhancement panel (for the first cycle of the programme)
- External Authenticator(s)
- QA Officer of the Co-ordinating Provider
- Collaborating Programme Leaders from all providers where assessments have taken place

**Accountable to:** LOETB FET Quality Council

#### Schedule of Meetings:

After each examination session

#### Responsibilities:

- Operate in accordance with the appropriate rules and regulations of QQI
- Review results and final assessment grades and take into consideration Internal Verification Reports and External Authenticator Reports and have the capability of dealing authoritatively with the results presented to it
- Consider any issues arising in relation to the results and make recommendations regarding corrective action
- Ratify the national results of the apprenticeship programme
- Recommend, based on the assessment results that apprentices be permitted to proceed to the following year of their training
- Recommend results to the FET Quality Council for noting at their next meeting
- Promote best practice in assessment and the development of a community of practice among instructors and assessors

- Submit results to the awarding authority QQI to request awards
- Undertake a review of the operations of the National Examination Board itself at the end of each programme cycle

#### Operational Matters:

- Following the robust exam and assessment processes in each ETB, the National Examination Board will convene to ratify the programme results
- The National Examination Board may act once the Chairperson of the Board is satisfied that an appropriate quorum for the proper discharge of the board's responsibilities is in place
- Normally decisions should be reached by consensus. However, where a consensus cannot be achieved, the members of the National Examination Board shall arrive at a decision via a majority
- The proceedings and deliberations of the examinations boards of LOETB are strictly confidential. Under no circumstances should any person attending a meeting of the National Examination Board disclose to any other person a decision of the board or any document, information or opinion considered, conveyed or expressed at the meeting
- The Chairperson of the National Examination Board may, however communicate appropriately with the LOETB FET Quality Council with regard to any matter requiring such communication, arising out of the proceedings of the National Examination Board
- At the meeting of the National Examination Board, a Table or Broadsheet of Results, or equivalent, shall be endorsed which shall record the total marks awarded to each apprentice in each Examination Module and which shall indicate, in relation to each apprentice's overall result, whether the apprentice has passed, has passed with Distinction, has passed with Merit, or is being referred
- Any dissenting opinion by an External Authenticator which shall have been recorded upon the Examination Report shall be brought to the attention of the FET Quality Council by the Chairperson
- Meetings of the National Examination Board should allow for full and frank discussion of all borderline cases before a final decision is made. That final decision should be based on the cumulative evidence presented rather than on the view of one examiner
- The Report of Results shall be signed by the Chairperson and Secretary of the meeting, and by all the Examiners present at the meeting. It shall be forwarded by the Secretary of the National Examination Board to the National Programme Co-ordinator at the earliest opportunity
- The Secretary of the National Examination Board will forward the Broadsheet of Results, together with any additional reports, to the next meeting of the FET Quality Council
- Where clear-cut recommendations emerge at a meeting of the national Examination Board, the Chairperson of the National Examination Board may cause a provisional list of results to be issued to apprentices by the National Programme Co-ordinator
- The National Programme Co-ordinator shall not issue a provisional result in the case of any apprentice whose result is in dispute, indeterminate, the subject of a recorded dissenting opinion, or whose entry is regarded as provisional. The name of any such apprentice may not be included in any provisional list of results issued by LOETB, nor should any information in relation to results be communicated to any such apprentice pending a decision thereon from the FET Quality Council
- The following guidelines shall be followed with a view to arriving at definite recommendations:
  - In the case of apprentices in the first year of the programme, the National Examination Board shall accord the apprentices a greater degree of latitude, given reasonable grounds
  - In the case of final (award stage) examinations/assessment the results should be interpreted in such a manner as to require the apprentice to have demonstrated an entitlement, based on examination



performance, to the result being sought

- The National Examination Board may, in the case of illness, bereavement or other unavoidable circumstances that have been verified and are deemed significant in terms of the apprentice's assessment performance, recommend that a final decision on an apprentice's result be deferred to enable the apprentice to complete specific outstanding requirements of the programme or examination
- The National Examination Board must be cognisant of fairness to all apprentices in granting individual apprentices referrals
- The final consensus of the Board is agreed and noted in the minutes

#### Appeals Procedures:

It is the policy of LOETB, as Co-ordinating Provider, to endeavour insofar as is practicable to:

- Deal with all reviews, appeals and disputes in relation to assessment matters in accordance with the principles of natural and constitutional justice
- Provide arrangements in relation to reviews, appeals and disputes in relation to assessment matters which ensure that they are dealt with fairly, transparently and in a timely way and which may involve, as necessary, experienced ETB staff and wholly independent persons of appropriate knowledge and experience in the process
- Ensure that any potential lessons are learned from the processing of rechecks, reviews and appeals and where appropriate that this learning is captured in revised processes and procedures
- It is a requirement of LOETB that any complaint or dispute arising in relation to any result considered or to be considered by it for the purposes of an award of Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) shall fall to be resolved as a matter of first recourse, via its procedures

## APPENDIX 2(a): FET PROGRAMME DEVELOPMENT AND APPROVAL PROCESS CERTIFIED PROGRAMMES

### Purpose

The development and approval of all new, and/or amended, FET programmes in LOETB will follow the process as outlined below. By doing so, LOETB will ensure that planned FET provision will be in line with LOETB's strategic objectives.

All programmes that have been developed in line with the process outlined below will be considered for approval by the LOETB Senior Management Team, based on the recommendation of the FET Quality Council.

The FET Programme Development and Approval Process should involve six key steps:

1. Initial Idea
2. Scoping
3. Meeting with relevant external stakeholders
4. Programme Development
5. Present Plan to Relevant Stakeholders
6. Present Proposal for approval to FET Quality Council

### Step 1: Initial Idea

The initial idea for new provision may arise in a variety of ways; internally, from industry needs, arising from enterprise creation / job losses, etc.

The initial idea should be taken to the relevant FET Manager. If it is identified as a potential priority area, it may be progressed to Step 2, outlined below.

### Step 2: Scoping

A scoping exercise should be conducted by LOETB staff members prior to discussing the idea with any external stakeholders. The Scoping Process Template should be completed as part of this process.

#### Who?

Internal Staff members only - Person with idea, member of Quality Assurance Support Service (QASS), relevant FET Manager, Centre/Service Manager

#### What?

The following points should be considered:

- What is rationale? Where is evidence?
- What is target learner profile? Employed, unemployed, newly unemployed, age, capacity
- What funding streams are available based on above? Will there be a cost to employer?
- What is expected of employers / industry / external agencies?

- Where expected/targeted outcome is employment: Are there real employment opportunities? Will learners be able to access work placements? Are job opportunities local?
- Where expected / targeted outcome is progression to FET/HE: what courses can learners progress to? Are agreements in place with HE Institutions? What are requirements? Is advice from Guidance service required?
- Certified? Uncertified? Vendor certified? Major award? Component award? Digital badge?
- What programme could be offered here? What programmes does LOETB already offer in this area? What are the other options? What are the entry requirements?
- Do we need to consult with DEASP?

### When?

When idea arises and is identified as a priority area by FET Manager - prior to meeting relevant stakeholders

### Why?

- The scoping exercise will ensure that the proposed programme is in line with LOETB's FET Strategy and complements existing provision.
- Preparation for meeting with external stakeholders – to establish what can (and can't) be offered, what options are available in terms of funding, etc.
- The information generated here will contribute to the programme proposal to the FET Quality Council.

## Step 3: Meeting with relevant external stakeholders

Agenda and minutes (with agreed actions and timelines) of this meeting (and all meetings with external stakeholders) must be maintained.

The purpose of this meeting is to either introduce the idea (if idea arose internally) or to gather information about the idea (if idea came from external sources). It is very important to establish the following:

- **What?** What is required? Certified / industry / vendor certified / digital badge?
- **Why?** Rationale - why is it required? Is there a gap in market? Will there be employment opportunities?
- **How?** If it is a course for employed people – will employees be allowed or be required to have time off to complete? Blended learning / remote learning?
- **Who?** Who should be targeted? Entry criteria?
- **When?** When does the programme need to start? Duration of course? Hours per week?
- **Where?** Where is proposed location of direct classroom delivery element of course?

This may be the opportunity for a brief outline of the different programme parameters – this could be a standard presentation or document which outlines what a traineeship / STA Route 1 / STA Route 3 / PLC, etc. is, payment of allowances, etc.

## Step 4: Programme Development

Based on information gathered in Steps 2 and 3, a programme development process can be established. All Programme Development meetings must have agenda, minutes, and agreed actions and timelines.

### A Programme Development Team may be made up of:

#### ✓ Internal Members:

- Centre/Service Manager
- QASS member
- Relevant subject matter expert (may be internal or external)

#### ✓ External Members:

- Contract trainer representative (where relevant)
- Any other relevant party (employer, industry rep, local partnership company representative, community representative)

### The Programme Development Team should address the following:

- Proposed Title
- Programme / Level / Certifying Body
- Relevant Skills Cluster
- Duration (on-the-job and off-the-job split)
- Proposed Start Date
- Proposed number of starters
- Will a Programme Validation application need to be made? Any Specific Validation Requirements?
- Proposed content
- Proposed funding mechanism
- What is the targeted outcome from course?
- Employment:
  - Evidence of existing or future skill need that this course will address
  - Employer Involvement and support: Detail any involvement of or engagement with employers or industry reps
  - Predicted outcomes
- Progression to FET/HE
  - Detail specific relevant education or training options available to participants on completion of this course
  - FET/HE Stakeholder involvement and support
  - Predicted outcomes
- Proposed teacher/ tutor (specify qualification/experience required)
- Will new equipment be required? Any amendments to buildings/facilities required?

The duration of programme development period will depend on number of factors, including:

- Whether the content required already exists or if content needs to be researched / written
- Whether LOETB are validated to provide the programme, or if an application has to be made to QQI (min 26 weeks from date of submission of validation application to validation panel date) or C&G (minimum 30 days from date of application to EQA visit)
- External stakeholders' level of engagement

### Step 5: Present Draft Programme Proposal to Relevant Stakeholders

The proposed programme should be presented to relevant stakeholders for agreement in principle (prior to presenting to FET Quality Council for formal recommendation).

Agenda and Minutes of these meetings must be maintained.

### Step 6: Present Programme Proposal for Approval to FET Quality Council

The Programme Development Team should forward the Programme Proposal to the Secretary of the FET Quality Council. All relevant evidence must be included. The Secretary will screen the information in the proposal and may seek further information or clarification from the Programme Development Team. The Secretary will ensure that consideration of the proposal is an agenda item for the next meeting of FET Quality Council. A representative of the Programme Development Group may be required to attend the FET Quality Council meeting to respond to any queries that FET Quality Council members may have.

If satisfied with the proposal, the FET Quality Council makes recommendation for approval to LOETB SMT.

*If the proposed start date of the Programme is before the date of next FET Quality Council (as per Schedule of Meetings provided), the Proposal may be forwarded directly to the FMT. The FMT may approve the Proposal or may refer the Proposal to the FET Quality Council for further consideration.*

## APPENDIX 2(b): FET PROGRAMME DEVELOPMENT AND APPROVAL PROCESS UNCERTIFIED PROGRAMMES

### Purpose

The development and approval of all new uncertified FET programmes in LOETB will follow the process as outlined below. By doing so, LOETB will assure that planned FET provision will be in line with LOETB's strategic objectives.

All programmes that have been developed in line with the process outlined below will be considered for approval by the FET Senior Management Team.

The FET Programme Development and Approval Process for uncertified programmes should involve four key steps:

7. Initial Idea and Scoping
8. Meeting with relevant external stakeholders (where required)
9. Programme Development
10. Present Proposal for approval to FMT

### Step 1: Initial Idea

The initial idea for new provision may arise in a variety of ways; internally, from industry needs, arising from enterprise creation / job losses, etc.

The initial idea should be taken to the relevant Line Manager. If it is identified as a potential priority area, a brief scoping exercise should be conducted by relevant LOETB staff members to explore what may be offered.

### Who?

Internal Staff members only – for example the person with idea, Centre/Service Manager, tutor(s) where relevant

### What?

The following points should be considered:

- What is rationale?
- What is target learner profile?
- What funding streams are available?
- Where expected / targeted outcome is progression to FET: what courses can learners progress to?
- What programme could be offered? What does LOETB already offer?
- Does DEASP need to be consulted with?

### When?

When idea arises and prior to meeting relevant external stakeholders

## Step 2: Meeting with relevant external stakeholders (where required)

Agenda and minutes (with agreed actions and timelines) of this meeting (and all meetings with external stakeholders) must be maintained.

The purpose of this meeting is to either introduce the idea (if idea arose internally) or to gather information about the idea (if idea came from external sources). It is very important to establish the following:

- **What?** What is required?
- **Why?** Rationale - why is it required?
- **How?** If it is a course for employed people – will employees be allowed or be required to have time off to complete? Blended learning / remote learning?
- **Who?** Who should be targeted?
- **When?** When does the programme need to start? Duration of course? Hours per week?
- **Where?** Where is proposed location of direct classroom delivery element of course?

## Step 3: Programme Development

Based on information gathered in Steps 1 and 2, a programme development process can commence. All Programme Development meetings must have agenda, minutes, and agreed actions and timelines.

### A Programme Development Team may be made up of:

- Centre/Service Manager
- Relevant subject matter expert (internal or external) (where required)
- Contract trainer representative (where relevant)
- Any other relevant party

### The Programme Development Team should address the following:

- Proposed Title
- Relevant Skills Cluster
- Duration and Proposed Start Date
- Proposed number of starters
- Proposed content
- Proposed funding mechanism
- What is the targeted outcome from course?
- Employment:
  - Evidence of existing or future skill need that this course will address
  - Employer Involvement and support: Detail any involvement of or engagement with employers or industry reps
  - Predicted outcomes
- Progression to FET/HE
  - Detail specific relevant education or training options available to participants on completion of this course
  - Predicted outcomes
- Proposed teacher/ tutor (specify qualification/experience required)
- Will new equipment be required? Any amendments to buildings/facilities required?

#### Step 4: Present Programme Proposal for Approval to FMT

The Programme Development Team should forward the Programme Proposal to a member of the FMT. All relevant evidence must be included.

If satisfied with the proposal, the FMT will approve the proposal and plans for delivery can commence.



## APPENDIX 3: RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION POLICY

POLICY ADOPTED BY LOETB BOARD 30 MARCH 2020

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### Purpose

LOETB is committed to the recruitment and retention of staff of the highest quality, who will provide the best quality teaching, learning opportunities, and support services for all its students and learners.

The role of the Human Resources Department is to ensure that LOETB's Mission of *Excellence through Education and Training* is supported by the recruitment and selection process. With the growth in legislative provisions in the regulation of employment, new and revised approaches to recruitment and selection are required from time to time to reinforce LOETB's values of equality, collaboration, innovation, professionalism and Integrity. These values will apply to all LOETB recruitment to support the development of an effective workforce.

### Scope

This policy applies to recruitment for all vacancies.

Selection of staff is, for the most part, by means of competency-based interviews. Additional methods of selection may be used when necessary and appropriate.

### Legal Framework

This policy is informed by the following legislation:

- (a) Education and Training Boards Act 2013
- (b) Further Education and Training Act 2013
- (c) Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training Act) 2012
- (d) Education (Amendment) Act 2012
- (e) Education (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2007
- (f) Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2006
- (g) Teaching Council Act 2001 and (Amendment) Act 2006
- (h) The Equal Status Acts 2000-2004
- (i) The Education for Persons with Disabilities Bill, 2002.
- (j) The Education (Welfare) Act, 2000
- (k) Qualifications (Education and Training) Act, 1999
- (l) The Education Act, 1998

This list is not exhaustive. A full listing of all educational legislation and relevant circular letters is available on the Department of Education and Skills (DES) website. The Code of Practice for the Governance of ETBs (2019) also informs this policy.

**The following values will inform all recruitment for instruction vacancies in LOETB:**

### Equality

It is the policy of LOETB to ensure that the highest quality applicants are recruited free from any discrimination

on the basis of sex, marital or family status, age, disability, sexual orientation, race, religion or membership of the travelling community.

### **Innovation and Collaboration**

LOETB aims to recruit employees in the most efficient and effective manner possible, including cost-effectiveness. Its recruitment processes will be informed by best practice at all stages, with a view to providing applicants with a positive experience of the process, whether or not their applications are successful.

### **Professionalism and Integrity**

LOETB aims to ensure that the standards utilised throughout the organisation in the procedures to appoint employees are fair, equitable, consistent and transparent, and will provide training to all staff and interviewers to ensure same. Applicants will be assessed in the most objective way possible on criteria such as qualifications, skills, competencies and ability to perform the role.

### **Review**

This policy will be subject to review in 2023 in accordance with organisational needs and/or where it is necessary to do so due to changes in DES regulations, legislation or other such situations.

## APPENDIX 4: PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT POLICY FOR EMPLOYEES OF LOETB

POLICY ADOPTED BY LOETB BOARD 27 JANUARY 2020

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### Purpose

This policy has been developed to enable LOETB to meet one of its strategic goals: Staff Development. It strives to support staff and enabling opportunity for continuing professional career development. This policy document applies to all sectors across the organisation including Schools, FET and OSD.

### Scope

This policy applies to all staff who are direct employees of LOETB. This policy operates within the terms and conditions of relevant Circular Letters.

### Policy Statement

The success of LOETB in delivering on its strategic objectives and fulfilling its vision of being a provider of Education and Training is dependent on its employees. In striving to deliver high quality services, which are innovative, responsive and inclusive, it is vital that we recruit and retain a highly-qualified and motivated work force. It is also crucial that our staff have the ability to learn, train and develop within their roles and also within the organisation.

### What is Professional Development (PD)?

PD is a term used to cover the following:

- Training (instructor-led, content based activity)
- Learning (Self-directed, work based process)
- Development (refers to the broader process of learning and training – acquiring skills or knowledge by a range of different means)

### Professional Development Plan

LOETB will:

Establish a Teaching and Learning Centre to effectively lead the development of all aspects of LOETB's Professional Development requirements. The Teaching and Learning Centre will be guided by the Senior Management Team to identify the knowledge, skills, competencies and capabilities required by the organisation, and to mediate a successful plan in order to meet specific outcomes identified. Where opportunity exists, the Teaching and Learning Centre will encourage the development of creative and innovative practices in order to enhance teaching and learning across the organisation.

### Equality of Opportunity

LOETB will ensure equal access and opportunity to development, education and training for all staff (within the limits set down by the DES). LOETB strives to offer an environment conducive to learning and development opportunities. Experience has shown that employees who are most successful in achieving their professional development goals are those who actively manage their own professional development. Training and development will be set out in the annual PD plans within the context of LOETB's Strategy Statement 2018-2022.

## APPENDIX 5: THE RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 CRISIS, BY LOETB, INTERIM REPORT - FET SECTION

### Section 4: The Impact on Further Education and Training Services

#### Introduction

LOETB has a strong and varied range of FET services across the two counties delivered by nine centres, two training facilities, an Education Service in two prisons, an Adult Guidance Service, a Literacy Service and a Community Education Service.

The aim of the service is to “encourage, enable and support adults who wish to return to education and to avail of educational opportunities that best suits their needs”. LOETB delivers a range of part-time and full-time programmes across its FET centres from Level 1 to 6 on the National Framework of Qualifications. LOETB also delivers an extensive range of training to a diverse range of clients including those entering the labour market for the first time, those changing careers, persons with a disability, and early school leavers. The Training division also provides Phase 2 training in Electrical Apprenticeship.

In the FET sector there are two external statutory bodies that impact on the decision making of the FET Management Team. SOLAS is the Further Education and Training Authority in Ireland and is responsible for funding, planning, and co-ordinating training and further educational programmes. An annual plan of programmes, performance outcomes and a budget will have been agreed with SOLAS for 2020. LOETB will be accountable to SOLAS for its performance. In addition, Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) is the statutory body that has validated LOETB FET programmes and its quality assurance procedures.

The FET Management Team, in making decisions on the appropriate response to COVID-19, needed to take account of the requirements and guidance of SOLAS and QQI. This section looks at the actions taken by the management and staff to respond to the closure of centres as part of the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The challenges facing the FET sector overlapped with those facing the management and staff at second level; the move to remote teaching and learning, and maintaining contact and engagement with their learners, particularly those with educational disadvantages. The response to moving to online teaching and the challenges faced by teachers and learners will be described below.

The majority of certified programmes provided by the FET service are QQI-certified. The assessments methodologies are locally devised and set out in the QQI validated programmes. Many of the programmes included end of year exams, and the early closure required many of the exams to be redeveloped as alternative assessment instruments in line with QQI approved learning outcomes of the relevant programmes. The additional challenge for the FET Management Team was to ensure the Quality Assurance procedures were adhered to successfully. Therefore, the FET Management Team had to submit a detailed contingency plan to QQI. The content of that report will not be duplicated here but will use some its content to summarise the actions taken. The interviews conducted provided some additional detail to the implementation of the contingency plans.

#### 4.1. Response of FET Management Team

On 12 March, the FET Management Team notified all learners and teachers of the decision to close centres and to move tuition to on-line systems. The aim was to ensure the continued provision of essential FET services and certification as far as was practicable. These two objectives posed considerable challenges for both management and staff. Unlike the second level provision, the pathway forward was clear from the beginning and this enabled the FET Management Team to put a contingency plan in place for the maintenance of programmes and the completion and certification of programmes at Levels 5 and 6. In doing so, it was decided early on that, while every effort would be made to maintain all programmes, it was essential to support learners who were completing certification at full award Levels 5 and 6.

#### 4.2. Governance of QA policies and procedures

The QA Governance Structure (see appendix 2) approved by QQI places the decision making on QA policy and procedural issues with the FET Management Team reporting to the LOETB Senior Management Team. In the addressing the implications of the closures for QA procedures, teaching and assessment and putting new arrangements in place, the FET Management Team was the final decision maker. This is in line with QQI requirements to maintain academic oversight and governance. “Alternative arrangements that necessitate change to assessment strategies are endorsed by the approval of the institutions academic governance system.” (P7)13

The governance for the management of the quality assurance procedures and the temporary changes that needed to be put in place was as follows:

- Regular FET Management Team meetings via Microsoft Teams to discuss proposals for alternative assessments and contingency arrangements regarding the Certification process.
- Where changes in procedures are proposed these are approved by the FET Management Team and forwarded to the LOETB Senior Management Team for final approval.
- Any areas for concern will be reported immediately to management on identification for follow up or action.
- Records of all decisions and changes required to existing Quality Assurance processes will be maintained and reviewed by Governance Structures and noted in all meeting minutes.

The FET Management Team identified as a priority cohort the Post Leaving Certificate courses and other courses where learners were aiming for a major award with a view to applying to third level institutions through the CAO system. Every effort was made to ensure that these groups were processed for certification on time for the June certification round. All other courses would be supported to be completed for the August assessment period, or the extra July assessment round provided by QQI. This affected over 500 learners in four centres, with over 80 teachers involved.

The Quality Assurance Support Service team undertook a survey of teaching staff involved in teaching and assessing that priority cohort to determine for each module the following information; what assessments had already been completed, whether all Learning Outcomes had been taught already, and what had already been corrected.

From the survey results the FET Management Team was able to determine that, “most of the class content for programmes that operate according to the academic calendar had already been delivered to learners so most

modules were almost at the stage of assessment. However, much of the assessments that were to take place were now not possible as they would require learners to attend at centres to complete Written Examinations and Skills Demonstrations.”

### 4.3. Changes to QA Procedures

#### 4.3.1. Alternative Assessments

The results of these surveys provided the QA Support Service with a snapshot of what assessments remained, and of those, what needed to be changed in order to facilitate completion on time for the June round of certification, and for subsequent certification rounds.

In relation to the administering of alternative assessments, it was LOETB’s priority to ensure the following:

- “Learners have the opportunity to provide evidence of their achievement of all learning outcomes specified
- Information relating to alternative assessments will be communicated to learners in a timely and understandable manner allowing sufficient time to prepare. Assessment deadlines must consider that learners may struggle with access to or ability to use technology, learners may have childcare or other care commitments or may be unwell themselves (due to COVID-19 or other illness)
- The integrity of the assessments will be maintained; learners will be informed and reminded of rules in relation to assessment malpractice
- Proctoring arrangements will be in place to protect integrity of online exams.
- All learners will be encouraged to undertake alternative assessment arrangements where this course of action is deemed appropriate and feasible. Where a learner does not engage or requests to defer or postpone assessment this will be addressed on a case-by-case basis.
- Learners will not be disadvantaged by changes to assessment formats and timeframes.
- Learners will continue to be supported during this time when completing assessments in any different format.” (p2)15

This is in line with the principles QQI set to guide the approach of institutions in developing alternative arrangements for programmes and the achievement of qualifications. The guidelines proposed that providers’ decisions should be made in a timely fashion; communicate with students and stakeholders keeping them fully informed; care for groups of learners; maintain standards; maintain academic oversight; and stay connected to national supports. (p7)16

In addition, the contingency plans for assessment were discussed with the Teachers’ Union of Ireland (TUI) and agreement reached on how to progress three main areas.

#### 4.3.2. Theory Examinations

The first step was the replacement of the traditional written Theory Examinations, particularly for the CAO priority cohort. The process was described as follows: “Each teacher/tutor that was teaching a module where a Theory Examination was left to be completed, was required to complete a Template form which proposed an alternative method of assessment. For the priority cohort alone, this involved 64 different modules being delivered to 116 class groups, with 38 different teachers involved. There were some modules that were taught by more than one teacher/tutor – in these cases, it was important to ensure a level of consistency and fairness.

Each proposal received was recorded on a template document, which was presented to the FET Management Team on a regular basis. Proposals were either approved, or returned to teacher/tutor for further consideration or with a query, or were not approved (some of the reasons for proposals not being approved included if the assessment was not deemed appropriate, or if learners did not have access to relevant technology, IT packages, etc.), and in some cases, proposals by teachers/tutors to postpone assessment until the learner could access the centre was deemed the most appropriate approach.” (p2)17

By 25 April, all the 38 teachers involved had received approval for their alternative assessments and were being supported by their managers and the QA Support Service to enable their learners to complete assessments in their respective areas. A Record of Approved Alternative Assessments was maintained to track actions taken and decisions made.

The most common alternative assessments that were approved were Assignments in lieu of Examinations, or online Examinations. The QA Support Service worked closely with the relevant staff to familiarise staff and learners with the Moodle system used to conduct online exams. The QA Support Service assumed responsibility for monitoring/invigilating the Online Examinations in order to protect the integrity of the assessments and over 70 online exams were completed. This was recognised by the teachers as an important support for them and their students and this further established the credibility of the QA Support Service.

The successful completion of this process was a considerable achievement for the staff of the QA Support Service.

#### 4.3.3. Skills Demonstrations and Projects

A decision was made by the FET Management Team to defer assessments which required specialist equipment and facilities until learners could access the centres to complete them. Those learner groups whose course assessment require specialist software or equipment were to be prioritised in the first instance. It was hoped that the assessments would be completed on time for the June round of certification, however, if restrictions remained in place, the extra Certification round facilitated by QQI in July would be used.

#### 4.3.4. Work Experience

The QA Support Service surveyed centres again to determine how many learners that were aiming for a major award in June and August certification rounds were not meeting the full requirements for the module and for the major award that they were completing. The responses to the survey were quite positive in that most learners had meet the requirements. However, there was approximately 30% of learners that did not meet full requirements to varying extents.

The FET Management Team approved a proposal for Alternative Arrangements for Learners not meeting full Work Experience Requirements from the QA Support Service. The proposal is set out below:

On analysis of the situation, four different cohorts of learners have been identified.

1. Learners who have completed the required number of hours but do not have a Supervisor's Report (SR) or the SR has not been verified
2. Learners who have completed 75% or more of the required hours
3. Learners who have completed 50%-74% of the required hours
4. Learners who have completed less than 50% of the required hours, or no hours at all (p7)18

An alternative arrangement for each of the above groups was approved by the FET Management Team to assist learners complete the requirements for certification. These actions were then implemented by the centres with the support of the QA Support Service.

## 4.4 Changes to Certificate Procedures

### 4.4.1. Internal Verification (IV)

LOETB put in place a Contingency Plan for Learner Evidence which was in the possession of teachers to be collected from their homes. This enabled the Internal Verification (IV) and External Authentication (EA) processes to continue, with limited number of critical staff conducting IV under strict social distancing conditions. The changes were communicated to staff in an email on 24 April. The IV and EA process was managed and undertaken centrally by the QA Support Service for all FET programmes delivered across the organisation.

A Guidance Document was prepared and approved by the FET Management Team regarding how folders should be prepared for the certification process and some forms were amended to consider the various ways that evidence needed to be presented. There was flexibility given in how the folders were presented – in their usual paper format, in digital format or in a combination of paper and digital. All information was made available for staff on the QQI Resources Section of the LOETB website.

The QA Support Service collected all the necessary folders and conducted the IV process on time. This was a mammoth task and required flexibility from the staff involved. The key message to teachers was that, when they had the materials ready, arrangements would be made to collect them. This allowed the team to conduct the IV process on a rolling and continuous basis which enabled them to complete the process in a more efficient way.

Because of the unique circumstances it was decided that Internal Verifiers would check the marks of 100% of the folders this year to eliminate calculation errors. This turned out to be an important decision as some totting or transcription errors were identified and addressed, thus reducing the number of subsequent appeals. To make the process more efficient, the teacher had to provide their marking schemes, the marking sheets from the module descriptors, and the Summary Results sheets were printed for each module.

### 4.4.2. External Authentication (EA)

The restrictions of COVID-19 contingency arrangements for the EA process were approved by the FET Management Team as outlined below.

Arrangements were made whereby modules taught by new teachers were externally authenticated. In addition, Authenticators were employed to work across centres in areas such as Communications and Work Experience. Arrangements were made for the Authenticators to visit or, if that was not possible, arrangements were made for either the evidence to be made available digitally to the Authenticator or for the learner evidence to be delivered by courier to and from the Authenticator's home, with their agreement. The EA process was successfully completed, and all reports were presented to the Results Approval Panel meetings.



#### 4.4.3. Results Approval Panel (RAP) meetings

Results Approval Panel meetings took place face-to-face or through Microsoft Teams as planned in time for the June, July, and August submission deadlines. Emphasis was placed on the following:

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

The target set to enable all learners who were seeking to submit results to the CAO process certification processes were completed on time for those learners who were seeking to move on to third level courses.

## 4.5. Impact of closure of specific Services

### 4.5.1. Literacy Services

In the report to QQI LOETB stated that “provision at lower levels (Levels 1-3, and sometimes 4 depending on the learner cohort) was more difficult to maintain online so the most common approach by tutors was to have learning materials delivered to learners by post and maintain contact by phone and email. This was effective in maintaining learner engagement prior to the Easter break, learner engagement was at approximately 80% (according to a survey of centres).”

As with second level provision the opt-out rate from learning engagement significantly increased after the Easter break. The reasons for reduced engagement included a lack of childcare, limited access to IT/internet, lack of IT skills, illness or lack of availability due to employment (temporary or otherwise) in front line services. Tutors also recognised that for vulnerable adult learners the supportive relationship with the tutor and direct face-to-face teaching is a key motivator. Tutors made continuous efforts to stay in contact with these learners in the hope of the learners returning to direct provision in the Autumn. The Literacy Services also launched two initiatives to support those who may have been struggling with learning at home during the closure. The first was the Learner Support Initiative which offered help to anyone who experienced problems with distance learning such as uploading assignments, accessing coursework, maths/literacy and so on. The second initiative launched was Support to Parents who were helping children with schoolwork at home such as Irish for Parents, Maths for Parents and help for Parents whose first language is not English.

### 4.5.2. Community Education

Many of the Community Education programmes that had been scheduled to start in 2020 were impacted negatively by the crisis. The Community Education Facilitators continued to engage with those who are most disadvantaged in the community through social media. This was achieved through a series of video tutorials, by LOETB tutors, that were made available on the LOETB Community Education Facebook page. The videos received 620 comments and 2,282 likes while each Community Education post is currently seen by an average of 1,114 people having grown from 4 on the first day of lockdown. The Community Education page now has 932 followers, and it is hoped that this will have provided a positive introduction to further education and training, encouraging participation on programmes scheduled to start in September. It was also imperative that the relationship with learners and community groups was maintained during lockdown and this was achieved through many interventions such as the online photography programmes that were developed and introduced.

#### 4.5.3. Training Services

The level of training provision in LOETB is quite significant with direct provision of two Electrical Phase 2 Apprenticeship programmes, two training facilities (Midlands Skills Centre in Tullamore and the National Construction Centre in Mount Lucas), a Community Training Centre, and a range of programmes delivered through contracted training with Second Providers. Two electrical phase 2 course had just commenced, and it was not possible to maintain the course online because of the practical nature of the programme.

The Skills to Advance programme for employees was postponed because the employees involved were no longer in employment.

Several courses provided by Contracted Training were completed as they were coming to an end at the time of the closure. However, other programmes provided could not be completed because of the practical assessments. As all trainees were receiving a payment on the course, SOLAS required the ETB to justify the payment during the closure. Thus, trainees had to maintain a level of engagement to maintain their payment. The theory modules were provided online, and other modules were offered to trainees in soft and transferable skills. Participation in these modules was voluntary as the modules were not core to their programme. The Contacted Training Provider continued to provide modules and maintain a level of support to their trainees. The arrangement put in place with the contractors was that a payment of 50% of the fee was paid on an ongoing basis. The contractor could claim for additional work undertaken. The Healthcare programme had to switch the practical assessment to online video skills demonstrations.

#### 4.5.4. Local Training Initiatives and Specialist Training Providers

There are four Local Training Initiatives (LTIs – community-based training programmes). Three of the LTIs successfully continued to provide training through online programmes and one Local Training Initiative could not continue during the closure as the start date was post-shutdown. The ETB required the staff to change to research and development during this phase. This led to the development of online Retail Sales Techniques programmes which were started during the shutdown, in partnership with Second Providers and the Dept. of Employment Affairs and Social Protection as a response to those who are long-term unemployed.

The National Learning Networks continued to engage with learners during lockdown. Though there was a small number of learners who were slow to submit work, the two centres reported 100% engagement up to Easter. This did reduce somewhat thereafter due to issues such as limited digital access and ill health/anxiety, however, the centres continued to support learners through contact with other services/agencies to ensure that learners had food and access to supports as required.

#### 4.5.5. Youthreach and Community Training Centre (CTC)

Youthreach and the CTC provide programmes to young people who have left second level education prior to completion of the Leaving Certificate. Again, the challenge for staff was to maintain contact with the learners and to provide support to them during the lockdown. There was limited educational engagement. It was noted that, because the learners at the CTC were already using online platforms (Google Suite), the level of continuing engagement by their learners was stronger than that in Youthreach (at 93% prior to Easter). The CTC has successfully submitted remote assessments for VTCT Barbering and Hair and Beauty, receiving praise for the work from both IQA and EQA and based on predicted grades, including VTCT Diplomas, 17 learners will receive their Major Awards/Diplomas in October (100% of learners will complete this year).

#### 4.5.6. Post Leaving Certificate Programmes

The Post Leaving Certificate Programmes are based in three locations: Portlaoise Institute, Tullamore FET Centre, and Abbeylax FET Centre. They offer a range of courses at Levels 5 and 6 with a mix of “hands on” practical work, academic work, and work experience designed as a step towards skilled employment or progression to third level. The challenge for these centres was to continue to ensure that learners were supported to complete their course work and assessments and put forward their work for certification. Communication with learners occurred on a regular basis by online conferencing, phone calls, emails, and texts. The priority focus was on those completing Level 5 and 6 programmes to ensure that they could progress through the CAO process at the end of the academic year.

Teaching staff used a range of IT platforms such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Screencast-o-matic, and Skype to deliver content to learners online where possible. Alternative assessments were introduced for exams and all the necessary quality assurance procedures were successfully completed. An analysis of the results and certification levels for the programmes was conducted and results were found to be like previous years. Factors which led to changes in the spread of grades were discussed at Results Approval Panel meetings and included weaker or stronger groups from previous years, change in levels of engagement from learners and interestingly, learners whose performance improved significantly due to the more flexible nature of delivery – for example where attendance at classes was low but learners engaged better with online learning and performed better in the last two months of their course.

#### 4.5.7. Education Centres in Portlaoise and Midlands Prisons

The decision made by the Department of Justice was to protect the prison population by reducing the engagement of outside bodies. It was decided that the teachers would not be able to be present in the buildings. The teachers continued to link with the IPS Education Officers and, as a result, 124 QQI folders were submitted for certification during shutdown as well as continuing to support 24 students with their Leaving Certificate subjects. The teaching staff also developed and provided video tutorials, access to webinars, workbooks, materials for art, mindfulness, yoga packs, literacy packs, music resource packs, books during this period.

### 4.6 Responding to urgent Labour Market Needs with Online Provision

LOETB designed two programmes to respond to training needs that had become urgent due to the COVID-19 crisis. The programmes are as follows:

#### 4.6.1. Infection Prevention and Control Programme

Due to the COVID-19 outbreak, the HSE made an urgent request for people in Ireland to register to be on call to help care for the people affected by the virus during this emergency. LOETB committed to attempting to respond to this urgent need, particularly in the Midlands region, by providing online training in Infection Prevention and Control to current QQI Level 5 (minimum) major award holders, and learners that are currently on QQI Level 5 Healthcare Support/Health Service Skills/Nursing Studies programmes.

Staff of LOETB engaged collaboratively with contract training companies to devise an appropriate online programme which effectively facilitated the learners to achieve the specific learning outcomes associated with the award, with a particular emphasis on COVID-19 related information as it was becoming available. Significant efforts were made to ensure that assessments could be completed by learners in their home while also protecting the integrity of assessment. LOETB liaised with QQI to ensure that they were aware of, and satisfied

with, the proposed programme and delivery method.

The programme was delivered online, with a minimum duration of five days of course delivery. Learners received access to online lectures, notes and workshops, on a flexible basis, and were supported on an ongoing basis by experienced, qualified tutors. Assessment were conducted during and on completion of the course content.

This programme was made available to attempt to respond to the HSE's need for staff. Course places would only be allocated for the duration of the COVID-19 crisis. Completion of this course did not guarantee that the learner would receive a position, in either a paid or voluntary capacity, with the HSE or any other employer in the healthcare industry. There was significant demand for the programme for a range of reasons – most applicants wanted to gain employment, while others wanted to be in a position to work on a voluntary basis during the pandemic, and others had an increased interest in infection control because of the pandemic.

Several other ETBs subsequently started to offer the programme to meet the demand nationally. Up to the July round of certification, 82 LOETB learners have completed assessments and have been submitted for certification, with some learners still completing assessments.

LOETB has provided seven different courses to date, with 130 participants in total.

#### 4.6.2. Remote Working Programme

LOETB, in collaboration with IDA Ireland, SOLAS, and Grow Remote developed two new online national training programmes that aim to develop the capability and capacity of those wishing to become remote workers and those wishing to lead remote teams. Remote Work Ready is aimed at employees and unemployed people hoping to transition to a remote working role and is fully funded and Leading Remote Teams is aimed at line managers leading a team that includes remote workers. It consists of Leadplaceless certification and a QQI Level 6 minor award in Project Management.

Both programmes are delivered online, available nationally and are of seven weeks' duration (with additional time allocated to facilitate completion of ECDL in Remote Work Ready and for submission of assessment material in Leading Remote Teams).

#### 4.7. Teachers' perspective

The QA Support Service undertook a survey with teachers across the Level 5 and 6 provision to get feedback on their experience of the whole process. This section is based on the responses to that survey completed by 27 teaching staff in four FET centres. Teachers were asked a wide range of questions about their experience and the results of the survey will be recorded by the QA Support Service. I am including here a short summary of the key findings.

Teachers indicated that the main obstacles they encountered since centre closed included the increased workload; knowledge of remote teaching and learning; poor online connection with some students; lack of resources at home, communication with students, and levels of overall engagement.

Teachers recognised that the challenges for learners were significant and noted that the learners were

concerned about isolation, missing the support of teachers and peers, working at home with limited supports, pressure to get work done, limited access to resources, poor wifi, and a lack of confidence in using IT systems generating stress and demotivation.

An important question asked of the teachers was if they thought that learner performance was impacted upon by the modified assessments. The majority stated that the results were consistent with learners' previous performance and that the results at the end of the year were consistent with the pattern of results in 2019.

It was clear from the survey results that there was no consistent approach to the combating of plagiarism. The FET Management Team should consider the introduction of a suitable plagiarism package for all FET centres. This would be a considerable help to teachers and tutors and would further encourage the use of IT systems for the online submission and assessment of assignments.

In answering what elements of the modified arrangements might be useful to use after the crisis teachers identified the following:

- The use of Microsoft Teams and Zoom.
- The use of the virtual classroom for students that must stay at home for some reason outside of their control.
- Online exams, the collection and correcting of assignments and the online storage of information.
- Identifying some aspects of the modules that can be assessed remotely.
- Recording demonstrations to enable students' access at a time that suits for revision.
- Getting students to work together through Teams.

This is consistent with the view of school management that the move to online teaching and learning was significantly developed through the crisis and that this should be built upon in the coming academic year.

#### 4.8. Learners' perspective

The QA Support Service undertook a survey of learners across the Level 5 and 6 provision to get feedback on their experience of the whole response. This section is based on the responses to that survey completed by 156 learners across four FET centres. Learners were asked a wide range of questions about their experience and the results of the survey will be recorded by the QA Support Service. I am recording here a short summary of the key findings.

Learners identified what they missed most by the closure; this included the loss of the social and community aspect of attending the FET centres, the relationship with tutors and peers in supporting their learning, the ability to ask questions and get answers in real time, the lack of preparation for exams, and the ability to do the practical in centres.

The main challenges identified included a lack of routine, difficulty in motivation and attention to study; not having the physical space to study, learning to use IT platforms, a lack of broadband and suitable devices, home-schooling and trying to find time to study, the inability to complete practicals, having to sit exams online, a difficulty in following instructions and addressing queries through email or texts, uploading to Moodle and logging into exams. Some described that the time pressure to complete assignments was their biggest challenges.

## 4.9. Conclusions

It is important to acknowledge the dedication and commitment of all FET Centre management and staff (teaching and administrative), and the Quality Assurance Support Team who have worked in less than ideal circumstances to ensure continuity of FET service delivery and assessment. The situation was constantly evolving, and contingency plans were being developed and adjusted in response to HSE and Government advice on an ongoing basis. The FET Management Team fulfilled their commitment to maintaining a record of plans as they evolved and maintaining contact with their learners, staff, and stakeholders such as QQI, SOLAS, and other relevant bodies on an ongoing basis.

The challenge for FET Centre managers and their staff in the approach required to provide education and training services in September. It is important to note that, as in the second level provision, the loss of education opportunity and the personal impact on learners most affected those learners on programmes at the early stages of delivery.

In addition, it is important to note that the closure had a significant impact on the most vulnerable learners. In this crisis the effort to reduce the educational loss to those at Level 5 and 6 seems to have been successful. The priority will now have to be to re-engage the vulnerable learners in the autumn, recognising that online teaching and learning on its own will not be successful with this group. A blended learning model with considerable support for learners will have to be developed if public health guidelines reduce the capacity to return to face-to-face classes on a full-time basis.

## APPENDIX 6: SELF-EVALUATION STEERING GROUP AND CONSULTATION PROCESS

The table below shows the membership of the Self-Evaluation Steering Group and their role in the organisation.

Name	Role
Louise Birchall	Quality Assurance Support Service
Padraig Boland	FET Manager (Skills)
Patricia Cullen	Deputy Principal, Portlaoise College
Tony Dalton	FET Director
Mary Dooley	Quality Assurance Support Service
Geraldine Dunne	Quality Assurance Support Service
Eileen Dunne	FET Manager (Inclusion)
Colin Flaherty	FET Manager (Pathways)
Shauna Busto Gilligan	Literacy Teacher, Portlaoise Prison Education Centre
Darryl Griffith	Centre Manager, Mountmellick FET Centre
Anne Marie Keane	FET Manager (Quality Assurance)
Vivienne Keenan	Teacher, Tullamore and Birr FET Centres
Jessica Mullen	Professional Development Coordinator
Michelle Shanahan	Centre Manager, Tullamore FET Centre
Pauline Shannon	Teacher, Abbeyleix FET Centre
Hazel Smyth	Corporate Services Department

The table below illustrates the Consultation Process. Text with a line through it shows consultation sessions that were planned originally but did not go ahead due to COVID-19 Pandemic.

Stakeholders	How	When	Criteria to be considered
Learners	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Learner Survey</li> <li><del>2. Learner Councils –</del></li> <li><del>TFETC &amp; PI focus groups</del></li> <li>3. AONTAS Learner Forum</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. October 2020</li> <li><del>2. W/C 30th March</del></li> <li><del>3. December 2020</del></li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• QA Policies and Procedures</li> <li>• Access, Transfer and Progression</li> <li>• Public Info &amp; Communications</li> <li>• Learning environment</li> <li>• Assessment of learners</li> <li>• Supports for learners</li> </ul>
Teaching Staff & Management	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Survey of all FET staff</li> <li>2. FET Forum – workshop &amp; online survey</li> <li>3. QA Team - workshop</li> <li>4. OSD – sample of OSD staff</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. October 2020 Teaching staff Levels 4-6 Teaching staff Levels 1-3</li> <li>2. 11th March</li> <li>3. 12th March</li> <li>4. 1st week of November</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mission and Strategy</li> <li>• Policies and Procedures</li> <li>• Staff Recruitment, Management &amp; Development</li> <li>• Access, Transfer &amp; Progression</li> <li>• Integrity and approval of learner results</li> <li>• Info &amp; data management</li> <li>• Public Info &amp; Communications</li> <li>• Learning Environment</li> <li>• Assessment of learners</li> <li>• Supports for learners</li> <li>• Self-Evaluation, Monitoring &amp; Review</li> <li>• Oversight, monitoring &amp; review</li> </ul>
Second Providers	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Contract Trainers – Workshop followed by online survey</li> <li>2. Community Training Providers – Workshop followed by online survey</li> <li><del>3. Joint Workshop re Self-Evaluation, Monitoring and Review</del></li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. 9th March</li> <li>2. Conducted remotely week of 12th October</li> <li>3. TBC</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mission &amp; Strategy</li> <li>• Policies and Procedures</li> <li>• Public Information and Communications</li> <li>• Learning Environment</li> <li>• Assessment of Learners</li> </ul>
Higher Education	Athlone IT IT Carlow	Early January 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access Transfer and Progression</li> <li>• Monitoring and Review of Relationships with Third Parties</li> </ul>