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Quality in Further Education & Training

A Synthesis of the Education
& Training Board Follow-Up
Reports to the Inaugural QA
Review Process



Dearbhú Cáilíochta
agus Cáilíochtaí Éireann
Quality and
Qualifications Ireland

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FOREWORD

In 2021/2022, QQI conducted an Inaugural Review of the effectiveness of the quality assurance policies and procedures established by the 16 education and training boards (ETBs). Following the completion and publication of the reports from these reviews, each ETB responded with a Follow-Up Report detailing the progress achieved in addressing recommendations made.

This synthesis report presents an overview of the Follow-Up Reports submitted by the 16 ETBs in response to the Inaugural Review process and offers an insight into its continuing impact in the twelve months after review. This represents a period of evolution and development in the ETBs. Further Education and Training (FET) Colleges of the Future are being established across the sector, in collaboration with SOLAS and the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS), providing a central location that encompasses the diversity of learners in ETB FET. For the first time, Ireland's school leavers can select from further education as well as higher education providers through the common applications office (CAO) when choosing where to continue their education. It is also the first time that learners can study in their local ETBs and go on to achieve Tertiary Degrees, many awarded by Ireland's newly established technological universities (TUs).

Strong examples of collaboration, stakeholder engagement and striving for an external perspective are prevalent in this report. The strengthening of these relationships indicates a FET sector that is maturing and growing in confidence. There is also evidence of the ETBs' response to the findings and recommendations in the *Quality Assurance of Further Education and Training in the ETB Sector – Sectoral Report (2023)*. This is exemplified in the enhanced use of data to inform decision making and planning in ETBs and the systemic use of continuing professional development (CPD) for staff, to improve the experience of learners. The push to amplify and capture the learner voice is common across the Follow-Up Reports resulting in empowered learners that are more confident in their navigation of, and contribution to, the tertiary space.

This synthesis report reflects a sector evolving and developing its management and enhancement of quality assurance and embedding a quality culture. QQI will continue to work with ETBs to progress the findings of the Inaugural Review and towards the establishment of a systematic quality reporting process.

Dr Padraig Walsh
Chief Executive Officer

INTRODUCTION

The inaugural review of quality assurance in the 16 Education and Training Boards (ETBs) took place from March 2021 to May 2022. The external review teams included reviewers (national and international) with expertise and perspectives from further education and training (FET), vocational education, quality assurance, learner voice, community and industry. The inaugural review process sought to further encourage the development of the quality culture within ETBs and improve public confidence in the quality of FET provision by promoting transparency and public awareness.

Following completion of the inaugural reviews and publication of the 16 review reports, a sectoral report team was established by QQI to identify system-level findings and observations. The sectoral report team identified many aspects of the quality assurance of FET in ETBs which are well managed, as well as some areas where improvements could be made. The report of their findings, [Quality Assurance of Further Education and Training in the ETB Sector: Sectoral Report](#) (hereafter “the Sectoral Report”) was published in March 2023.

Twelve months following the publication of each ETB’s review report, the ETB submitted a [follow-up report](#), outlining proposed actions and plans to address the recommendations of the review team. The final follow-up report was submitted to QQI in March 2024.

The purpose of this synthesis report is to provide an overview of QA developments, enhancements and activities in the sector as reported in these 16 follow-up reports. It identifies key themes and topics, and some key initiatives implemented by ETBs in response to recommendations made in the review reports. It is important to recognise that the follow-up reports do not reflect all of the QA activities within an ETB; rather, they reflect what the ETBs have chosen to emphasise as the most relevant aspects of their quality assurance and enhancement activity arising from their individual review recommendations. This report includes reference to relevant case studies¹ included in the follow-up reports.

Core themes identified across the follow-up reports include enhancements to stakeholder engagement by ETBs through the formalisation of the engagement process; amplification of the learner voice; enhanced data management; and the use of indicators and the promotion of continuous professional development (CPD) to enhance the learning experience.

¹ An accompanying collection of case studies is published on QQI's website.

1. STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT – EMPLOYERS/INDUSTRY

QQI's [Sector-Specific Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for ETBs](#) set out the scope of quality assurance procedures for an ETB. Whilst this is dependent on organisational structure, context and complexity, the scope recognises how active ETBs are in and across their local communities and their engagement with other ETBs and stakeholders. The scope of an ETB's QA procedures extends to 'engagement with other parties for the purposes of providing programmes of education and training and related services and the range of awarding, regulatory, professional or statutory bodies that ETBs may be working with or accountable to'.²

A key focus for ETBs is the provision of education and training for employment³ and it is clear that ETBs have strong relationships with stakeholders in industry and with employers. This was a common theme arising in the review reports and in the follow-up reports. Across the sixteen follow-up reports there are several accounts of regional and national initiatives, in which ETBs both participate and lead, that address effective industry and employer engagement.

The Strategic Employer Engagement Database (SEED), launched by Mayo, Sligo and Leitrim ETB (MSLETB) in 2022⁴, is a system that allows ETBs to manage relationships with employers and is an example of an initiative adopted across the ETB sector. Working with SEED is highlighted by eight ETBs in their follow-up reports, with rollout of the initiative at varying stages at the time of reporting.

ETBs also recorded individual efforts designed to facilitate good relationships with employers and industry. This includes consultation with employers to inform the development of employer fora to provide a space for discussion of regional employment needs:

- Donegal ETB reported that its Enterprise Engagement Working Group (EEWG) enables links with local enterprise and other relevant stakeholders. Progress is documented annually in the Skills to Advance Planning Report.
- Longford and Westmeath ETB (LWETB) noted a continuing priority within the ETB to develop networks with employers. As such, the ETB is involved in a number of internal and external working groups. A database for industry-related information, to be used in the ETB's engagement with employers, is under development. LWETB outlined its response to industry's need for programmes to upskill their workers in the case study – [Employer Engagement](#)⁵, which explains the ETB's use of its contacts with industry to inform its approach to skill shortages and the provision of programmes.
- Cavan and Monaghan ETB (CMETB) reported on an invitation to employers to engage with the ETB through the establishment of an Employer Engagement Working Group. The need to communicate clearly with this cohort of stakeholders has been identified as crucial.
- Dublin and Dún Laoghaire ETB (DDLETB) has recruited an Enterprise Engagement Officer to promote and progress the ETB's engagement with industry. This is in direct response to a recommendation made in its inaugural review report.

2 [Sector Specific Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines - Developed by QQI for Education and Training Boards \(ETBs\) \(2017\)](#), p.4.

3 [Education and Training Boards Act \(2013\)](#).

4 <https://msletb.ie/strategic-employer-engagement-database-seed/>

5 [Longford and Westmeath ETB \(LWETB\) Follow-Up Report \(2023\)](#), p 38.

- Galway and Roscommon ETB (GRETB) noted that its Adult Education Officer (AEO) responsible for Enterprise and Engagement is a member of the Western Region Skills Forum. This has boosted the ETB's capacity to forge links with the sales, engineering, medtech and ICT sectors. GRETB is also represented on the Net Zero Cities⁶ steering group and is working with Bia Innovator, the food innovation and incubation centre for the West of Ireland, on a range of programmes.
- City of Dublin ETB (CDETB) reported that it had increased the number of staff in its Employer Engagement Unit by three and was also proposing to expand the unit into a central hub. CDETB's KA2 project, which develops training for facilitators of employer engagement, has been completed and the training is now part of the ETB's professional learning and development (PLD) offering. Members of the Employer Engagement Unit have also travelled to colleges in France and the Netherlands to learn from the experience of providers in different jurisdictions.
- Tipperary ETB reported on a Workforce Development Group that aims to bring key FET staff together to consider the ETB's response to workforce needs. As well as working directly with employers, employees and industry representatives to identify skills gaps and training needs and plans to address these, the group works to promote and market itself to industry. It was stated that this collaboration feeds into the ETB's programme development and also helps Tipperary ETB find and confirm suitable work placement opportunities for learners.

A number of ETBs have engaged directly with local industry to address their specific training needs:

- Donegal ETB outlined its work with the Donegal Women in Business Network in the case study - [Donegal Women in Business Network \(DWBN\)](#)⁷ to provide training in areas crucial to the development of skills by members of the network.
- Cork ETB described its response to the needs of local industry with its case study - [Responding to the needs of external stakeholders](#)⁸, whereby the ETB's engagement with a Cork-based hotel group identified an industry need for training in leadership. An employers' support team located in Cork College of FET, Bishopstown Campus, promotes the ETB's education and training services to business, provides opportunities for upskilling and reskilling for people in employment, and provides bespoke training for companies. The ETB also reported that it works with local industry to address its own staff training needs through a staff placement in industry programme. This programme also fosters opportunities to supplement the student learning experience through the inclusion of, for example, field trips and guest speakers.

The involvement of industry in contributing to the development of specific ETB programmes was also evident in reporting:

- DDLETB described the benefits of using a forum for employers in the development of the ETB's Early Learning and Care (ELC) programme. Relevant industry representatives were invited to provide feedback to the ETB during the programme development process and served also as members of the ELC programme board. The ETB noted that this engagement has been crucial to ensuring that the programme is fit for purpose. DDLETB also reported

6 <https://netzerocities.eu/>

7 [Donegal ETB Follow-Up Report \(2023\)](#), p. 41.

8 [Cork ETB Follow-Up Report \(2023\)](#), p. 55.

on an intended consultation with industry to develop the organisation’s programme development policy. The ETB has also established a steering group, consisting of a number of employer representatives from the healthcare sector, to oversee the development of a new healthcare micro-qualification to be delivered using an augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) methodology.

- Donegal ETB outlined how it engaged with employers to inform the development of its City and Guilds Supervisory Management in Hospitality programme. Hotels were consulted with to identify the priorities and needs in this sector.
- Louth and Meath ETB (LMETB) reported on its collaboration with employers when developing and leading apprenticeships, particularly in the advanced manufacturing area, stating that its apprenticeship development is aligned with employment opportunities and needs. The ETB’s QA Governance/Management Committee (QAGMC) is responding to the requirements of the post-2016 apprenticeship structure for the Robotic Automation Apprenticeship by extending its membership to include industry and academic members.
- In September 2022, Limerick and Clare ETB (LCETB) formed a working group of local small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and FET staff with a view to reviewing nine NFQ Level 3 IT module descriptors. These were then externally reviewed before being made available for use across the ETB.

2. EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS IN GOVERNANCE

The sectoral report emphasised that ‘the quality assurance of FET provision should be covered by the institution’s governance arrangements which include a strong voice for internal and external stakeholders i.e. employers/industry, staff and learners’⁹. In their follow-up reports, some ETBs have reported on work to include the ‘employer voice’ in governance structures.

- In 2022, Donegal ETB undertook a review of its QA governance membership. As a result of this review, additional internal and external members were included in different governance groups. These include the involvement of teachers, tutors and instructors on the programme and QA sub-committees of the ETB’s FET quality council. The quality council also has further representation from industry and community stakeholders.
- LCETB also undertook a review of its quality council membership, and the ETB has now included representation from higher education, industry (Mid-West Regional Skills Forum) and a learner representative.
- In its follow-up report, Kerry ETB noted the value of having a diverse range of perspectives on its quality council and reported that, in addition to an independent chair, it has now included a further two independent members. The ETB’s new Statement of Strategy (2023-2027)¹⁰ also outlines an ambition to work more closely with internal and external stakeholders – particularly marginalised groups – to inform its QA planning.

⁹ Quality Assurance of Further Education and Training in the ETB Sector, Sectoral Report (March 2023), p. 14.

¹⁰ <https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.kerryetb.ie%2Fwp-content%2Fuploads%2F2023%2F06%2FStrategy-Statement-2023-2027-English-Accessible.docx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK>

3. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT/EDUCATION

A number of ETBs included activities/actions on community engagement and education in their follow-up reports. Notable examples of community engagement and education include:

- LCETB reported on the development of a new Community Education and Training Partner Local Business Process 'intended to deliver a harmonised, streamlined approach to developing and engaging with community partner groups in the region'. Having reviewed its modes of community partner engagement, the ETB established a webpage, [Collegeoffet.ie/communities](https://collegeoffet.ie/communities), which allows community and voluntary groups that provide adult education to register to partner with the ETB for the provision of teaching hours supported by a service level agreement. The objective is to encourage and support adult learners from disadvantaged backgrounds to avail of education at little or no cost. The ETB notes that over 90 community partners have registered.
- Laois and Offaly ETB (LOETB) outlined an approach it adopted whereby the ETB's community education services deliver shorter "taster" programmes in its FET centres. This has been successful in increasing the number of learners engaging with centres and progressing. The ETB also introduced a targeted approach of offering uncertified and lower-level programmes in rural communities. It was found that, once engaged, these learners can be encouraged to progress and pursue further programmes in FET centres. LOETB also reported on its use of the REACH Fund (formerly the Mitigating Against Educational Disadvantage (MAEDF) fund) which 'delivers funding to improve access and supports for educationally disadvantaged learners who participate in community education programmes across Ireland'.¹¹ The ETB reported that it has administered funds to 600 individuals and roughly 20 community groups through this scheme.
- KWETB reported that its new quality assurance framework will be rolled out to its contracted training and community providers, which will provide an opportunity to further develop and strengthen the ETB's relationships with these stakeholders.
- Donegal ETB reported that it produces an annual report documenting engagement between FET services staff and community stakeholders, the findings of which are shared at a community provision seminar every year. This report directly informs strategic planning within the ETB.

4. LEARNER ENGAGEMENT / LEARNER VOICE

Another area identified in the sectoral report for improving the effectiveness of quality assurance in the sector was the need to strengthen the learner voice in quality assurance. Given the diversity of learners and provision within ETBs it can be difficult to achieve learner representation that reflects that diversity and engagement can be difficult to sustain. The sectoral report noted that learner voice was 'not as loud as would be expected, and the arrangements for senior managers to hear and act on these voices can be inconsistent and insufficient'.¹²

¹¹ <https://www.solas.ie/reach-fund/>

¹² Quality Assurance of Further Education and Training in the ETB Sector, Sectoral Report (March 2023), p.14.

The sectoral report team explicitly encouraged ETBs to build quality assurance and strengthen learner voice by ‘making arrangements for learners to be represented in decision-making groups’¹³. The follow-up reports included limited evidence of the inclusion of learners as members of key governance groups. The following two examples were noted:

- Mayo, Sligo and Leitrim ETB (MSLETB) reported on a review of its QA governance groups and their terms of reference undertaken in 2022 resulting in the addition of two learners to the membership of ETB’s FET quality council, a currently enrolled learner and a graduate learner. The ETB noted that it aims to review the membership and terms of reference of these groups annually. The development of a tool to measure the effectiveness of the ETB’s learner representation in governance is also being progressed.
- LCETB reported on the appointment of a learner to its quality council in 2021.

I. LEARNER FORA, REPRESENTATIVE STRUCTURES & SUPPORTS

The follow-up reports do indicate, however, that the enhancement of learner voice within ETB quality systems via other mechanisms is a notable area of focus across the sector. A variety of models of engagement with learners were referenced, including the development of internal fora and structures as well as collaboration with organisations such as AONTAS¹⁴ to amplify learner voice.

- Learner representative mechanisms reported by LCETB included a students’ unit on the ETB’s Mulgrave Campus where, in 2022, over 70 class representatives were active on behalf of learners from programmes across two campuses. The National Hairdressing Apprenticeship (NHA)¹⁵ led by the ETB also includes learner representation from each class group, a number of which were consulted and provided feedback to the revalidation process for the programme.
- CDETБ reported that strengthening the voice of learners was one of the key developmental areas that arose from its review. In 2022, the ETB established a learner support and engagement service (LSES), which has established a cross-centre/services learner survey, supported student councils, supported learners on QA governance groups and programme boards, and begun developing structures to support and amplify learner voice and leadership across FET. The ETB reported on a FET learner conference planned for 2024, with representatives from each centre as a means of closing the ‘feedback loop’.
- Donegal ETB reported that since 2020, it has developed a number of mechanisms for the collection of its student voice. A Governance and Management Student Forum was established in May 2022, which meets four times per year to consider items related to programme development and delivery and the development of the ETB’s QA system. Feedback is provided to the relevant ETB governance groups for review and response. The aim is to ‘provide a channel for the student voice in QA planning and decision-making’¹⁶. The ETB also hosts an annual student voice event, which seeks to gather feedback from

¹³ Quality Assurance of Further Education and Training in the ETB Sector, Sectoral Report (March 2023), p. 14.

¹⁴ <https://www.aontas.com/>

¹⁵ <https://hairdressingapprenticeship.ie/>

¹⁶ Donegal ETB Follow-up Report, p. 5.

learners on their experience of the ETB's FET services. The ETB illustrates the progress made on the basis of previous learners' feedback through a 'You Said-We Did' presentation. A report is produced after each learner voice event and is shared across FET services – including the senior management team and the governance and management groups – to inform QA planning and developments. The ETB reported that feedback from student forums has resulted in real change, e.g. additional courses for childcare students, improved classroom facilities, addressing travel issues for learners and the introduction of inclusion training courses.

- Cork ETB reported that its Learner Voices group was established in 2021, and has developed the Cork ETB Learner Charter. The group is also represented on the Cork ETB Assessment Working Group and, in conjunction with the latter, has collaborated in the development of a series of videos to provide learners with an introduction to the assessment process in Cork ETB.
- CMETB reported on its Learner Advisory Network (LAN) where learner representatives from each FET service are invited to meet with the ETB's quality assurance enhancement service (QAES) to discuss the learner survey feedback and to help plan the structure and focus of the annual learner forum. The ETB reported that the QAES is reviewing the effectiveness of the LAN as a feedback-gathering mechanism and a project plan will be implemented over 2023/2024. The QAES is also exploring the possibility of hosting a series of 'Learner Connect' events in addition to the Learner Forum (held in February 2023). The first of these events was a forum held in May 2023 specifically for Youthreach learners.
- CMETB further reported that it maintains a Learner Survey Database and that a synthesis report based on student surveys from 2019-2022 was underway. The ETB reported that learner survey data is used to identify targets for centres. Details of the ETB's student survey and how the results are used are outlined in its case study – [Learner Voice at CMETB](#)¹⁷.
- Waterford and Wexford ETB (WWETB) reported on the establishment in November 2022 of a learner forum comprised (at the time of reporting) of eight learners from different programmes. Other members of the groups include an external chair representing AONTAS and WWETB's Quality Assurance Officer and Access and Inclusion Officer. WWETB has captured the establishment of its learner forum group in its case study – [WWETB's Learner Voice Forum](#)¹⁸.
- Tipperary ETB reported on the establishment of its FET Student Council in 2022. The council has a number of sub-committees that are concerned with specific subjects. AONTAS conducted a planning workshop with the student council to identify key issues to address. The formation of Tipperary ETB's FET Student Council is outlined in the case study – [FET Student Council](#)¹⁹. The case study also identifies a number of initiatives discussed and actioned as a result of learners having a platform for feedback to the ETB.
- Kerry ETB reported on engagement with learners via surveys and focus groups in updating and developing a number of QA procedures. The ETB noted that the governance board will draw from this feedback when making decisions on revisions to procedures. In addition, Kerry ETB's quality council invited learners to a number of its meetings to share their views and experiences.
- GRETB reported on plans to establish a learner forum on an incremental basis. The initial

17 Cavan and Monaghan ETB (CMETB) Follow-Up Report (2023), p 54.

18 Waterford and Wexford ETB (WWETB) Follow-Up Report (2023), p 47.

19 Tipperary ETB Follow-Up Report (2023), p 52.

stage is the hosting of five regional ‘Learner Experience’ events, with a view to establishing five regional fora by 2024. Subject to learner feedback, these may become a single GRETB Learner Forum and the ETB’s ultimate goal is to have learners represented at all governance groups.

II. SYSTEMATIC COLLECTION OF LEARNER FEEDBACK

Most ETBs cited examples of plans to enhance collection of feedback by learners on their programmes or learning experience to support quality assurance and enhancement processes. The development of survey tools was a notable trend. Illustrative examples include:

- LWETB reported that a working group has been established within its programme governance group (PGG) tasked with developing a learner voice feedback form that would allow all learners to provide information to the ETB. This would include both qualitative and quantitative data.
- LCETB reported on a commitment in its FET Strategic Framework to develop consistent mechanisms to capture learner voice to inform decision making at both centre/campus and management levels. An audit of feedback mechanisms in campuses was undertaken in 2021 and the ETB had established a working group comprising FET provision coordinators and support services to develop a feedback system for learners across FET. A questionnaire was piloted in FET sites with a view to being rolled out across the College of FET in 2023. Consideration was also being given to the adoption of campus-wide quality improvement plans that integrate learner feedback mechanisms.
- WWETB reported on a review by its QA unit of the ETB’s ‘End of Course Evaluation’ process with a view to evolving from a programme/centre-oriented process to a more standardised ‘Learner Satisfaction Survey’ to enable a more systematic approach and support data analysis.
- Kerry ETB reported that its QA Unit developed a survey tool to be used across its FET centres and Kerry College campuses. The survey tool captures learner feedback which is collated into a response report considered by the QA Governance Board. It was noted in September 2023 that 566 learners used the survey to record their experiences in the ETB.

5. TEACHING, LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT (TLA)

Quality-assured TLA is the cornerstone of provision in ETBs and noted by the sectoral report team as having the ‘greatest influence on learner outcomes and the quality of provision’²⁰. A number of follow-up reports illustrate initiatives introduced to standardise approaches to the quality assurance of TLA and improve the consistency of learner experience.

- WWETB reported on the establishment of a FET Teaching, Learning and Assessment Network in late 2022, which held its first full network meeting in the spring of 2023. The network's terms of reference outline its 'commitment to providing the highest quality training and education' to ETB learners²¹.
- MSLETB reported on ongoing work to establish integrated QA policies across all of its services. The ETB noted that consultation events had taken place in 2022 on the programme evaluation policy and procedure as well as on procedures in relation to reasonable accommodations and appeals processes. A substantial suite of policies and procedures was reported to be scheduled for review and update in 2023 and 2024, including multiple assessment-related procedures.
- LMETB also reported on its progress towards the development of a single set of policy and procedures for the quality assurance of assessment. Templates for assessment briefs, learner feedback forms, internal verification (IV) checklists and guidelines for IV and external authentication (EA) have been made consistent across the ETB. An FET awards portal also facilitates the housing of assessment briefs and resources per module.
- LCETB reported on the development by its Active Inclusion Support Service (AISS)²² of a College of FET English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and Migrant Learner Framework. Launched in 2022, the framework provides for the 'development of structures to support the planning and delivery of inclusive, effective teaching, learning and assessment to migrant learners' accessing FET courses. The ETB also outlined its induction process for ESOL practitioners, which aims to provide a consistent experience and ensure improved teaching and learning, in the case study - [Induction Session for new ESOL Learning Practitioners - Limerick and Clare ETB College of FET](#)²³. A further initiative reported was the introduction of 'programme familiarisation' sessions for managers and teachers who deliver the new Early Learning and Care (ELC) programme in LCETB. Sessions were hosted by LCETB's Enterprise Engagement Support Service and its Quality Assurance Support Service for County Childcare Committees: 297 teachers, managers, monitors and coordinators participated.
- KCETB reported on the approval by its Quality Assurance Oversight Committee (QAOC) of a Teaching and Learning Policy. A Work Placement Policy has also been approved, which encompasses all work placement at the ETB and addresses key activities such as planning for placement, monitoring and assessing learning activities, QQI Awards and associated key documents. A subgroup consisting of managers and subject matter experts (SMEs) has also been tasked with creating a policy and developing guidelines to support the embedding of competency assessment across the ETB's FET centres.

21 [WWETB FET Teaching, Learning and Assessment Network Terms of Reference](#), P. 1.

22 [Active Inclusion Support Service – \(AISS\) Framework \(LCETB\)](#)

23 [Limerick and Clare ETB \(LCETB\) Follow-Up Report \(2023\)](#), p. 68.

6. DATA MANAGEMENT

The sectoral report notes that ‘ETBs and the ETB sector need to make better use of quantitative data to support quality assurance’²⁴. Progress in the effective management of data to support quality was noted by several ETBs in their follow-up reports, including the commitment of additional resourcing in this area.

- WWETB reported that it has increased the number of staff managing and analysing data. These includes two programme learner support system (PLSS) coordinators and a FET data analyst, with a data officer to be recruited. The QA team provides FET data management and strategic performance agreement (SPA) targets training across campuses and data inputters are regularly briefed. The ETB noted the use of six data indicators in its programme data management process, two of which are from EQAVET’s Indicators Toolkit²⁵. A further indicator is concerned with grade distribution and compares the ETB’s FET grade distribution data with national data. WWETB also reported on a collaboration with South East Technological University (SETU) to track progression from FET to higher education between the two providers. The ETB’s approach to data management is outlined in the case study – [WWETB’s Use of Data](#)²⁶.
- LCETB also reported that it has enhanced its staffing capacity in relation to data management, including the provision of training for staff on Tableau to analyse PLSS data and the appointment of a QA officer with responsibility for monitoring and evaluation, including data analytics.
- KCETB similarly reported that additional resources were allocated to the implementation of data management. In 2022, the ETB conducted a review of its learner management information systems policy in relation to compliance. A review of data in all KCETB centres was undertaken and the ETB stated its intention to provide additional training and support to all centres on data security and retention. A data procedure checklist has been developed for each centre and will be incorporated into its annual assurance declaration.
- KCETB also reported on the approval of its Data Management Policy in 2023. The policy presents processes in relation to the collation of FET programme and learner data. Data reports in key areas are shared with all FET centres. KCETB outlined improvements made to its data analysis processes in the case study – [Enhanced Data Analysis Processes \(Self-evaluation, Monitoring and Review\)](#)²⁷.
- Donegal ETB reported that it has established a Data Management Working Group, including users of PLSS from across FET, to standardise practice and enable consistent use of the PLSS to reach FET targets. The work of this group feeds into the ETB’s integrated QA system and considers how best to use data to inform FET provision, monitoring and self-evaluation to support the achievement of SPA targets. The group also seeks to improve the quality of data collection from PLSS.
- Cork ETB reported on the establishment in 2022 of a Data Analytics and Reporting Support Strategy, Planning Support Unit, which was developing tools and reporting structures that will help the ETB to monitor its actions against defined targets, such as SPA targets.

24 Quality Assurance of Further Education and Training in the ETB Sector - Sectoral Report (March 2023), p. 3.

25 [EQAVET Indicators’ Toolkit](#)

26 [Waterford and Wexford ETB \(WWETB\) Follow-Up Report \(2023\)](#), p. 50.

27 [Kilkenny and Carlow ETB \(KCETB\) Follow-Up Report](#), p. 53.

- KWETB reported on the development of data dashboards to ensure that comprehensive data is available to the FET team to inform decision making.
- CMETB reported that its Data Reporting Officer produces a summary report in newsletter format – Databytes – of relevant data for circulation amongst staff in all centres. Additionally, ways to support the assessment of data in relation to outputs from the learner survey database are being developed to better support centres to evaluate their performance.
- DDLETB reported that following research into best practice in monitoring and evaluation, it opted to identify key performance criteria which, combined with QQI certification data, will allow the ETB to manage risk. A Policy for Information and Data Management is being developed as a priority by the ETB's quality enhancement committee.

7. KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS (KPIs) AND TARGETS

The sectoral report notes an absence of the widespread use of KPIs and the lack of a systemic approach to using data in the ETBs²⁸. Most ETBs referenced in their follow-up reports the performance indicators established by SOLAS²⁹ and their arrangement for monitoring progress against these. A number of ETBs use the PLSS to set individual KPIs and also benchmark the ETB's performance:

- LMETB and Donegal ETB reported on the use of KPIs for employer initiatives to demonstrate their engagement with the sector. These are detailed in the ETBs' annual Skills to Advance Planning Reports.
- WWETB noted in its follow-up report that in addition to monthly information system (MIS) reports, the ETB has developed an annual FET data report for FET and programme managers. This includes a mid-year review of data related to KPIs. 'FET data is benchmarked according to programme category means and deviation from these means beyond a certain tolerance is brought to the attention of the relevant managers'³⁰.
- LCETB reported on an audit of instruments and planning, monitoring and evaluation (PME) tools conducted in 2022 and the identification of KPIs for use by provision and support services across the College of FET. A consistent list of indicators is now in use across the organisation based on a number of data types including PLSS, databases, staff and learner consultations and various annual reports. LCETB is also piloting the use of QA software with the UK company MESMA³¹, which involves 'a comprehensive mapping of various strategies and plans, and includes pre-determined sets of indicators that can be mapped to a range of other standards, such as QQI and EQAVET, to provide a comprehensive model of evaluation'³².
- Following a recommendation in its review report, CMETB established multi-annual KPIs for programme development. The ETB reported on the establishment of a tracker for this activity, noting that the ETB had exceeded its target for 2022.

28 Quality Assurance of Further Education and Training in the ETB Sector – Sectoral Report (March 2023), p. 14.

29 <https://www.solas.ie/ff/70398/x/75cd27f307/solas-grade-10-competencies-2020.pdf>

30 Waterford and Wexford ETB (WWETB) Follow-up Report (2023), p. 23.

31 <https://mesma.co.uk/>

32 Limerick and Clare ETB (LCETB) Follow-up Report (2023), p. 49.

8. CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT (CPD)

Continuous improvement in professional learning and development (PD/PLD) and investment by ETBs in CPD is evident in many follow-up reports. Improvements include the identification of skills and training gaps amongst staff and addressing these gaps through updated PLD policies and strategies; standardising good practice and approaches across the ETB through PLD; the establishment of digital hubs to support the communication of CPD opportunities; the recruitment of staff to plan in this area; and the establishment of communities of practice (CoPs) to support teaching staff. Examples included:

- MSLETB reported on the completion of a PD survey of FET staff (with a separate survey for line managers) at the end of 2022. The data was analysed to identify common areas for improvement and inform the development of PD plans for 2023/24. As part of its Action Plan, the ETB also committed to targeted PD funding to build staff capacity in the area of recognition of prior learning (RPL). Staff were supported to complete courses in RPL offered by higher education institutions and undertake training in RPL assessment in another ETB.
- LMETB also reported on the use of surveys of FET leaders and senior management at the end of the academic year to identify PLD needs for the new academic year. The ETB noted plans to conduct a detailed evaluation in 2028 in preparation for the development of its next PLD Strategy. LMETB also reported that its PLD office has been continuing to work with its technology enhanced learning (TEL) office to facilitate workshops and other opportunities to support teaching and learning. Initiatives include a UDL (universal design for learning) digital badge in teaching and learning (achieved by 23 LMETB FET staff in January 2023), a Dyslexia Course for FET educators and courses in TEL.
- KCETB similarly reported on the use of staff surveys in April 2023 to identify and inform the development of staff training plans for the next academic year. To support the promotion of PD opportunities, the ETB also engaged a third party to create a PD portal for use by staff (due to be operational in Autumn 2023) for the communication of PD opportunities and to allow staff to 'track their professional development journey'. KCETB also reported on the establishment in May 2023 of a digital badge platform that allows the ETB to offer badges to both staff and employers. The ambition is that the digital badges will ultimately develop into accredited courses.
- Donegal ETB reported on the establishment of the Donegal ETB UDL Professional Learning Network (PLN) in February 2022. The PLN aims to support members with the implementation of UDL in their work, to promote a deeper understanding of UDL and share best practice amongst staff. The establishment of the PLN is outlined in the case study - [Donegal ETB UDL Professional Learning Network \(PLN\)](#).³³
- Kerry ETB reported on the establishment by its QA Governance Board of a QA working group to advise the Board on CPD planning and implementation. A revised CPD policy and procedure was approved by the Kerry ETB Board in July 2023 providing a framework for staff to pursue professional qualifications aligned with the needs of the ETB. The ETB's QA unit tracks CPD undertaken by FET staff on a quarterly basis.
- The GRETB Follow-up Report noted the appointment, in September 2023, of a PLD coordinator. PLD priorities reported by the ETB included the drafting of a PLD Policy and the development and implementation of the PLD Strategic Plan.

- DDLETB reported that its PLD coordinator supported the establishment of a Professional Development Hub for ETB staff. The hub is designed to be a 'one-stop-shop' for staff in planning and availing of FET PLD and is reported to allow for a more systemic approach to PLD that is available across the ETB. The PLD coordinator also conducted an FET-wide training needs analysis to inform PLD, availing of both internally and externally sourced training when planning for the next year.
- Donegal ETB reported that its CPD events are published on its staff Intranet and staff can apply online via an automated expression of interest form. Communications are issued each month alerting staff to upcoming CPD events. It was noted that 44 such events were facilitated by the ETB in 2022, attended by 955 staff, the themes of which were informed by feedback from staff, service demands and recommendations from external authenticators (EAs) and other stakeholders.
- Cork ETB reported on the establishment in September 2021 of a PLD Support Service, noting the establishment of a PLD steering group was initiated to support its work. A dedicated PLD digital platform has been developed in the ETB to support staff awareness of and engagement with CPD, which has been live since October 2022. In the 2021/22 training schedule, training opportunities were prioritised in key identified areas such as teaching and learning, literacy, numeracy and digital skills, learner supports, ICT, technology enhanced learning and quality assurance. Themes identified for focus in 2023 were vocational upskilling, leadership and management, and employer engagement. The implementation of Cork ETB's PLD platform is addressed in the case study - [Cork ETB Professional Learning and Development SharePoint Training site](#).³⁴
- CMETB reported that a PLD working group consisting of representation from across all FET services, had been established to support the ETB's PLD, Research and Evaluation Officer. CMETB published a PLD Action Plan (2022-2024) that aligns to CMETB's FET Strategy, the National Further Education and Training (FET) Strategy³⁵ and the National PLD Statement of Strategy (2020-2024).³⁶ Part of the action plan includes the development of a PLD calendar, which is published twice-yearly and reflects the areas of critical need identified in the National PLD Statement of Strategy and additional priority areas identified in consultation with staff.
- LCETB reported on the introduction of a professional development initiative – Show & TEL - that consists of 30-minute 'bite-sized' sessions delivered 'by learning practitioners for learning practitioners' to showcase best practice in the use of learning technologies across FET. The objective is to build digital capacity amongst staff while also showcasing and sharing practitioner experiences and PLD opportunities. The sessions, or inputs, are recorded and available on the ETB's Show and TEL Stream Channel. The innovation is described in the following case study - [SHOW AND TEL - Limerick and Clare ETB College of FET](#)³⁷.

34 Cork ETB Follow-Up Report (2023), p. 49.

35 [Future FET: Transforming Learning, The National Further Education and Training \(FET\) Strategy \(2020\)](#)

36 [The FET Professional Learning & Development Statement of Strategy \(2020-2024\)](#)

37 Limerick and Clare ETB (LCETB) Follow-Up Report (2023), p. 64.

I. COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

Many of the ETB follow-up reports commented on the value of ‘communities of practice’. Noting that these networks provide an important and relevant way for staff teams to benefit from each other’s experience, the sectoral report suggested there should be more opportunities for ETBs to collaborate on quality assurance at regional and national levels³⁸.

- One of the commitments MSLETB outlined in its Action Plan following its inaugural review was to establish and maintain five new communities of practice (CoPs) annually and the provision of coaching for CoP leaders. At the time of reporting, CoPs had been established in UDL and QA.
- LMETB reported on the establishment of a CoP for staff engaged in Early Learning and Care (ELC) provision. CoP members use MS Teams to communicate and meet regularly and share resources. In-person training days for the CoP were scheduled in 2023. An ELC E-book, to be used as a QA tool to enhance communication with stakeholders and publicise the ELC programme, was developed by the ELC coordinator and a CoP member. The ETB notes that a further 6 CoPs related to different subjects have been established using MS Teams and in-person information days are planned for 2024.

CONCLUSIONS

This report provides an overview of QA developments, enhancements and activities in the sector as reported in the 16 follow-up reports submitted by the ETBs in response to their respective inaugural review reports. It reflects key themes and notable activities arising from the follow-up reports in response to review recommendations.

It is evident from the ETBs' engagement with the inaugural review and the follow-up reporting process that there is a strong commitment to the ongoing development of quality across the sector and many planned activities and actions have been implemented.

The **strengthening and organisation of the ETBs' relationships with regional industry partners and employers** is particularly evident. In addition to some adoption of SEED, ETBs are formalising communication channels with these stakeholders and establishing networks and working groups focused on underpinning their engagement processes. There is evidence of systemic approaches to identifying gaps in provision in terms of the needs of employers/industry and also collecting feedback to inform planning and strategy. The provision of additional staffing is also in evidence.

Improvements made to how **feedback is collected from learners and used to inform decision making and amplify Learner Voice** also features strongly in the follow-up reports. Mechanisms are being developed to embed learner fora, advisory networks and class representative groups for learners to feed into ETB decision-making processes. Progress is at different stages across the sector: however, there is evidence that a culture of learner engagement is consistently growing across the ETBs. There are also signs that seeking a **consistency of approach in relation to Teaching, Learning and Assessment (TLA)** is contributing to an improved learner experience.

Most, if not all, ETBs are working with the programme learner support system (PLSS) to access data and set targets. The follow-up reports note that some ETBs are being innovative in their **management and reporting of data** with a view to identifying and measuring improvement. The allocation of additional staff in this area is indicative of a recognition of the importance and value of data to the functioning of effective quality assurance and of ETBs' commitment to building data management and analysis capacity. In addition to monitoring and reporting against key performance indicators (KPIs) established by SOLAS, there is also some evidence of the use of KPIs within individual ETBs to support specific operational strands.

The follow-up reports include several examples of advances in **continuous professional development (CPD) and professional learning and development (PLD)**. Many ETBs have engaged staff to oversee this and have developed new policies to address staff needs. A number of ETBs have utilised internal websites and SharePoint sites to centrally locate information for staff. There are examples of engaging directly with staff to identify their training and learning needs in addition to addressing skills gaps identified by the ETB.

Quality assurance, its management, enhancement and oversight, **continues to evolve and develop within ETBs**. The inaugural review process marked a significant milestone for quality in the sector. In February 2025, each ETB will submit an interim quality report on the progress made and impact of actions arising from the review report recommendations. QQI will continue to work with the sector towards the establishment of a systematic quality reporting process.

