Donegal ETB

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Inaugural Review of Quality Assurance
Further Education & Training Service
Self-Evaluation Report

February 2021

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Bord Oideachais agus
Oiliúna Dhún na nGall
*Donegal Education and
Training Board*

2021

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Glossary and Abbreviations

Term	Definition
AGMS	Adult Guidance Management System
ASIST	Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training
ATP	Access, Transfer and Progression
BTEI	Back to Education Initiative
CAB	Certification Approval Board
CE	Community Employment
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
CRM	Customer Relationship Management
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools
DPER	Department of Public Expenditure and Reform
DPO	Data Protection Officer
DSP	Department of Social Protection
EA	External Authenticator/Authentication
ERT	Emergency Remote Teaching
ESER	Executive Self-Evaluation Report
ESF	European Social Fund
ETB	Education and Training Board
ETBI	Education and Training Boards Ireland
FAR	Funding Allocation Request
FARR	Funding Allocation Requests and Reporting System
FÁS	Foras Áiseanna Saothair
FE	Further Education
FET	Further Education and Training
FETCH	Further Education and Training Course Hub
FOI	Freedom of Information
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation

Term	Definition
GP	General Practitioner
HE	Higher Education
HR	Human Resources
HSE	Health Service Executive
ICS	Irish Computer Society
IPC	Infection Prevention and Control
IT	Information Technology
ITEC	International Therapy Examination Council
IV	Internal Verifier/Verification
LYIT	Letterkenny Institute of Technology
MAEDF	Mitigating Against Educational Disadvantage Fund
MIS	Management Information System
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NALA	National Adult Literacy Association
NCGE	National Centre for Guidance and Education
NFQ	National Framework of Qualifications
NWRC	North West Regional College
NWRSF	North West Regional Skills Forum
NWSGP	North West Strategic Growth Partnership
OETC	Outdoor Education and Training Centre
OSD	Organisation Support and Development
OSP	Occupational Skills Profile/Profiling
PLC	Post Leaving Certificate
PLSS	Programme Learner Support System
QA	Quality Assurance
QASS	Quality Assurance Support Service

Term	Definition
QC	Quality Council
QIP	Quality Improvement Plan
QQI	Quality and Qualifications Ireland
RACE	Reasonable Accommodations at the Certificate Examinations
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
SEC	State Examinations Commission
SER	Self-Evaluation Report
SLA	Service Level Agreement
SMT	Senior Management Team
SOLAS	An tSeirbhís Oideachais Leanúnaigh agus Scileanna
SPA	Strategic Performance Agreement
STP	Specialist Training Provider
TEL	Technology Enhanced Learning
TQAS	Transition Quality Assurance System
UDL	Universal Design for Learning
VEC	Vocational Education Committee
VTCT	Vocational Training Charitable Trust
VTOS	Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme
WRAT	Wide Range Achievement Test

Foreword

"Our mission is to 'promote, provide and support accessible and inclusive education and training, which enables young people and adults to empower themselves to reach their full potential in a safe and caring environment."

Foreword by Anne McHugh, Donegal ETB Chief Executive and Cróna Gallagher, Director of Further Education & Training

We are pleased to endorse Donegal Education and Training Board's Self-Evaluation Report (SER) as part of the Inaugural Review of the ETB's Quality Assurance processes. At its formation, Donegal Education and Training Board created vision and mission statements with students, staff and the community, to underpin the work of the organisation. Quality Assurance (QA) is at the core of guiding and facilitating the fulfilment of these statements. Donegal Education and Training Board, in its strategy statement (2017-2021), describes its vision for the future as 'Excellence in the delivery of a quality, learner-centred education and training service.

This self-evaluation report outlines how Donegal ETB develops, implements, monitors and evaluates effective quality assurance processes and their subsequent impact on our students, stakeholders and community, in accordance with QQI Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines, and associated sector-specific and topic-specific guidelines. Donegal Education and Training Board's staff and stakeholders have fully engaged with this opportunity to reflect on the effectiveness of its quality assurance systems as they relate to FET services, even in the context of the current challenging circumstances. We look forward to engaging with the Review team and its feedback will be invaluable in providing an external perspective and advice on how we can further enhance our quality assurance processes.

This is the first review of its kind for ETB's and we would like to thank all staff, students and external stakeholders for their contributions to the process and for reaching such a significant milestone.

We would like to warmly thank our FET service staff for managing this process of internal self-evaluation and for drafting the report. Extensive consultation and collaboration with all stakeholders have taken place over the past year and we hope that the report is an accurate reflection of Donegal ETBs FET service quality assurance processes at this point in time. This work was supported and guided by the Self Evaluation Report Steering Group, with representatives from FET full-time and part-time provision, management, administration, guidance and support services. All contributions were very much valued and appreciated.

We look forward to welcoming the Review Team to Donegal Education and Training Board in May 2021 and to engaging with them in the Review Process.

Anne McHugh,
Chief Executive
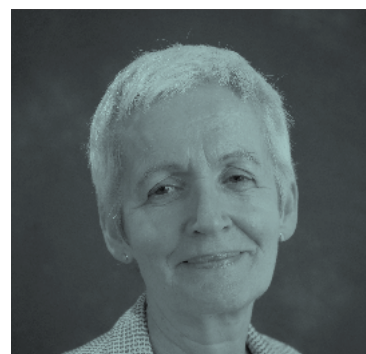
Cróna Gallagher,
Director of Further Education and Training

ETB Context

Donegal Education and Training Board (Donegal ETB) was established under, and is governed by, the Education and Training Boards Act (2013). The new organisation replaced Donegal Vocational Education Committee, while the Further Education and Training Act (2013) also dissolved the former Foras Áiseanna Saothair (FÁS) training centres and established An tSeirbhís Oideachais Leanúnaigh agus Scileanna (SOLAS) as a new statutory body. Former FÁS provision transferred to Donegal ETB later the following year. Consequently, Donegal ETB is an amalgamated entity, formed as a result of the merger of two organisations.

ETBs have been structured with three pillars: Further Education and Training (FET), Schools and Organisation Support and Development (OSD). This Self-Evaluation Report is focused on the Quality Assurance aspect of Donegal ETB's Further Education and Training provision. FET services are predominantly delivered in the ETB's FET centres (Fig 1) and through outreach programmes in the community. The Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) programme, which is part of the ETB's FET provision, is delivered in three ETB schools. All FET provision is supported by the OSD pillar of the ETB.

Figure 1
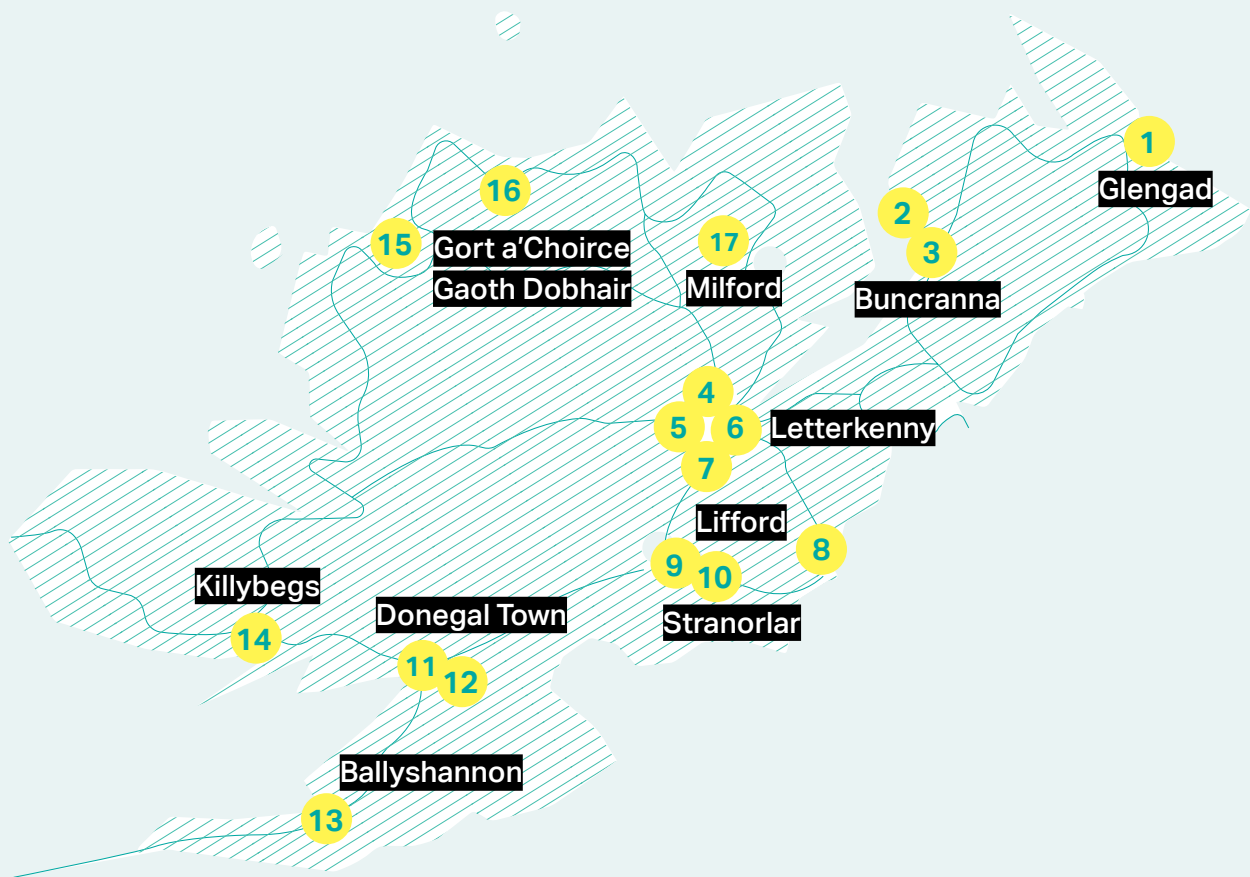
1	Youthreach Centre	Glengad
2	FET Centre Buncrana	Buncrana
3	Youthreach Centre	Buncrana
4	FET Centre Letterkenny	Letterkenny
5	Errigal College (PLCs)	Letterkenny
6	Training Centre Letterkenny	Letterkenny
7	Youthreach Centre	Letterkenny
8	Youthreach Centre	Lifford
9	FET Centre Finn Valley	Stranorlar
10	Finn Valley College (PLCs)	Stranorlar
11	FET Centre Drumcliff	Donegal Town
12	FET Centre Ard Scoil na gCeithreMáistir	Donegal Town
13	FET Centre Ballyshannon	Ballyshannon
14	St Catherine's Vocational School (PLCs)	Killybegs
15	Training Centre Gaoth Dobhair	Gaoth Dobhair
16	FET Centre Gort a'Choirce	Gort a'Choirce
17	FET Centre Milford	Milford

At its formation, Donegal ETB created vision and mission statements to underpin the work of the organisation with students, staff and the community. Quality Assurance (QA) is at the core of guiding and facilitating the fulfilment of these statements.

Vision: 'Excellence in the delivery of a quality, learner-centred education and training service.'

Mission: 'To promote, provide and support accessible and inclusive education and training, which enables young people and adults to empower themselves to reach their full potential in a safe and caring environment'.

The ETB is a Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) provider, currently operating under two QA agreements approved by QQI. In line with the ETB's Vision, Mission and Strategy, and to continuously improve the quality of its student experience, the ETB's FET Service is in the process of integrating these QA systems. This will facilitate the gradual transition to a single system, drawing on best practice from both to reflect the unified nature of QA and the ETB's commitment to developing a 'quality culture' across the FET Service. A range of non-QQI certified programmes are also delivered.

As the largest statutory provider of further education and training in the county, the ETB's FET provision is strategically directed by a series of documents designed to embody and reflect the organisation's mission and vision statements. These include a five-year (2017-2021) ETB Strategy Statement entitled Lean ar Aghaidh and a Strategic Performance Agreement (2018-2020) for the ETB's FET Service, which was developed in consultation with SOLAS.

Contextual Factors

Geographically, Donegal is Ireland's most northerly county and the fourth largest in the country. It shares 93% of its entire land border with Northern Ireland and there are thirteen inhabited islands. In 2011, the Donegal Gaeltacht represented 24.5% of the total Gaeltacht population **of the State.**

The 2016 Pobal HP Deprivation Index identified Donegal as the most deprived county in Ireland, while the 2016 census showed that Donegal was the county with the fourth highest age dependency ratio in the state, at 60.5% (the age dependency ratio for the state as a whole in 2016 was 52.7%). The population is spatially scattered, presenting a significant challenge for public service delivery.

This is exacerbated by relatively poor public transport infrastructure. Almost 22% of people aged 15 years and over in Donegal have not been educated beyond primary level (Census 2016). Donegal, with Laois, has the lowest admission rate to third-level education (41% compared to national average of 51%). Donegal ETB's Strategic Performance Agreement (2018-2020) drew information from the 2016 Census regarding the most important sectors for private sector employment in Donegal. These were Accommodation and Food Services (20.4%), Wholesale and Retail (26.3%) and Construction (11.4%). There is an emerging industry cluster around the ICT and Fintech sectors; employment within ICT grew at a steady rate by 80% in the eight years up to 2015. Micro-enterprises also dominate the landscape, with the Western Development Commission (2015) reporting that there were 7454 enterprises in Donegal, almost 92% of having 10 or fewer employees.

Principal economic status

Table 1 shows the employment status of Donegal residents compared to the State as a whole. The constituency has a lower proportion of usual residents at work than the State overall (47% compared to 53.5%). Donegal has a higher proportion of retired persons (17.9% compared to 14.5%). The table also illustrates the percentage of residents at work across the constituency of Donegal at the electoral division level.

Table 1

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Principal economic status of Donegal compared to the State

Principal Economic Status	Donegal	State
At work	47%	53.5%
Looking for first job	0.9%	0.8%
Unemployed having lost or given up previous job	9.4%	7.1%
Student	10.8%	11.4%
Looking after home/family	8.6%	8.1%
Retired	17.9%	14.5%
Unable to work due to sickness or disability	4.9%	4.2%
Other	0.4%	0.4%

For explanation of terms and definitions used in Census data, see the CSO website here

Principal economic status cont.

In 2019, the FET Service engaged with 11,462 students; 32% of FET students registered were male and 68% were female. Qualifications range from levels 1-6 on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) and cover fields of learning such as Business, Administration and Law, Health and Welfare, Engineering, Arts and Humanities and Services (Fig 2). In addition to delivering courses leading to QQI awards, the FET Service offers courses leading to certification from other awarding bodies, including City & Guilds, International Therapy Examination Council (ITEC), Vocational Training Charitable Trust (VTCT), and Irish Computer Society (ICS), among others.

Figure 2

Broad Fields of Learning
--
- Generic Programmes and Qualifications
- Business Administration and Law
- Services
- Health and Welfare
- Information and Communications Technology
- Arts and Humaities
- Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries and Veterinary
- Education
- Natural Sciences, Mathematics and Statistics
- Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction

Award Class
--
- Major
- Minor
- Special Purpose

Around four thousand of the 11,462 students in 2019 (Fig. 3) were in the Community Education Support Programme, demonstrating the far-reaching and grassroots nature of the ETB's FET Service. When undertaking programme development, the ETB consults widely with other stakeholders including the Department of Social Protection, employers and the North West Regional Skills Forum (NWRSF). Since 2018, in response to skills shortages identified through the NWRSF, training opportunities in the areas of Engineering and Financial Technology (Fintech) have been added, improving employment prospects for people in the county.

Donegal ETB is integral to the social, economic and educational fabric of Donegal. Through its education and support programmes, the FET Service has extensive, well-developed links with the statutory, voluntary and private sectors. The ETB funds non-accredited hobby-type courses through long established community partnerships, while simultaneously offering responsive, agile education and training through a network of dispersed FET centres, or 'in-house' with employers. The FET service is able to meet the challenges of delivering a myriad of accredited and non-accredited learning opportunities across a large, remote county through the consistent hard work and dedication of staff working within a quality assured framework. For these and many more reasons, the ETB's FET Service is the provider of choice for for many people in the county.

Figure 3

Further Education and Training Enrolment 2019
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- Community Education
- Basic Education
- Training Services (excluding Apprenticeships)
- Back to Education Initiative
- Night Class Programmes
- Post Leaving Certificate
- Youthreach
- Other Funding
- Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme
- Recognition of Prior Learning
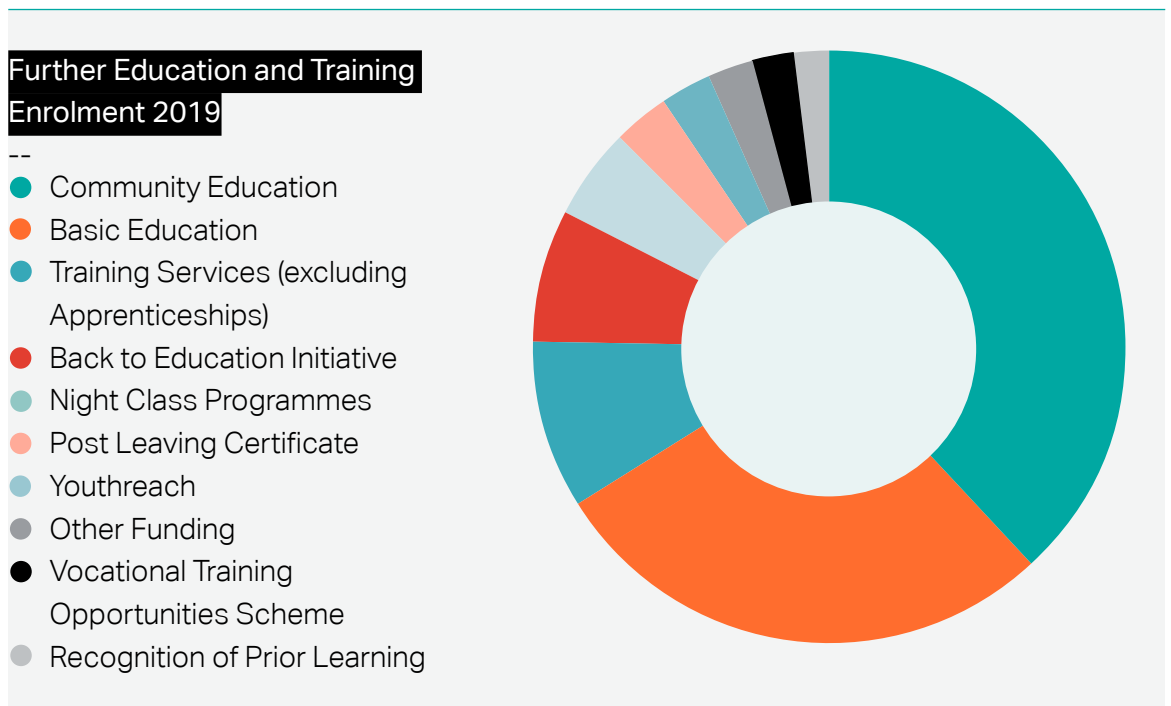
This Self-Evaluation Report has been produced in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, with contingency planning an ongoing consideration for the continued provision of FET services and associated quality assurance. Because of the pandemic, a large number of the consultations necessary for the development of the report, with both internal and external stakeholders, have been conducted online rather than in person.

Donegal ETB has very much welcomed the opportunity to undertake the Self Evaluation Report in advance of the Statutory Review visit. The initial undertaking of the Quality Assurance Baseline exercise to gather information from each of the respective FET programmes, services and stakeholders for the report has been insightful. Staff have seen during the process how evaluation can be used to inform future quality enhancements. The student feedback that was gathered during the surveys, evaluations and the Student Voice Forum is vital to the future improvement of the service. Although feedback from our student population has been predominantly positive, the allocation of student supports and their consistent implementation across programmes and centres will need to be addressed as a future priority.

The use of information and data as a resource to help inform planning, monitoring, review and evaluation of our provision planning, systems and services is an area which the FET service will continue to build on. Evidence based planning will help to inform future courses, programmes and course review.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has brought many challenges, yet it has also helped to highlight opportunities for the FET service. The means and modes of undertaking staff CPD along with the flexibility and accessibility that some of the technology interventions have brought about will all be of benefit to the FET service. Students though miss their interaction with their peers, the ETB staff and their centres. COVID-19 has also tested the robustness and agility of our QA Governance system and processes. The implementation of our Contingency Policy, Procedures and Processes on Alternative Assessment has been continually reviewed within the QA cycle since it was first approved in April 2020. It is currently in the process of being updated with revised work placement arrangements in line with the current mitigatory measures for programmes and awards introduced by QQI to help support ETBs and other providers during the pandemic.

From the stakeholder feedback gathered within this report it is evident that a Quality Culture exists. Feedback from our stakeholders, both internally and externally supports this statement. The ETB accepts the Self Evaluation Report highlights areas for improvement within the FET Service, but that it also demonstrates the commitment of staff across all levels and programmes to provision of a quality, learner centred education and training experience.

Self-Evaluation Report
— **Methodology**

In January 2020, following the publication of the QQI documentation on the Inaugural Review of Quality Assurance in ETBs, a Steering Group was established to guide the self-evaluation process and the production of the Self Evaluation Report (SER).

This group included staff from across the FET and OSD pillars of the ETB, in recognition of the integrated and comprehensive nature of quality assurance in all aspects of the organisation. The Steering Group is chaired by the Director of Further Education and Training, and other members include the QA Coordinator (who acts as the group's secretary), staff representatives from Administration and Teaching and Learning, the heads of Corporate Services, Finance, Human Resources and Information Technology, and various members of the FET Senior Management Team and FET Coordinators' Team. Terms of Reference for the role and duration of the Steering Group were drawn up at the time of its formation, and reviewed and agreed at the group's initial meeting (Appendix 1).

A plan was formulated to encompass the breadth of FET provision in the collection and collation of information regarding the FET Service's approach to quality assurance and improvement. A timeline that illustrates the development of the SER is shown below, in Figure 4. Several publications, which summarise the ETB's position and outline future aspirations, were used to inform the report, including the Executive Self-Evaluation Report (ESER), Lean ar Aghaidh (2017-2021), **Donegal ETB's five-year Strategy Statement, and the ETB-SOLAS** Strategic Performance Agreement (2018-2020). **In addition, consultation events in a variety of formats were organised.**

— Student and Staff briefing and consultation events were held to provide staff and students with information about the inaugural QA Review and to evaluate their experience with Donegal ETB.

— In view of the consultative and documentary requirements of the SER, a QA Baseline Activity (Appendix 2) was designed to assess how legacy QA systems are being implemented in practice across programme areas, governance and management and the wider ETB. Information was gathered in line with the 'Inaugural Review of Quality Assurance in Education and Training Boards Review Handbook', published by QQI.

— A plan for external engagement was generated to evaluate the experiences of employers and other external stakeholders, including work placement providers, community education providers and second providers.

— Surveys were used to gather specific information across the FET Service, regarding the three objectives in the Self-Evaluation Report.

— Formal reports, which include student support research, External Authenticator reports, External Verifier reports and research on the response of Donegal ETB to the COVID-19 pandemic, were analysed and referenced where appropriate.

— Consultation events (Appendix 3) took place across the FET Service, to review the Self-Evaluation Report.

— All team meetings, including management, programme coordination and delivery meetings, discussed the review and the development of the SER on a regular basis, to ensure the meaningful involvement of staff and stakeholders.

An overview of engagement has been created, which illustrates the breadth of consultation undertaken as part of the development of the Self Evaluation Report (Appendix 4).

It is important to note that the COVID-19 crisis had a significant impact on the means of engagement and formats used to gather information.

Donegal ETB uses Google Workspace, and a shared drive folder has been created to give the Review team access to relevant documents.

2020–2021 **A Time of Self-Evaluation**

- Self-Evaluation Report (SER) Steering Group Established

- Meeting of SER Steering Group
- Senior Management Team QA Meeting
- Reports fron Student Voice Forum and Staff Briefing and Consulatation Events completed
- QA Baseline Activity Session for Youthreach
- First draft of Donegal ETB Provider Profile completed

- Stakeholder groups identified and communication strategy designed

- QA Baseline Activity template approved
- Meeting of SER Steering Group

Jan

Mar

May

Jul

Feb

Apr

Jun

- QA Baseline Activity template devloped in line with Self-Evaluation Report template issued by QQI

- Senior Management Team decision to hold Standalone QA Development meetings
- QA Baseline Activity Sessions for Adult Literacy Service and Adult Guidance Service
- Students and staff surveyed on the impact of Covid-19

- Donegal ETB Student Voice Forum
- County-wide Staff Briefing and Consultation Events
- Working Gantt Chart developed for self-evaluation process

Figure 4

- Meeting of SER Steering Group
- Proposal for engagement with external stakeholders agreed
- Senior Management Team QA Meeting
- QA Baseline Activity Session for VTOS, PLC Programme. TEL Working Group, FET Quality Council, Training Services Senior Management Team and QA Subcommittee Clerical Administrator
- Updates completed on draft Donegal ETB Provider Profile

- SER Consultation Feedback reviewed and analysed
- Meeting of SER Steering Group
- Final Draft of SER completed
- SER approved by Donegal ETB Quality Council
- SER submitted to QQI

- Donegal ETB Provider Profile approved by Quality Council for submission to QQI
- Meeting of SER Steering Group
- Senior Management Team QA Meeting
- Work on draft SER continued
- Surveys carried out with students and Community Education providers

Aug | Sep | Nov | Feb
Oct | Dec | Jan

- QA Baseline Activity reviewed
- Lead author of SER appointed

- Meeting of SER Steering Group
- Consultations on draft SER held with staff and student groups

- Analysis of QA Baseline Activities
- Teachers, tutors and instrctors surveyed
- Senior Management Team QA Meeting
- QA Baseline Activity Sessions for QA Support service and FET Programme Subcommittee
- Engagement with external stakeholders carried out
- QA Review Team commenced draft of SER

- Survey carried out with workplace providers
- Meeting of SER Steering Group
- First draft of SER completed for the consultation

Governance and Management of Quality

Objective

1

1.1 Donegal ETB's Mission and Strategy

At its formation, Donegal ETB inherited a further education service and a training service, with two separate Quality Assurance systems. Consequently, a primary objective of the ETB as a whole, and of the FET service in particular, is the integration of further education and training services and the creation of a single comprehensive, robust and responsive QA system that integrates the best practices from both legacy systems where feasible.

A critical deliverable from the single QA system will be the implementation of a consistent, systematic quality process. This will drive forward enhancements where required, capture the existing quality culture within the service and support the achievement of a number of objectives under the key themes **in the ETB Strategy Statement 2017-2021 (Teaching and Learning, A Progressive, Accountable Organisation and Working with Partners).**

In evaluating the Governance and Management of the legacy Quality Assurance systems, it is evident that because the legacy systems are largely incompatible with the new structures and processes, they are not consistently or fully implemented across FET (the area of assessment, in which policies and procedures are well understood and firmly adhered to by both staff and students, represents a notable exception to this). There is an acknowledgement across the FET Service that the elements of the QA system that have not been updated and integrated into one are outdated and no longer in line with the requirements of the QQI Core Statutory QA Guidelines.

Donegal ETB's Strategy Statement provides the framework within which the organisation supports the implementation of its Mission Statement. Policies and procedures underpin the delivery of the ETB's services and cover all aspects of its work. Quality Assurance, therefore, provides the rubrics by which the ETB can measure its effectiveness in realising those aspirations. This further emphasises the need for a comprehensive and thorough yet reflective and responsive single quality assurance system which can meet the needs of the organisation, staff, students and external stakeholders.

Our Ethos in Practice: Hearing the FET Student Voice

Our vision and mission statements are realised through actionable outcomes such as strategies to mitigate disadvantage and remove barriers to participation. A key objective outlined in Donegal ETBs Strategy Statement 2017-2021 is working in partnership and engagement with our stakeholders. Consequently, documenting and responding to the voice of the student body was identified as one priority area for development by the FET Service. Before the COVID-19 crisis, in February 2020, the inaugural FET Student Voice Forum took place. AONTAS had previously collaborated with Donegal ETB's FET Service in 2018 and 2019 to hold regional student forums alongside their yearly national event.

The Student Voice Forum was designed to encourage feedback from students on all aspects of their learning experience with the ETB. Donegal ETB's forum event in February 2020 included one hundred students from across all FET programmes and was facilitated by the Quality Assurance Support Service (QASS), with assistance from the Guidance Service and Literacy Organisers. This was a deliberate decision to encourage open communication between the students in attendance. Overall, the feedback was positive and demonstrated that students felt supported within their centres and programmes of learning, and, most importantly, by their teachers, tutors and instructors.

During the summer, four hundred and seven students again highlighted their experience of being supported by teachers, tutors and instructors in a report entitled 'Providing Quality Further Education and Training in a Crisis Situation: Donegal ETB's COVID-19 Responses and their impact on Quality Assurance, Teaching, Learning and Assessment', completed on behalf of QQI during the first lockdown period.

A second, more extensive student survey undertaken in early December 2020 reinforced earlier findings, indicating that 96.8% of two hundred and eighty-six respondents had an experience of Donegal ETB's FET Service which reflected the aspirations outlined in the mission statement.Based on the data gathered from the Student Voice Forum, COVID-19 research, class and programme evaluations and the recent student survey, it is clear that Donegal ETB's FET Service is committed to listening to its students and responses would indicate that the service is relatively successful in providing a supportive, inclusive learning experience in a safe and caring environment.

Donegal ETB FET Service Student Forum Mentimeter responses:

Many of the comments submitted by students indicate that Donegal Education and Training Board's FET service is viewed positively by students.

— Excellent service. Great centre, always warm and very welcoming. Good teachers.
— Great organisation
— Happy with service, I feel well enough looked after. Look forward to coming back before I leave.

Conclusion

The FET Service aims to promote and foster a sense of collective ownership and inclusivity in Quality Assurance through continuous engagement and consultation with staff and students. Feedback from students which reflects the aspirations expressed in the ETB's Mission Statement affords some measure of the success of its deployment thus far. Further engagement with the Student Voice Forum and adoption of the Student Voice Policy will be essential to continued enhancement of the student experience. Throughout the Self Evaluation there will be further examples of the realisation of the vision and mission statements given. Donegal ETB's FET Service will continue to work towards the development of a single QA system that enhances the already present quality culture.

1.2

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

Donegal ETB's Executive Governance & Management Structure

The Chief Executive (CE) is responsible for the executive management of the ETB and has overall responsibility for the performance of the ETB schools, colleges, centres and associated services, with three Directors assigned responsibilities under the following three pillars:

— Schools
— Further Education and Training
— Organisation Support and Development (OSD)

In addition to the Further Education and Training service to which this report largely pertains, there are 15 second-level schools throughout the county managed and operated under the patronage of Donegal ETB; other services include Music Education, Youth Work, Drugs & Alcohol, and Outdoor Education.

The Administrative Offices are central to Donegal ETB operations and act as the hub for the delivery of its programmes and services in the ETB schools and centres. The administrative functions are delivered through a four-strand structure, comprising Human Resources, Finance, Corporate Services (including Estates Management, Procurement, FOI/Data Protection, Health and Safety and Communications) and ICT, all managed under the Director of Organisation Support and Development (OSD).

Donegal ETB's Executive Governance & Management Structure cont.

Donegal ETB has 21 Members, 12 of whom are elected following the local authority elections; two (2) members of staff; two (2) parents; the five (5) remaining members are appointed arising from nominations from bodies and organisations specified by the Minister for Education. The Board meets on a regular basis to carry out its reserved functions under the ETB Act 2013. The DES Circular Letter 0002/2019 outlines the Code of Practice for the Governance of Education & Training Boards, effective from 30 January 2019.

Donegal ETB's Further Education & Training (FET) Service

The CE and Director of FET are ultimately responsible for the oversight of the FET Service and for the development and implementation of its Quality Assurance system. Strategic direction for the service is initially provided by the ETB's Strategy Statement and the CE/Directorate, in accordance with national policy. Further direction is provided by the FET Senior Management Team and the Director of FET. The Director of FET reports to the Chief Executive, who reports to the Board of Donegal ETB on matters relating to developments and progress within the FET Service.

The accountability and reporting structures have been designed to reflect the key objective of integrating the further education and training services into one coherent whole. Each of the five FET **Senior Managers** (Area Training Manager, two Assistant Training Managers and two Adult Education Officers) has responsibility for individual programmes and services within FET, as well as further specific responsibility for eight overarching areas reaching across the FET Service: Quality Assurance; Buildings; Enterprise Engagement; PLSS and Data Management; Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL) and Professional Development; Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL); Student Supports and Social Inclusion; and Integrated Programme Planning and Development. Each of these cross-FET areas has a Working Group comprising staff from across the FET service (and the wider ETB) as applicable. The FET Senior Management Team (SMT) meets on a monthly basis with the Director and Chief Executive and individual and smaller group meetings are held as required.
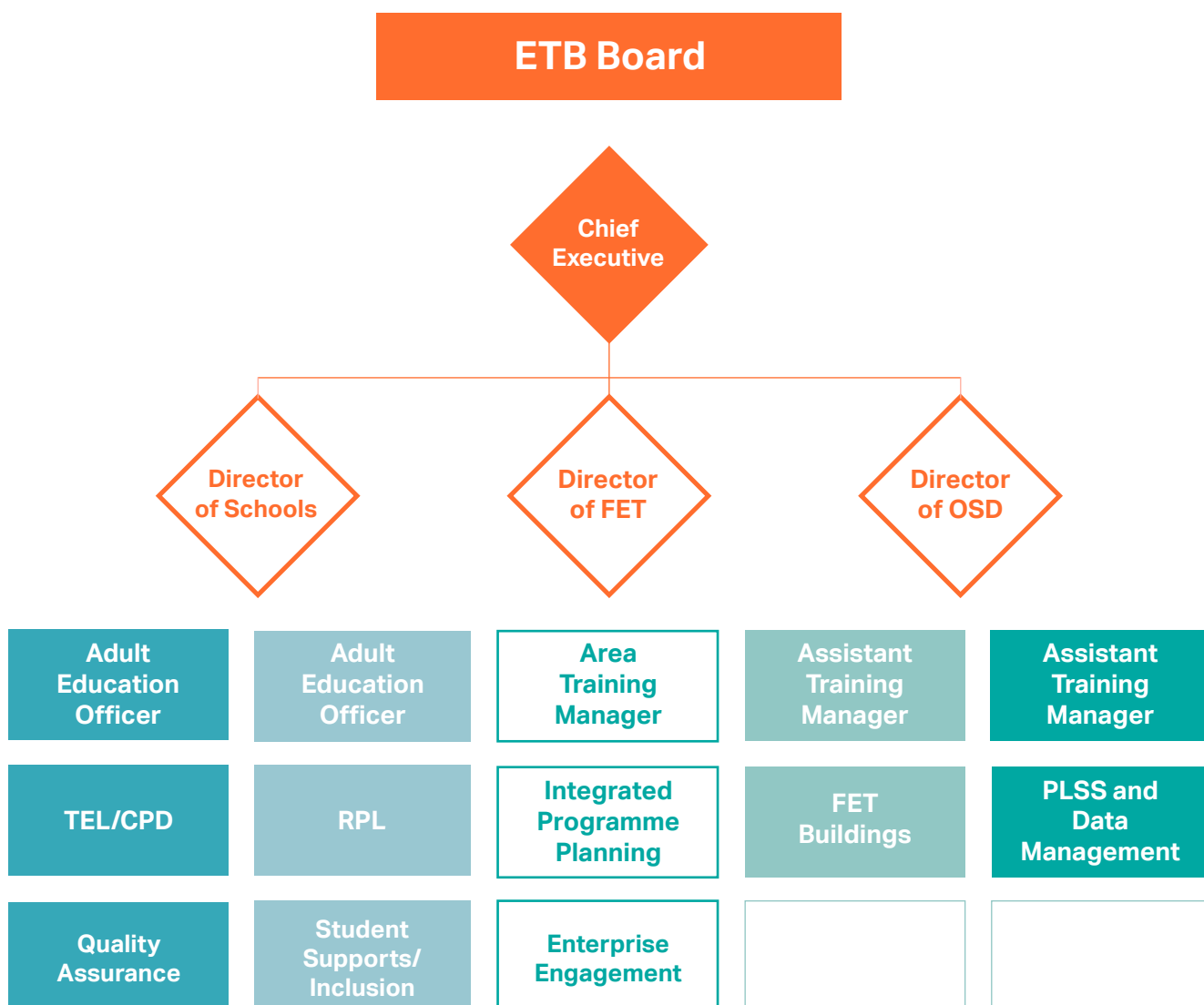
A **Planning and Funding** working group, with membership from senior management teams from FET and OSD divisions, chaired by the Director of OSD, also meets on a regular basis and has an oversight function regarding all financial matters relating to the FET service.

A middle management group of **FET Coordinators** represents all the full-time and part-time FET programmes and services. This group meets approximately every six weeks, providing an additional layer of integrated reporting and information-sharing within the FET Service's management approach. All FET staff also have regular team meetings with their respective line managers, ensuring a consistent approach across the ETB's FET programmes and services.

The diagrams shown in Figure 5 represents the staff management accountability and reporting structures within the ETB's Further Education and Training service.

Figure 5.1
FET Coordinators and Managers Cross Cutting Areas

ETB Board

Chief Executive

Director of Schools		Director of FET	Director of OSD	
Adult Education Officer	Adult Education Officer	Area Training Manager	Assistant Training Manager	Assistant Training Manager
TEL/CPD	RPL	Integrated Programme Planning	FET Buildings	PLSS and Data Management
Quality Assurance	Student Supports/ Inclusion	Enterprise Engagement		

FET Coordinators Team
(Full-Time and Part-Time Provision and Support Services)

Community Education Facilitators (2)	VTOS Co-ordinator	BTEI Co-ordinator (County)	Basic Education Co-ordinator (County	Youthreach Co-ordinator	Guidance Service Co-ordinator (County)
RPL Co-ordinator	Contracted Training Officers (2)	Programme Development Officer	Training Standards Officer (QA)	Training Standards Officer (QA)	FET Course Recruitment Officer (Training Services)
Senior Training Advisors (Apprenticeships) (2)	QA Co-ordinator	Enterprise Engagement Co-Ordinator (2)	TEL/CPD Coordinator	FET Systems and Data Reporting Officer	Communications Officer

Figure 5.2 FET Programme Staff Reporting

Director of FET

Adult Education Officer	Adult Education Officer	Area Training Manager	Assistant Training Manager	Assistant Training Manager
VTOS Coordinators Teachers **Administrators** Ancillary Staff	**Youthreach Coordinators** Teachers, Resource Workers and Advocates **Administrators** Ancillary Staff	**Senior Training Advisors** (Apprenticeships (2)	**Training Centre Instructors (Letterkenny and Gweedore)**	**Contracted Training Officers (2)**
BTEI Coordinator (County) BTEI Support **Worker Teachers and Tutors** Administrators Ancillary Staff	**Basic Education Coordinator** Adult Literacy Organisers **Tutors** Administrators **Ancillary Staff**	**Programme Development Officer**	**Training Standards Officer** Assistant Training Standards Officer	**FET Systems and Data Reporting Officer**
QA Coordinator FET Training Standards Officer QA Resource Person **QA Administrator**	**Guidance Service Coordinator** Guidance **Counsellors** Information Officer	**Enterprise Engagement Co-ordinator**	**Administration Assistant** Clerical Administration Staff (Letterkenny and Gweedore)	**FET Course Recruitment Officer (Training Services)**
PLC Coordinators Teachers	**Community Education Facilitators (2)** Administrator	**Finance and Administration Officer** Clerical Staff	**Evening Training** Evening Class Managers **Evening Class Instructors** Clerical Admin Ancillary Staff	**Second Providers (Specialist Training Providers)** STP Managers **STP Tutors**
TEL/CPD Coordinator	**RPL Coordinator** Tutors/Facilitators Administrator		**Second Providers (Contracted Training Providers)** Contracted Training Managers **Contracted Training Tutors**	**Ancillary Staff (Letterkenny and Gweedore Centres)** Canteen Services (Letterkenny and Gweedore Centres)

Figure 5.3   FET Management Cross Cutting Areas

Figure 5.3 — FET Management Cross Cutting Areas

FET Management Cross Cutting Areas

- FET Buildings
- Quality Assurance
- TEL & CPD
- PLSS & Data Management
- Student Supports and Active Inclusion
- Enterprise Engagement
- RPL
- Integrated Programme Planning
- FET Planning and Funding Working Group

Quality Assurance Governance and Management

Implicit in all that we do is the understanding that governance and management of quality assurance take place at all levels of the FET service. Accountabilities and responsibilities are multi-layered, reflecting the scale and breadth of provision and support services. In June 2019, Donegal ETB developed a formal Quality Assurance Governance and Management structure, in line with the QQI Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines. The QA Governance and Management structure **incorporates the** Quality Council, Quality Sub-Committee, Programme Sub-Committee **and** Certification Approval Board, **and is outlined in Figure 6 below.**

Figure 6
FET QA Governance
—Donegal ETB
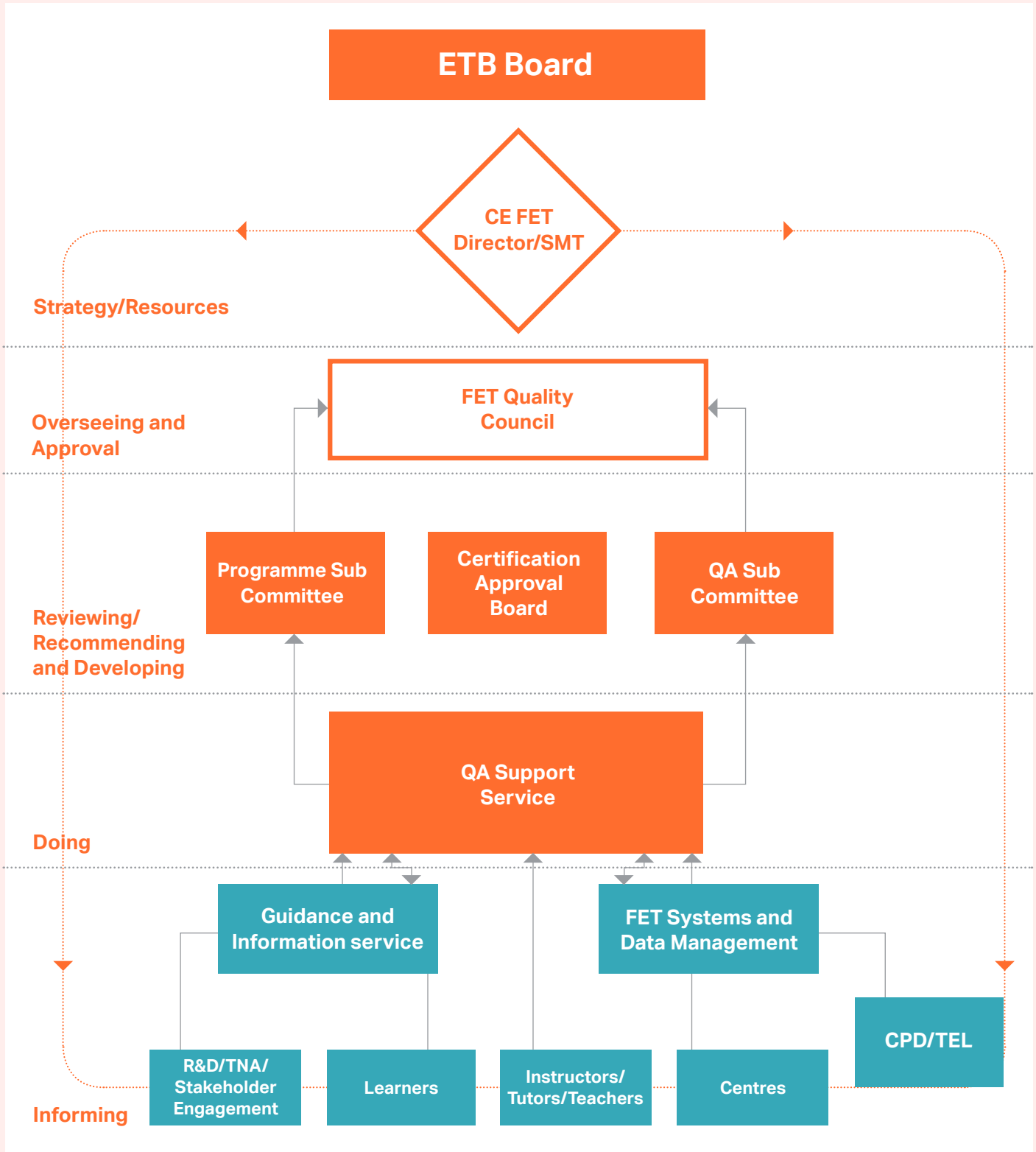
The structure was designed to ensure a clear separation of responsibilities between the production and development of material, and its approval. Each group within the QA Governance and Management structure has clear terms of reference which outline its role and responsibilities.

A Quality Assurance Support Service (QASS) was also created to support the separation of responsibilities outlined above, and to offer wide-ranging support to the FET staff and other stakeholders. The QASS collects and collates feedback from FET staff and other stakeholders regarding proposed policies and procedures; documentation is updated based on the feedback received and forwarded for review, recommendation and approval through the appropriate level of the QA Governance and Management structure. The QASS performs an essential role in the QA cycle, which is critical to the organised and structured evaluation process that underpins our new Quality Assurance system.

Conclusion

When devising and rolling out the new QA Governance and Management structure, a strong emphasis was placed on widening participation in the committee processes. Careful consideration was given to the constitution of each group, and importance was attached to engagement with external stakeholders and involvement of staff and students. This has supported the FET service in delivering a robust, transparent QA system that is owned by the stakeholders and is based on the principles of continuous feedback and improvement. It represents a verifiable step in making visible the quality culture that is tacit throughout the service and organisation.

This process is not without challenges. Terms of Reference and membership of some of the sub-committees are being reviewed to ensure their effectiveness. There are challenges with student engagement which have been exacerbated by the COVID crisis; there is further work to be done on improving communications and disseminating information. It is evident that the QA Governance and Management structure and processes must be more visible and transparent to all.

Nonetheless, embedding the cycle of review and reflection and the continuous feedback process has allowed us to identify areas for improvement. The QASS team consulted with FET staff across all programmes in 2019 and introduced the new QA system and QA Governance and Management structure to them. As a consequence of these consultations, the FET Service has become more proactive in seeking stakeholder feedback, including that of our students, in our QA review processes.

Is the ETB's Governance and Management of QA visible and transparent?

Yes   **Partly**   **No**

23

60

16
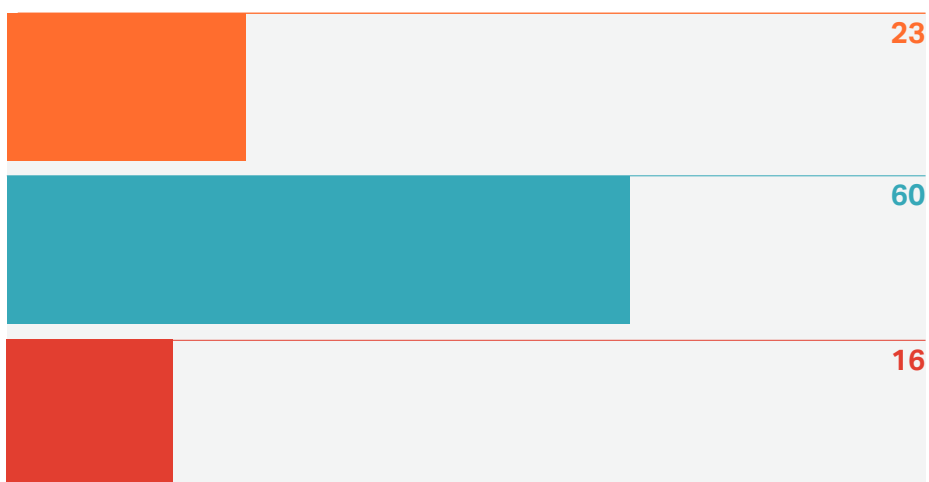
Staff Briefing and Consultation event (2020)

Summary of Student Survey December 2020

Are you aware that Donegal ETB has a governance and management structure that oversees quality assurance for the FET service? (286 respondents)

Answer choice	Responses
Yes	67.83%
No	32.17%

In a move towards transparency, Executive Summaries of the student and staff evaluations were produced and are published on the ETB website, where they are accessible to staff and the general public. Quality Assurance is now a standing agenda item in all programme and subcommittee meetings, a notable outcome from the earlier consultations that places QA awareness at the heart of day-to-day operations within the FET Service.

1.3 The Documentation of Quality Assurance Policies and Procedures

Developing and documenting a single integrated Quality Assurance system which is reflective of the QQI Core Statutory QA guidelines requires a review of existing policies and procedures to assess their relevance and effectiveness against these guidelines (Appendix 5a). In practice, this means all current policies and procedures are being reviewed and updated or replaced in accordance with the needs of the new QA system (Appendix 5b).

Donegal ETB's Strategy Statement 2017-2021, **Lean ar Aghaidh, identifies the organisation's core values relating to its work with "students/learners, staff and community". These core values form the basis for the Donegal ETB FET Service's new single Quality Assurance System, which strives to make visible the quality culture that already exists through planning, implementation, review and continuous improvement.**

The FET Service's Quality Assurance system rests firmly on the five stages of the quality cycle: plan, implement, publish, review, and improve, illustrated in Figure 7 below.

Figure 7

The development of a primary Quality Assurance Policy will ensure that other QA system policies and procedures are developed and revised in a way that is congruent with the QQI Core Statutory QA Guidelines. The quality cycle outlined in Figure 7 (above) is underpinned by a standard template for policies and procedures, and a process of development and revision which has been documented.

Through the self-evaluation process, the Certification Approval Board (CAB) was identified as an area of best practice in the adoption and implementation of the new QA integrated system. The CAB demonstrates how the new integrated QA system is a responsive and reflective replacement for the legacy systems. Evidence of the new QA system in action with regard to assessment procedures and processes being standardised across the FET Service exists within CAB. This continuous feedback loop has led to discernible improvements in the committee's functionality through the development of an improvement log to capture and respond to recurring or unresolved issues. This ensures nothing is missed or overlooked and a consistent approach to resolving problems is adopted. CAB is also in the process of developing a standardised template for reporting certification results — a best practice approach that will be shared across programmes.

Given the critical nature of the policies and procedures to the implementation and success of the single QA system, the FET Senior Management Team has decided that the policy and procedure consultation process must be prioritised. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, this process has been moved online and progress has continued. The Quality Assurance Policy has been supplemented by the addition of a 'step-by-step process' flow chart to clarify the development of the subsequent policies and procedures (Fig 8).

The FET Senior Management Team has prioritised the resourcing of quality improvement and development based on areas of the Quality Improvement Plan **(QIP)**, which is supplemented by a QA Development Planning chart. The Quality Improvement Plan and the QA development planning chart identify quality assurance actions based on the strategic plan, policies and procedures, research and stakeholder feedback. Reasonable timelines are established for the completion of the quality assurance actions and it is important that they reflect the ETB Vision and Mission statements. Both these documents demonstrate the FET Service's commitment to supporting the development and implementation of an integrated quality assurance system, its processes and its management.

This is a work in progress however, and it is acknowledged by FET SMT and QA staff that communication around the QIP and QA development with wider stakeholders must be improved. QA development steps, such as the introduction of the FET Service Student Voice Forum in 2020, alongside the recent implementation of the 'Public Information and Communications' policy and 'Recognition of Prior Learning' policy and procedure, are evidence of affirmative action taken to help address these issues.

Figure 8

A rationale is presented to the FET SMT by the QASS to develop new or update existing Quality Assurance Policies and Procedures based on a specific need and in line with the QA Guidelines

A Draft Policy and Procedure is then produced by the QASS

Draft Policy and Procedures are reviewed by FET SMT

Draft Policy and Procedure is then issued for wider consultation with relevant stakeholders

After feedback, amendments a review of Policy and Procedures take place in preparation for operational use

The Draft Policy and Procedure presented to relevant governance subcommittee(s)

Following recommendations by the subcommittee, policy or procedure presented to Quality Council for Approval

Following approval from the Quality Council – presented to the ETB Board for information

Communication to staff

Implementation

Publish

Ongoing monitor and review as part of self-evaluation procedures

Continuous improvement: a systemic approach to continuous improvement to the management and delivery of all aspects of the service

Conclusion

The FET Service's understanding of Quality Assurance has evolved through the QA development process and the new QA system reflects improvements in practice. It is also cognisant of the diversity within the Donegal ETB's FET Service and the breadth of programme areas within it.

Further demonstrating the cycle of review and reflection in action, policies and procedures for systematic evaluation have been identified as an area for improvement required under the new QA system.

1.4 Staff Recruitment, Management and Development

Donegal ETB is committed to fairness, equality and transparency in respect of all recruitment processes. The process is aligned to best practice and meets all legislative requirements (Employment Equality Acts 1998-2015 and Disability Act 2005), including Garda vetting.

Staff Recruitment

The Department of Education/SOLAS sanction recognised posts, and FET vacancies are appointed through a formal recruitment and selection process. The Vacancy Notice, Job Description, Person Specification, Application Form and Information Document all form part of the standard Vacancy Pack for formal FET vacancies. Relevant competencies are identified by FET Senior Managers, in consultation with Human Resources (HR), and matched to the skills required for the Grade attached to each post. Approved posts are advertised in the Vacancies Section of the Donegal ETB website and relevant documentation is made available to download.

A transparent and consistent shortlisting process is conducted by the relevant FET Senior Manager(s) in consultation with HR. Consideration is given to the essential criteria on the person specification, including qualifications and work experience nationally agreed/commensurate with the requirements of the post. Selection Board members are chosen in compliance with Department of Education circulars, or due to the Board member's expertise in a particular field of FET. Recruitment and selection checks are conducted by HR before an appointment, including the completion of the Garda Vetting process, a pre-employment online medical, and checks on documentary evidence of qualifications, references and the candidate's date of birth
.
All those involved in the recruitment and selection process follow step-by-step instructions, and clear information is provided to all candidates.

Staff Management Development System

ETBs do not operate a formal Performance Management Development System. Staff identified the absence of a formal performance development process as an area for improvement. It was reported that the lack of a formal appraisal system could be perceived as a missed opportunity to offer staff direction around CPD which would enhance their performance, develop competence and support their professional development for progression within FET or the ETB as a whole.

Staff Development

Donegal ETB's FET Service maintains a Continuous Professional Development (CPD) calendar and provides a range of professional development opportunities for its staff. The FET Service's CPD policy is influenced in its ethos and content by the SOLAS FET Professional Development Strategy 2016-2019. Donegal ETB is committed to professional development within its FET Service which places the professional competence of its staff as central to its ability to respond to the changing needs of students and employers. The FET SMT are cognisant of the strong link between professional development and the quality of education and training provided. This practice has been particularly evident during the COVID-19 pandemic in relation to the rolling out of Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL) training to support and encourage staff with the introduction of Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT). A strong emphasis has also been placed on integrating Universal Design for Learning (UDL) into pedagogical practice, module assessment and delivery.

One of the positive aspects that emerged from the COVID-19 situation was the informal learning that took place for both staff and students. Much of the feedback gathered from both as part of the COVID-19 research made reference to how they had encountered new opportunities to expand their skills and knowledge. Students, in particular, reported that they were motivated to engage with learning which was self-directed.

Review of Donegal ETB's COVID-19 responses and their impact on Quality Assurance, Teaching, Learning and Assessment

Student comment

"I am really impressed with what we have done. I have worked hard to finish and hopefully get my qualification. I am happy with the ETB and tutor. The work put in to have online classes was so much. I think we should all be happy with how we have adapted."

"This has been a challenge for all, that we have met in ways we never thought possible. We now need to help students believe that they can register with us with confidence and that we will do everything possible to help them through their learning experience, be it in a physical classroom, a remote one or a blend of the two."

In concert with the formally organised CPD, staff are also encouraged to identify and apply for professional development opportunities on an individual basis. Donegal ETB has a Training and Development Policy for all FET programme staff. This process can be initiated by an individual staff member or their line manager, and once approved by the line manager, Human Resources (HR) will process the application in accordance with the terms of the policy. A copy of the application is also retained by HR.

Training Centre Instructors can undertake a period of industrial placement should they wish to upskill to keep abreast of developments in their occupational area. An annual staff seminar is organised which all FET staff are invited to attend, regardless of their role. The seminar is an opportunity for staff to meet each other, discuss current developments in the sector, and hear expert inputs on relevant themes e.g., Future of Work, Active Inclusion.

Through the Organisation Support and Development (OSD) Service within the ETB, training in the areas of Health and Safety, Data Protection and GDPR, and Finance is delivered at organisational level. FET staff members are required to attend training in compliance with regulatory requirements. In the course of consultations, a desire to strengthen relationships between parts of the OSD service and FET was expressed. It was reported that, due to inadequate staffing resources within the OSD Service, its communication with the FET Service is not as well developed as it could be. A mutual knowledge gap concerning the day-to-day working of both services was identified.

CPD and TEL

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, Donegal ETB appointed a Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL) Coordinator to research and implement a TEL development plan. This plan is in accordance with SOLAS TEL Strategy and will enable the FET Service to stay abreast of technological advances in education and training. It was initially anticipated that TEL opportunities would first be targeted and utilised in a way that would benefit teachers, tutors, instructors and students in specific fields of learning. However, the introduction of Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT) in response to the pandemic significantly accelerated this process (Appendix 6 a/b). **The CPD initiated by the TEL Coordinator, working group and FET Senior Management Team (SMT) was instrumental in the success of the FET Service's response to COVID-19. Although good practice in resource sharing previously existed among teachers, tutors and instructors, it grew significantly through the increased use of online platforms.**

Cross-programme TEL training encouraged a shared approach to developing and utilising online resources. New networks have formed, and it has resulted in Donegal ETB becoming significantly more advanced in the rollout of training and use of TEL. Feedback from staff indicates that TEL encourages innovation in teaching and the use of new technologies.

As part of its research into the impact of Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT) the FET Service surveyed students from different programmes and distributed a questionnaire during the first COVID-19 lockdown which assessed the impact of ERT on FET students. The responses received from FET students in Donegal consistently highlighted the swift transition to online learning and the levels of support given. In addition, however, it is interesting that a significant number of students expressed their desire to return to a classroom-based learning environment.

Conclusion

Donegal ETB adheres strongly to statutory requirements in its approach to recruitment and selection. However, evaluative feedback from FET staff suggests there is a need for a structured and consistent approach to induction for new staff members across the FET Service. Each programme has developed its own specific process for this, which is not consistent or assessed for compliance with current HR policies.

Whilst the FET Service has a record of all the CPD undertaken by staff on an annual basis, there is no systematic planning, monitoring or evaluation process in place to ascertain the effectiveness or relevance or implementation of the training undertaken.

Information on the quality or efficacy of CPD is fed back in isolation and is confined to the programme or staff cohort to which the staff member undertaking it belongs.

In the staff surveys and baseline activity documents collated for the Self-Evaluation review, staff who had undertaken CPD described it as a positive experience. Often, CPD opportunities are identified by the staff. Feedback from Human Resources (HR) expressed an interest in increasing their involvement in the area of CPD, as it is one of their primary functions; it was acknowledged that this is only an aspiration at present due to inadequate staffing resources. It is a medium to long-term goal within HR to move from a reactive position in relation to FET needs to a model of integration and planning which includes the areas of staff induction and CPD.

Over the past few years, CPD has responded to key development areas identified by staff. This included: class management, working with students with mental health issues, sustainable development and environmental impact awareness, and Safe Talk.

1.5

Programme Development, Approval and Submission for Validation

Programme development continues to work under the two legacy QA systems while new programme approval and validation has moved within the new QA governance structure. Under the legacy systems, programme development is informed by the local context, labour market requirements, with the ETB's mission statement and values integrated into all provision.

No new programmes have been developed under the new QQI Programme Validation criteria, however new programme development has continued under the legacy QA systems. The development, approval and submission of new programmes, courses and qualifications are prepared and submitted through the Programme Sub Committee who in turn will review submissions and then recommend these new or changed programmes and courses to the Quality Council. The rationale and strategic approach to programme development across the accredited NFQ levels and non-accredited provision is outlined within each of the respective sections below.

Community Education

In line with government priorities and Strategic Priority 6 of the current SOLAS FET Strategy, **Donegal ETB's FET Service fully embraces its responsibility to be proactive in providing courses to promote and encourage active inclusion. As County Donegal's largest provider of education and training at NFQ levels 1-6, the FET Service is crucial to engaging individuals in the community who are socially, educationally and economically disadvantaged.**

The FET Service has an essential role in breaking the cycles of disadvantage that can prevent some from reaching their full potential. Implementing courses, policies and procedures that support and encourage active inclusion within the community is a constant priority for the FET SMT.

Donegal ETB's Community Education Support Programme enables Community Education Providers to organise and deliver low-cost, locally based education opportunities for groups of people who do not usually avail of such opportunities. Donegal ETB's Community Education Facilitators (CEFs) assist in the administration of a grant scheme that supports education initiatives in local community settings. A Community Education Forum chaired by Donegal ETB has members of a range of statutory and voluntary organisations and encourages a collaborative model of support. Community education courses supported by Donegal ETB are mainly non-formal, but some formal provision linked to identified skills needs that support and enhance the community is also supported. Examples include: first aid and CPR. All community education provision is delivered in an environment that is accessible and inclusive. Non-formal courses funded by the Community Education Support Programme can be generalised under the following themes: agriculture, horticulture and mariculture; arts, craft and media; health, family and social; technology and the natural environment. The process affords participants an opportunity to identify their learning goals, build upon their individual experiences and understanding and avail of the opportunity to progress to formal education.

SER Community Provider Survey
Community Provider

Our relationship and partnership with the ETB has gone, and I feel, will go from strength to strength in the future. They are in the business of developing people and lives, with the help of communities, as are we. With this common goal, we will both continue to support and enhance communities.

Non-accredited provision

Non-formal or non-accredited provision is delivered by the Basic Education Service and falls mainly under introductory courses and family learning provision. Summer schools provision has been piloted in the following areas such as 'Touch-Type and Spell' to support dyslexic students and 'English language acquisition' for other EU and non-EU residents.

Family learning provision delivers short courses to support parents to gain skills and confidence to help their children with school work. Provision includes: 'At the Kitchen Table' – support your child with homework'; Maths for parents; Irish for parents and Internet Awareness for Parents.

Programmes at Levels 1-3

Donegal ETB's Basic Education Service, Youthreach and Specialist Training Provision (STP) programmes are responsible for the delivery of courses and programmes of learning from levels 1 to 3 on the NFQ.

The Basic Education Service, marketed as the Learning for Living Programme, encompasses the following strands of provision: Refugees Resettlement, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), asylum seekers, family learning, mainstream literacy and numeracy and intensive tuition for adult basic education (ITABE). The service has developed and validated programmes that support the acquisition of skills, knowledge and competence and provides a seamless progression from level 1 to 2 and 2 to 3. Programme delivery is enhanced by the production of contextualised and level appropriate resources. Themed provision has engaged students who share a common interest to learn together. The use of cultural heritage as a theme supported the acquisition of a major award in general learning at level 3 and provided students with a meaningful and relevant experience. Horticulture is another theme that has engaged students through their interest and combined the use of both an indoor and outdoor classroom (Appendix 7). In addition to themed provision, the programme has reworked combinations of modules that integrate generic skills as a response to identified needs. One example of this is a level 3 introductory course to childcare to provide foundation skills and a pathway for students. While the programme has undertaken the development of resources and summative assessment tasks for levels 1 to 3, the resources are shared across the service and particularly with Youthreach which also delivers provision at the same levels.

The Youthreach programme is a two-year full-time programme that is open to young people aged 16-20 years who have left school with little or no formal qualifications. Within national operational guidelines, each centre organises a range of provision which meets the needs of its participants. Support is also provided in developing progression pathways within FET, or external institutions/training.

Our Specialist Training Provision (STP) is delivered by specialist contracted trainers and offers a range of awards designed to meet the needs of students with disabilities allowing them to progress into further and higher education opportunities with the appropriate support. The contract for provision is reviewed and renewed as appropriate on an annual basis.

Programmes at Levels 4-6

When responding to the direction and targets required within the SPA, a number of new progression-focused courses were designed and implemented within the part- time FET programmes. The primary objective of such courses is to bridge the gap for students who have completed major awards at QQI Level 3 and provide a progression route to build on core skills, develop transversal skills and progress to the occupational or skill-specific higher level courses.

Programmes at levels 4–6 cont.

The progression courses were based around the General Learning Award, however with the integration of information technology, research methods and study skills within the assessed communications module, the courses enable students to progress with accreditation and skills into a range of further education and training opportunities on other programmes.

The delivery of part-time NFQ Level 5 Health Care and NFQ Level 5 Early Learning Childcare provision in both short courses and full awards over two years, to facilitate those working and those with other family or caring commitments, is also a feature of part-time provision.

In the higher-level skills-specific FET programmes, course changes were implemented in response to the changing economic landscape and in response to feedback from employers and local networks, while also aligning with agreed strategic targets. These included the introduction of e-Business, Tourism and ICT qualifications from City & Guilds, Microsoft and the Irish Computer Society within the full-time NFQ Level 5 FET programmes. Within Training Services provision, two innovative programmes in Intellectual Disability Studies with Special Needs and Automated Software Testing have been developed and delivered in response to employer needs. Several of the programmes offered at NFQ levels 4-6 are delivered as Traineeships i.e. they include a minimum of 30% work placement.

Within some of the PLC offerings, the integration of Erasmus+ exchange opportunities for participants has provided openings for students to see how adaptable their learning is in other contexts and aids in the development of transversal skills. These programmes have significant employment prospects locally, regionally, nationally and internationally.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic and the ensuing economic downturn, one of the main target groups for the FET Service was school leavers. The historic perception of Further Education and Training in comparison with Higher Education represents a challenge when attempting to develop programmes of benefit or interest to this cohort. In an attempt to overcome this bias, the FET Service engaged with local second level schools from disadvantaged communities (DEIS schools) to see how FET could be framed as a viable alternative for young people not necessarily interested in pursuing third-level studies and most at risk of experiencing economic disadvantage. Initial meetings have been positive and taster modules in specific vocational areas had been planned before the COVID-19 crisis. Considerable work was also undertaken by Communications to develop specific promotional materials for school leavers to highlight what the FET Service can offer them.

In my experience with ETB has been more than positive. The learning environment is comfortable and inviting and I find myself looking forward to my classes. The teachers have been helpful, encouraging, patient and most importantly we have some fun. I had been caring for my father in the home for three and a half years and found that the social interaction with learners and teachers, that are outside my normal circle of contacts, was empowering and helped me to find me again. My father has now passed away and because of my participation in this course, I am now actively and confidently working towards gaining new employment.

Enterprise Engagement and Employers

The ongoing work of our Enterprise Engagement Team continues to raise our profile as the Further Education and Training provider of first choice locally for employers. Relationships have been built with multinational companies, SMEs and employers, as well as with appropriate local and regional business networks and agencies e.g. Regional Skills Forum, LEO, Enterprise Ireland, IDA, Chamber of Commerce, Údarás na Gaeltachta etc. Development work in this area has been accompanied by the introduction of more awarding bodies and vendor-based qualifications and the potential of the national Skills to Advance and Skills for Work (Appendix 8) initiatives has been harnessed. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Skills to Advance was used to partner with the Letterkenny Chamber of Commerce to deliver online information sessions on 'Communicating with Your Customers in a time of Crisis', 'Lead Generation' for sales and 'Restart Retail', a series of webinars on Agile Trading, Emerging Trends and Creating a Plan. In response to a request from the Donegal County Childcare Committee during the pandemic, the STA initiative was used to deliver specially tailored training in Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) in the early years' setting to childcare providers. Feedback from the participants on the IPC course was positive and highlighted how timely and useful the training was, and how professional and knowledgeable the tutor was. Courses certified by the Institute of Leadership and Management (ILM) have been developed in cooperation with four other ETBs, SOLAS and Regional Skills Fora, and delivered successfully in the region.

SER Enterprise Engagement Survey
What does Donegal ETB do well?

Programme Design—we asked Donegal ETB to set up a Network Planning and Design course and every requirement was catered for. I am happy so far. The current course (Skills to Advance) the Excel- the feedback is brilliant and it is seen as upskilling the current workforce here (in Letterkenny).

—

Head of Planning and Design, KN Circet

The **Skills for Work** initiative focuses on increasing the skills and competencies of those in low-skilled work, under the auspices of Enterprise Engagement. Skills for Work targets NFQ levels 2-3 primarily, and works seamlessly alongside Skills to Advance in offering basic education, supporting progression opportunities and strengthening job security. The Explore programme introduces basic digital literacy skills to employees in positions at risk of mechanisation in the workplace.

Recognition of Prior Learning has been widely utilised across Donegal to validate the experiential learning of staff in a number of different companies (Appendix 9). Since 2016 Donegal ETB's FET Service has used the process to enable validation of skills, knowledge and competencies at levels 3, 4 and 5. Donegal ETB has been awarded funding to roll out a collaborative RPL project with Limerick and Clare ETB to validate skills, knowledge and competencies of care sector employees.

SER External Partnership Survey

My experience with Donegal ETB is as an external authenticator, particularly authentication of RPL assessment portfolios in recent years. The fact that Donegal ETB is to the fore nationally in providing RPL opportunities for learners is a reflection of its inclusive reach. Looking in from the outside I can see that learners are very well nurtured and supported through the RPL process.

—

External Authenticator

Donegal ETB is in the final stages of developing a **Traineeship** in Weaving, following considerable engagement with relevant employers. This is a niche course designed to run biennially and add a new generation of weavers to this world-renowned traditional craft industry in Donegal. Crucial to the success of the course are suitably trained tutors. Many people nearing the end of their careers in the industry may have spent their entire working lives hand weaving or using power looms. Therefore, possibilities for utilising RPL to validate the experiential learning of these highly skilled workers to deliver part of the training are being explored.

Enterprise Engagement and Employers cont.

The success of our Training Service in engaging with employers and identifying skills shortages which lead to the development of new programmes is due mainly to the implementation of a clear Enterprise Engagement strategy. Whilst other areas of the FET Service also respond to identified employer needs, it is often in a more ad-hoc manner, and not always recorded. The Enterprise Engagement team has recently begun to use a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system to maintain a database of employers and a log of interactions and support given to them. This more systematic approach is essential to accurately track the number of employers the FET Service engages with, record the levels of service delivered, and monitor and evaluate the quality and effectiveness of the service or training provided.

When developing and delivering new awards based on employer feedback or labour market demands, it would be beneficial if teachers, tutors and instructors undertook vocational upskilling as part of their CPD. This would encourage employer confidence in the ETB to deliver the most up-to-date education and training.

Conclusion

Donegal ETB's FET Service has been very successful in developing programmes in response to identified needs, but the organisation recognises that its overall approach needs to be more systematic, standardised and evidence-based. Feedback from employers and other external stakeholders has highlighted the need for increased agility in responding to new course requests. Robust and transparent policies and procedures that specify the full process, from conception to delivery, are required. Some progress has been made, e.g. all new proposed programmes must be approved through the QA governance structures prior to delivery. The recent establishment of an Integrated Programme Planning working group and the recent appointment of a Programme Development Officer are two initiatives that are designed to support this critical work.

Within programme development, there is a commitment throughout the organisation to staff and students to provide an environment where each person is given an equal opportunity to achieve their potential free from prejudice and discrimination. The ETB strives to embody and comply with both the spirit and the letter of legislation under The Equal Status Acts 2000-2018 and Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty 2014.

Donegal ETB is adopting a robust and comprehensive approach to the area of Programme Development, Approval and Submission for Validation. New programme development will incorporate the QQI Statutory Quality Assurance Core Guidelines and new QQI validation criteria for the validation of programmes of education and training.

Programme development will continue to be informed by the collection and analysis of economic and social data and a response to identified needs. Course planning is informed by both internal and external data, consultation with stakeholders and the strategic priorities in the ETB's Strategy Statement and our SPA agreement with SOLAS. Although formal re-validation of programmes was not required when re-designing courses, an approval and QA process is still required when scheduling the course within the PLSS system course calendar.

1.6 Access, Transfer and Progression

The ETB's FET Service supports Access, Transfer and Progression (ATP) in many ways and has various approaches to ATP across diverse FET programmes, which have course offerings ranging from NFQ levels 1-6. In many cases similar awards or qualifications may be delivered on a full-time or part-time basis. Access arrangements are based in some instances around eligibility, funding and social status rather than qualification or award entry requirements. For students with a specific disability who require increased support, access is provided through Specialist Training Providers who deliver courses as part of our second provider FET provision.

Access

The FET Service promotes its courses in various ways, with FET staff targeting specific groups at the recruitment stage. An impartial Guidance Service **works in conjunction with the Recruitment Officer and other FET programme coordinators and organisers in supporting access across the FET service courses and programmes. Many of the initial expressions of interest for our courses come from word-of-mouth referrals demonstrating the excellent reputation of the ETB's FET Service in the community.**

Policies and procedures governing ATP exist under the two legacy QA systems and access to courses, particularly those where a formal interview takes place, varies across programmes. Approaches to standardise the interview process have been taking place across a number of FET programmes, where the 'skills checker' has been used as a means of identifying the students overall level and may result in a recommendation for further in depth assessment. This process also has a secondary benefit in the provision of assessment accommodations during course delivery for students if a learning disability presents at the interview stage. The Recruitment Officer for FET has recently developed a proposal to enhance the recruitment process while also creating a consistent approach across the FET service regarding access at interview stage. This has been progressed for consideration by the quality assurance support service and is a first step towards introducing an integrated single Access, Transfer and Progression policy approach across the service.

Course access information is provided to prospective and current students in a number of ways and through various channels. The ETB is very active on a number of social media platforms, additionally Facebook Messenger deals with FET courses 24 hours a day. An annual FET prospectus of courses is published both digitally and in hard copy. Programme brochures, leaflets and posters also provide information to potential applicants. Students can now register and apply for further education and training (FET) courses online with the Further Education and Training Course Hub (www.fetchcourses.ie). The course finder on the ETB's website provides course access information in tandem with the information populated on the national course hub.

The annual Further Education and Training Fair attracts approximately one thousand adults and young people each year. Moving the Fair to a more accessible location in Letterkenny and refocusing it solely on Donegal ETB's FET provision has facilitated access to information, FET students and teaching, tutoring and instructing staff for people considering a return to education and training. Due to COVID-19 the Fair did not take place in 2020; however, a virtual information event is planned for Spring 2021. The ETB's FET service has strong relationships with external stakeholders such as the Department of Social Protection (DSP), Community Employment (CE) Supervisors, local community groups, Donegal Youth Service, the Health Service Executive (HSE), Tusla (the Child and Family Agency) and Children and Young People's Services Committee (CYPSC). These relationships all create access pathways to FET programmes and services for potential students.

Another means of advocating access to courses is through frontline administration staff in the FET centres. They regularly make administrative referrals to the Guidance Service or recruitment team from general public enquiries.

Full-time and part-time course interviews are held to make sure that the right person is matched with the right course, and at the right level. The Guidance Service assists with the Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS) and Back to Education Initiative (BTEI) interviews. As part of a fair and consistent process the Recruitment Officer and FE programme coordinators keep a record of interviews should they be required following an appeal. Individuals interested in evening classes are invited to information sessions, during which they are given an overview of the course and an opportunity to ask any questions they may have. The Skills for Work Coordinator and Enterprise Engagement Officer work directly with employers to ensure the ETB is offering the appropriate qualification at the proper level for both employees and the employer.

Donegal ETB FET Service Student Voice Forum Mentimeter Question

Do you feel you were on the right course? (Of the 64 respondents)

Yes   No

63

1
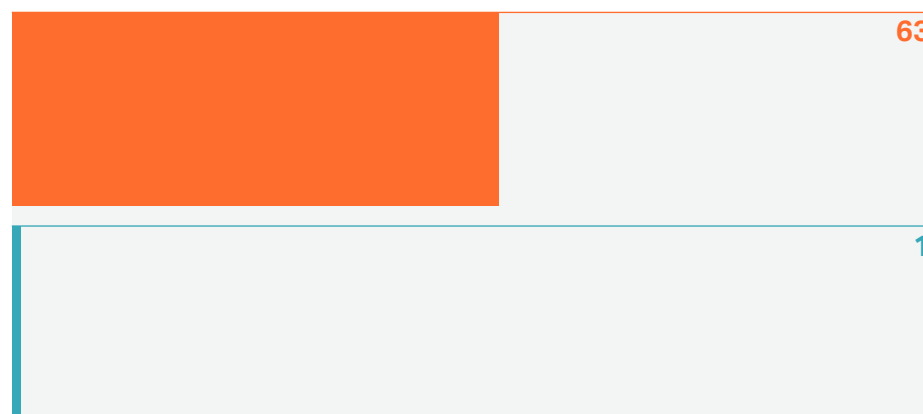
Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) has had a significant impact in Donegal. The process has facilitated the certification of all learning, including workplace experiential learning. Beneficiaries include employees with low, or no formal qualifications. As well as increasing certification outcomes, it has increased participants' access to FET courses and, in some cases, the confidence and self-belief to return to learning.

Donegal ETB is currently undertaking a joint project with Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board to validate the learning of experienced care sector employees at NFQ level 5, primarily targeting health care assistants with no prior certification. A number of FET staff undertook RPL training to enhance their CPD and gain a thorough understanding of the process. Additional staff are also undertaking a NFQ level 9 module in RPL at Letterkenny Institute of Technology (LYIT), to embed a knowledge base across the FET Service. This will be invaluable in supporting increased participation in RPL in the future.

Transfer

The prospectus outlines the range of learning opportunities available within FET.

Students can transfer based on their interest. Teachers, tutors and instructors provide much of the transfer information, which includes suggestions such as natural progressions or allied modules to assist with students' long-term goals. The Guidance Service offers group and one-to-one sessions to students on VTOS and BTEI courses, in which transfer and progression options are explored in-depth.

Progression

In many cases, information and support on progression opportunities for students is often successfully provided by teachers, tutors or instructors, within a classroom setting. Literacy Organisers work with basic education students to facilitate progression options within the literacy programme and also to other FET programmes. PLC programmes show excellent progression to higher education and employment. VTOS, BTEI and Literacy students benefit from comprehensive formal sessions on progression from the Guidance Service. Workshops are undertaken to explain FE and HE options, funding for progression and support with applications offer students a step-by-step guide to progression. Follow up one-to-one sessions offer specific guidance to each individual student where requested or needed. The Guidance Service also has a comprehensive employability programme which assists students at QQI Levels 4 and 5 to prepare for the world of work; it covers everything from vocational and personal skills assessment to mock interviews and is offered under the title "Tick that Box". A handbook for students supports both the group and one-to-one sessions.

The course so far gave me more confidence across a lot of new skills I've learned so far. I already feel that I am ready to progress into higher education next year, with the way I have been given help with assignments, expressing myself etc.

Student Self Evaluation Survey
December 2020

Student

At an organisational level, Donegal ETB promotes access, transfer and progression through an articulation agreement with LYIT which outlines progression paths from Donegal ETB courses at NFQ levels 5 and 6 (and other equivalent certification) to specific LYIT degree courses. Within the BTEI part-time healthcare programme employers are facilitated to meet students virtually or visit classrooms to create pathways for employment and placement opportunities.

Further facilitating progression routes, as a member of the Cross-border Further and Higher Education Cluster, Donegal ETB has a good relationship with North West Regional College, and a developing relationship with Ulster University.

Conclusion

One of the findings from the student support research and the Student Voice Forum carried out in 2020 was that there is a lack of consistent student support particularly around progression. Availability of information about progression opportunities can be limited in courses where there is no guidance support; therefore, the rolling out of a schedule of guidance is seen as crucial in providing a quality service to all students. In further developing a consistent approach to ATP across the FET Service, the ETB recognises the need for a single policy and procedures in this area. A need has been identified to develop progression pathways which are clear for everyone to understand. This would help to ensure a consistent student experience across FET provision and centres. This has been identified as a priority for the Integrated Programme Planning Working group for 2021.

1.7   **Integrity and Approval of Learner Results**

Our FET Service is committed to the integrity of assessment and recognises that responsibility for the integrity of the assessment process lies with both staff and students. This area has been identified as a priority for the development of revised integrated policies and procedures in line with the QQI Core Statutory QA Guidelines. Significant progress has been made and a draft integrated Fair and Consistent Assessment of Learners policy has been developed with a range of procedures in progress, as part of the integrated QA system. This action supports a consistent decision making process across the service.

Furthermore, the ETB's FET Service has taken a collaborative approach to creating a bank of centralised assessments, with considerable input from teachers, tutors and instructors. The review cycle for these centralised assessments includes integrated standardisation and moderation, both internally and with external input. The ETB's robust Internal Verification (IV) process and centralised External Authentication (EA) process further assure consistency of award standards across the service. The externality afforded by the EA process allows for moderation of Donegal ETB results against national award standards.

SER External Partnership Survey
External Authenticator

DL ETB have been working effortlessly these last two years to ensure assessment processes are effectively coordinated and quality assured.

Figure 9

Assessment
- QQI - access to a bank of centralised assessments created locally and reviewed annually
- Other awarding body - access to assessments in line with awarding body procedures

Authentication Process
- Internal verification that all assessment procedures have been applied and to monitor the outcomes of assessment i.e. assessment results
- External examination/authentication by an independent subject matter expert to moderate assessment results

Results Approval
- Meeting of Certification Approval Board to examine the outcomes from the authentication process and approve student results
- Ensure that outcomes from authentication process are implemented across the ETB FET Service
- Advise on the issues of student provisional results and the appeals window

Appeals Process
- Allow the requisite 14 days for appeal
- Assign an external subject matter expert to adjudicate on the appeal
- Inform stakeholders of the outcome of appeals
- Inform CAB of outcomes of appeals

Request Certification
- Request certification in line with awarding body procedures

Oversight of the assessment process (Fig 9) is provided through the QAGovernance and Management structure by the Certification Approval Board (CAB) and the Quality Council (QC). Reports detailing the outcomes from the Internal Verification (IV) and External Authentication (EA) processes, as well as grade outcomes, are considered at a CAB meeting before the approval of results. A summary report is developed by the Training Standard Officers on behalf of the CAB. This is then presented to the QC and circulated to the Quality Sub-Committee for noting. A member of the CAB sits on the QC to support the sharing of information.

The **Certification Approval Board** demonstrates one area that has transitioned to a single QA system. The members of CAB are staff with extensive experience of the legacy systems. Due to the nature and importance of the work this group does, it meets at least six times per year in line with the QQI Key Dates Calendar.

When issues have arisen, there has been a determined solution-focused approach to resolving them. CAB members' commitment to quality, transparency and consistency across the FET Service has been illustrated by the creation of a continuous improvement log to track assessment issues raised and the actions taken to address them. The log aims to ensure that all issues are properly documented and addressed. Where an issue remains unresolved, it will be researched, and a determination sought in a timely manner through consensus and using evidence of best practice. As a further means of improvement and enhancement, CAB is currently collating all External Authenticator feedback which has been mapped in themes against the QQI QA Core Guidelines. This resource, and its utilisation in the future, will further help to support identification of good practice and inform areas for improvement that need addressing. It is planned to review this feedback document as a standing agenda item in each CAB meeting in the future.

External Authentication

The centralised approach to authentication based on award types and fields of learning, as opposed to the previous centre-based approach, has been commended on several occasions by external authenticators as a practice that could be rolled out nationally. EAs who have regularly returned to work with Donegal ETB have noted improvements in assessment practice based on their previous feedback and recommendations. This demonstrates the real-time implementation of a systematic cycle of review and reflection, effective and timely dissemination of information, and the openness of assessors to constructive feedback in enhancing their professional practice.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the CAB successfully transitioned to an online platform to continue with the certification approval process, minimising the impact on Donegal ETB FET students.

Conclusion

Whilst, overall, the CAB now functions under the new QA single system, when information from CAB meetings is disseminated back to programmes it is often distributed according to the policies and procedures of the legacy systems. This has resulted in a hybrid functionality in QA regarding certification approval. Addressing assessment issues that arise, authentication feedback and the certification data and outcomes will be further enhanced when the issues log and feedback resource are fully implemented and functioning within the overall QA governance model.

The centralised approach to external authentication will be further strengthened through the development of a local EA panel, membership of which will be drawn from the national database of EAs.

1.8 Information and Data Management

Donegal ETB appointed a Data Protection Officer (DPO) in May 2018. This signalled a move toward a strategic organisational approach to the implementation of and compliance with the Data Protection Act 2018. The DPO has an important role, which includes monitoring compliance and issuing guidance and communication on an ongoing basis (e.g. compliance requirements relating to data transfers to the United States of America, compliance requirements concerning website cookies, etc.).

ETB managers and coordinators across the organisation are provided with a GDPR toolkit or checklist on an annual basis to ensure compliance within their area of responsibility. Also, each department is asked to return other information, such as data mapping and a data-sharing inventory. GDPR training is provided upon request and is mandatory for new employees as part of their induction. It is recommended that all employees refresh their Data Protection training annually.

Donegal ETB has implemented the following data protection policies and procedures:

— Data Protection Policy
— Data Breach Policy
— Privacy Notices for students, employees, volunteers, board members, etc.
— Records Retention Schedule
— Access to Records Policy
— Clean Desk Protocol
— GDPR Guidelines for Remote Working
— Data Protection Impact Assessment Guidelines

Programme Learner Support System (PLSS)

Donegal ETB's FET Service operated several inherited legacy Management Information Systems (MIS), due to the broad range of provision category types (e.g. BTEI, Post Leaving Certificate) introduced over the years in response to particular national initiatives. To help consolidate these systems and to create centralised reporting on FET students, the Programme Learner Support System (PLSS) was introduced across the FET sector in 2017. As a central data repository developed by ETBI and SOLAS, it allows ETBs to use the data collected by the system to provide measurements or metrics to monitor, evaluate and improve the quality of programmes and services that ETBs offer.

The PLSS system is now the primary MIS for the FET Service. It was designed to support FET provision, to report on key student input, output and outcome metrics, and to capture specific student support data for both National and European funding, research and analysis. The PLSS system comprises a National Course Calendar (including a National Learner Database), a National Programme Database and a PLSS Reports module. The Course Calendar schedule integrates with the ETB website course finder and the national website, www. fetchcourses.ie (FETCH), with an option for potential students to make a course application online.

Data is captured and available for 'slice and dice' reporting using the PLSS Reports module. Reports can be generated from the PLSS system for the six SOLAS targets agreed as part of the Strategic Performance Agreement (SPA), including learner start inputs and learner finish outputs and progression and certification outcomes.

The **Funding Allocation Request and Reporting (FARR)** system is also integrated within the PLSS system, and this supports the annual planning cycle for FET provision to facilitate alignment with the SOLAS SPA.

Information regarding GDPR is published on the ETB website; students sign a Data Protection Statement included in the PLSS Learner Details form. At interview or when starting a course, this printed statement is supported verbally. Where students have difficulty registering for a Learner Account, all programmes provide access to support to take them through the online process and explain the Data Protection Statement to them.

Donegal ETB also has an image consent form for all students and staff concerning the use of images and spoken words in print, websites or online media promotional materials. Permission once given, can be rescinded at any time in most circumstances (exceptions may be mass print materials such as the prospectus). At large public events such as the FET Fair, posters advising that photographs or video recordings are being made for promotional materials are always well displayed. Attendees can inform staff they do not wish to be photographed.

The Adult Guidance Service engages minimally with the PLSS, instead using an alternative MIS hosted and supported by the Department of Education through the National Centre for Guidance and Education (NCGE). This Adult Guidance Management System (AGMS) was developed to be responsive to the needs of Guidance Counsellors, capturing a different data set. Currently, the NCGE is in consultation to create a more up to date MIS.

Conclusion

Overall, Donegal ETB has effective systems in place in the area of Data Protection and Information Management. A responsive DPO and IT Support team proactively oversee compliance. The scope and responsibility of the roles are wide-ranging in an organisation the size of Donegal ETB.

Through the baseline evaluation, the DPO identified an area for enhancement; the development of a FET Data Protection working group would add a layer of understanding and compliance. The DPO also stated that staff could benefit from further training in the area of 'Freedom of Information'.

The PLSS system featured in both staff feedback and baseline evaluations. Whilst it is the most widely used MIS, there are legacy systems still in use alongside it for specific functionality not in PLSS. Most programmes accept they do not utilise the full functionality of PLSS in the area of data collection and management specific to monitoring and evaluation. It was also noted, however, that the PLSS Learner Details Form can be onerous administratively, particularly for programmes such as Literacy where student numbers are high, or in Community Education where the community groups collect the information. Occasionally, some of the most excluded individuals in the community choose not to participate in courses due to the level of personal data required for the Learner Details Form.

Donegal ETB's FET Service has recently appointed a FET Systems and Data Reporting Officer whose responsibilities will include the management of the MIS within the FET Service. The Quality Assurance Support Service and FET Senior Management team are eager to use this opportunity to consider more effective ways of using data to inform FET provision, including access, transfer and progression, and monitoring and evaluation. In addition, the Communications Officer has made many requests for more data in order to better inform the general public and current students and staff about FET outcomes. However, it is not systematically gathered or utilised comprehensively in the FET Service. The application of an overarching policy and procedures on the collection and use of data will feature as part of the new integrated QA system and provide an extensive index of easily accessible information on further education and training in County Donegal.

1.9

Public Information and Communications

Donegal ETB's Further Education and Training Service is committed to the provision of public information and communication about its activities including our education and training programmes, related services, quality assurance system and evaluations as per the requirements of the QQI core statutory quality assurance guidelines.

This is reflected in our current Strategy Statement 2017-2021 Lean ar Aghaidh and also within our FET Service's Strategic Performance Agreement 2018-2020. As part of the development of the integrated QA system, a new Public Information and Communications Policy (and related procedures) has been developed and approved and is currently being implemented across the FET service.

Donegal ETB has a cross organisational 'Communications Advisory Group' and a Communications Officer promoting the services of the ETB while also raising an awareness of FET through publicity and advertising (Appendix 10).

Donegal ETB Website

One of the most significant projects to address this in recent years has been the complete redevelopment of Donegal ETB's website to clearly highlight the three pillars of the organisation, including the provision of clear information on the programmes of learning available with the Further Education and Training (FET) Service. Donegal ETB has also greatly increased its use of social media to digitally communicate the work of its FET Service to a range of stakeholders. It has increased the number of platforms it uses, grown its follower's numbers and greatly increased its engagement rates. For example, in 2016 its Twitter account had over 138,000 impressions which increased to over 1.95 million impressions in 2020. Facebook Messenger is very popular for students and members of the general public to make enquiries about FET courses.

Donegal ETB Prospectus

Each year the Communications, Guidance and Recruitment sections of the FET Service work to create and publish a prospectus of courses which is available in both print format and digital format. It is also translated and available in Irish as per the requirement of the Scéim Teanga.

FET Fair

To complement the publication of the prospectus, the FET Service also runs a FET Fair every year to showcase the range of courses offered. Attendees number over one thousand annually. Over the years the format has been altered in response to changes in the local labour market and the demographic seeking FET opportunities. In 2019 for the first time, an evening event was added before the main FET Fair to highlight the range of options available to those school leavers considering FET as a progression option. As this event was well attended and very successful, it was scheduled to run again in 2020 before the COVID-19 crisis hit. To overcome this challenge, the Recruitment and Communications Officers have developed a video for school leavers to offer a virtual information session as an interim solution in the current situation. Plans are also progressing for virtual FET Information sessions in the Spring of 2021, with the hope that we may be able to host an onsite event again in the Autumn time. Prior to the pandemic, the FET Recruitment Officer would normally attend careers fairs in second level schools, give presentations at parents' evenings and liaise with Guidance Counsellors across the county, providing information on courses.

Information Sessions

Donegal ETB's Training Centre in Letterkenny also hosted school tours for Youthreach and fifth and sixth year students, so they can see at first hand the facilities available for our traineeship students and apprentices. These will resume when it is safe to do so. At key times of the year, the FET Service also advertised its services and programmes in local shopping centres, raising awareness of the range of opportunities available to the general public. Anecdotally, however, 'word of mouth' and personal recommendations still remain one of the most important ways in which information about the FET Service is communicated.

Student Voice Forum February 2020
Question 1: How did you find out about your course?

All word of mouth 50 (out of 100)
Word of mouth, teachers, tutors, guidance, talks in school – 35 (out of 100)

Digital Media

Donegal ETB has actively pursued the national strategic goal on promoting the standing of FET to 'ensure a valued learning path leading to agreed employment, career, developmental, personal and social options.' One of the most visible ways it does this is in partnership with local online media outlet Donegal Daily, which supports the FET Service by highlighting student stories on its website and social media platforms, such as Facebook (more than one hundred thousand followers) and Twitter (more than twenty thousand followers). In addition, these stories have been included on Donegal ETB's website, **to build a bank of stories for highlighting the benefits of various courses and sharing further.**

In April 2020, these mediums were used to reach out to those facing unemployment due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Guidance Service provided information on four specific topics over a four-week period in relation to employability. Because of its huge reach across the county, specific work on information provision was also carried out by the Adult Guidance and Information Service through Facebook and Twitter in the early stages of the pandemic.

Publications and Reports

All press releases are available bilingually, and are shared on the ETB website, widely on social media and sent to local media outlets (print press, online and radio). Alongside this, the ETB website has a publications and resources section with a library of information. Reports and documents relating to governance and management, strategic plans and board meeting minutes can be accessed. It also has an employer portal to give information on the services and supports offered.

In 2020 the Communications Officer worked closely with two programmes, Youthreach and PLCs, to begin a process of rebranding Youthreach and developing a suite of promotional materials for the three PLC centres (based within three post-primary schools).

Communicating with Enterprise

The FET services Enterprise Engagement Officer has built up excellent relationships with local businesses. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the FET Service actively participated in the local Business Networks (Letterkenny Chamber of Commerce, Donegal Business Network, Donegal Women in Business Network, Donegal Town Business Network and Traders Associations). Six webinars were organised: Communicating at a Time of Crisis, Retail Restart (three workshops), and Sales and Generating Leads. Proactive communications ensured accessibility and participation (for example, WhatsApp was utilised to send notifications to a 'Support Local Donegal' group with 178 members).

Communicating with Enterprise cont.

Communications are approved in advance by the Communications Officer who ensures the correct branding in terms of logos, hashtags and social media and meeting our European Social Fund (ESF) funding promotional requirements. The success of this approach during COVID-19 enabled the Enterprise Engagement team to share information on Skills to Advance and the support that Donegal ETB offers businesses through certified training. Consequently, the ETB's FET Service now has a broader reach across the county and with new companies. In particular, sole traders are now seeking information on the range of training opportunities available, and there has been a noticeable increase in the number of businesses following Donegal ETB's Facebook and LinkedIn accounts. The Diploma in Social Media for business has been of particular interest to local entrepreneurs during this challenging time. Donegal ETB's Communication Officer has also begun working with Donegal County Council's new Economic Development Unit to assist them in communicating what FET has to offer investors in the county. Donegal ETB has worked hard to create a culture of transparency and accountability congruent with the spirit of good governance and accountability in the public service. It is also compliant with its obligations under GDPR, FOI and Official Languages Act (2003) **legislation.**

Conclusion

It is planned that as the FET Service makes more progress toward the single integrated QA system, an intranet portal for staff will be developed, on which information will be easily accessible, and feedback regarding quality assurance policies and procedures will be gathered. This will perform an essential function in the cycle of reflection and review, as well as supporting monitoring and evaluation, particularly as part of the new Public Information and Communications Policy itself.

An agreement on developing a standardised format for naming courses within the FET Service will also be sought. Currently, there are variations based on the programme that delivers the course and its historic title under the legacy organisations. From a Communications perspective, this needs to be addressed with the aim of providing clear and consistent information to the general public.

Further action is required with regard to the processes relating to the development of policy and procedure within the QA Governance and Management structure itself. Robust, systematic processes and procedures can facilitate a cycle of continuous improvement and evaluation.

Having a clearly defined system that allows reports relating to the FET Service, its policies and procedures, the QA Governance and Management structure, and evaluation feedback to be published and easily accessible to staff, students and external stakeholders is the next step in achieving this transparency and quality enhancement. The new Public Information and Communications Policy is in its implementation stage; it will improve the publication and dissemination of QA reports and material and how they are implemented across the FET service.

2020 has proved a challenging yet innovative year for communication and information sharing for the ETB. The increased use of technology tools to communicate remotely has allowed the continuation of services and enabled staff and stakeholders including students to remain connected. A paradigm shift has occurred in education delivery and further education and training has transitioned alongside primary, second level and higher education to remote, distance and online platforms for learning. QQI research into the teaching learning and assessment experience of FET students during the COVID-19 pandemic found that a majority of respondents felt supported by FET staff in their online journey. The use of digital communications in the form of Google Classroom, email and social media was highlighted. Guidance and information staff provided progression information via online workshops and the use of guest speakers was also mentioned. However, traditional methods of communication such as letters, information packs and telephone calls were also used in view of the fact that deficits in Wi-Fi connection, access to devices and digital literacy skills can be barriers in this county. Many students, whilst engaging with the online learning processes, and giving positive feedback on that experience, still expressed a desire to return to class or centre-based learning.

Overall students commented on the support and care given by their teachers, tutors, instructors and other staff. The FET Service communicated in a positive manner, students felt 'heard' and expressed their pride in completing a course with the ETB. The COVID-19 pandemic experience took FET Service with a fledgling Technology Enhanced Learning strategy and created a successful multiplatform learning environment for educators, administration and management staff in a very short time. What had been planned to evolve over a number of years, was operational within weeks and months. The learning landscape changed indelibly. The challenge now remains to create an education and training experience that mixes online learning with traditional classroom experiences in a way that supports the unique needs of further education and training students and which can be quality assured to ensure high quality pedagogical practices and positive learning outcomes.

Conclusion

Donegal ETB, as a publicly funded and accountable statutory body, is heavily invested in both its Corporate and Quality Assurance responsibilities with regard to Governance and Management. Transparent and robust policies and procedures are the cornerstone of the ETB's Three Pillars—Further Education and Training (FET), Organisation Support and Development (OSD), and Schools—and the organisation upholds integrity in public office, adopts best practice and is cognisant of its legislative obligations as a statutory body.

The organisation is, however, relatively new. Given its size and breadth of purpose, it has been successful in the delivery of education and training to the people of Donegal through its second level schools and FET Service since its creation.

Adult education in Ireland has evolved markedly since the publication of the 2000 white paper, Learning for Life. Various government initiatives were rolled out to encourage second chance education, Post Leaving Certificate education, basic education and vocational training under the Vocational Education Committees. Each new initiative had its own set of criteria for funding, participation and evaluation. FÁS had a long history of providing courses with an employment focus, enabling the economically inactive to retrain for the labour market, and job seeking supports were offered too. In addition, FÁS also regulated traditional craft and trade apprenticeships.

With the creation of the sixteen new Education and Training Boards, the multivarious programmes from the VEC adult education service and FÁS training services became one large offering under the umbrella of Further Education and Training.

This led to a period of continuation with legacy governance and management systems, until a new integrated QA system could be developed and implemented across the FET Service. Donegal ETB is in the process of creating that new single integrated system of quality assurance.

This Self Evaluation Report has provided an opportunity for the ETB and its FET Service to assess its progress towards development and implementation of the new QA system.

Progress has been made, primarily in the establishment of a functioning QA Governance and Management structure that facilitates the work being done to achieve this objective. New policies and procedures for integrated Public Information and Communications and Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) have been designed and approved under the new QA system, and there are several more policies currently in development.

The Quality Assurance Support Service has been created, along with the Quality Council and its various sub-committees. An overarching QA Policy, the purpose of which is to promote and embed quality practices in all aspects of the FET service by ensuring that policies and procedures are developed and revised in line with statutory legislation, has been referred back for review, demonstrating the ETB's quality processes in action and the cycle of review and reflection.

The use of the two legacy QA systems in the FET Service will continue as the new QA system evolves. It is arguable that the use of the legacy systems and continued emphasis on programmes are factors in many of the areas identified for improvement in this report.

As an example, a lack of consistency in student experience was highlighted in the Student Voice Forum held in February 2020 and the report on student support within Donegal ETB compiled by DMH Associates in June 2020. Differing access to the Guidance Service across the ETB's FET programmes, inconsistency in the support available to students with learning difficulties or disabilities and variations in access to funding to support these students was identified in the research. There was a concern among staff that this inequality could impact on access, transfer and progression opportunities.

Objective Conclusion cont.

The need for a single, structured, systematic process of monitoring and review was expressed in the QA baseline reports and staff feedback. It is evident that evaluations and feedback from students are gathered, but often only at classroom, centre or programme level. Issues are addressed, but this information may not be shared outside of the programme or across the broader FET Service. Communication, therefore, could be improved. Furthermore, while staff participate in annual seminars or research, due to a lack of staff resources for collating and authoring reports, the information gathered may not be effectively disseminated, or a substantial amount of time passes before it is published and findings are implemented.

The need to build an effective CPD strategy and framework was also made clear in the QA baseline evaluations. Although it was observed that good professional development opportunities are available, there is currently no means provided for reporting on the utility or quality of training received. A system is required for the systematic recording of staff professional development at personal and organisational level. It was pointed out that staff cannot identify and seek support to progress in their posts without an evaluation of skills and a personal development plan—a position supported by feedback in the Human Resources QA baseline evaluation.

Much of the feedback gathered for this report focused on what works well within the FET Service. Through the Student Voice Forum, COVID-19 research and student questionnaire, students consistently stated that they felt supported by the ETB. A staff survey reported similar findings. For example, in relation to CPD, the feedback on the TEL training offered in response to the move to Emergency Remote Teaching was overwhelmingly positive. It allowed teachers, tutors and instructors to keep delivering, and students to remain engaged in learning. This responsiveness demonstrated organisational agility in the most extraordinary of circumstances, as well as staff willingness to undertake something completely new and often challenging at a time of great personal and professional uncertainty.

In developing a new integrated QA system, the creation of a quality culture within FET is a central theme. The feedback from the Student Voice Forum and student evaluations points to evidence of a quality culture throughout all of the ETB's FET programmes, from caretaking staff right through to FET Centre Managers. Creative work in the design of new assessments by teachers and tutors in particular fields of learning has helped to form communities of practice within FET, outside of the normal programme or centre structures. This demonstrates the high standard of staff professionalism and commitment in designing materials and resources for students.

The establishment of an External Authenticator (EA) directory to provide consistent evaluation of the calibre of work presented for certification provides further indication of a quality culture within Donegal ETB. This must be named and framed as such, and evidence of it needs to be systematically collected, collated and reflected back to staff, students and external stakeholders in order to highlight the standard of care and attention that has become a hallmark of the FET Service. Good practice should be shared and areas for improvement identified and addressed where they exist.

Donegal ETB is visible in local communities through the Community Education Programme, Employer Engagement, and its seventeen FET centres. The FET Service is promoting inclusivity, upskilling employees and recognising prior experiential learning in line with national initiatives, and positively impacting labour market opportunities in the North West region. It offers education and training opportunities appropriate to the local economy at NFQ levels best suited to the needs of its students. The FET Service works to continuously improve overall education levels for all young people and adults aged 16 years and over, regardless of their economic status. Donegal ETB's FET programmes and services are designed to facilitate learning that improves overall educational outcomes in the county. However, the benefits of FET also include an improvement in health and well-being, increased social cohesion, intergenerational transmission of skills and social mobility, improved autonomy and communication skills, and the continuation of its students in education and training through the pursuit of further qualifications.

Looking forward, Donegal ETB's FET Service will continue to phase out the legacy QA systems and implement its single integrated QA system. It is reviewing its communication practices to speed up the development, consultation and evaluation processes for new policies. Continuing expansion of student engagement is planned in order to capture and verify student experience. Procedures for consistent, clear and timely dissemination of information from the FET Senior Management Team to staff across the FET Service, thereby closing the communication loop, are being put into effect.

The appointment of Programme Development Coordinator and FET Systems and Data Reporting Officer will facilitate a systematic approach to the creation of new programmes and the structured collection of data across the FET Service. The Certification Approval Board provides a model of good practice for other subcommittees. All of this will be instrumental in supporting a QA Governance and Management structure which is robust, transparent and responsive to the needs of the organisation, staff, students and external stakeholders who are invested in the future of Donegal ETB's FET Service.

Teaching, Learning and Assessment

Objective

2

2.1 The Learning Environment

Donegal ETB's FET Service is committed to teaching and learning that is student-centred, flexible and inclusive, in accordance with the ethos and values of the organisation. All FET students receive induction which varies from course to course, but which is aimed at ensuring that students are informed and feel comfortable in their learning environment. The Adult Guidance and Information Service provides an induction within some FET programmes that creates a safe and positive learning environment and promotes team building, to help students adjust to their new surroundings.

Many programmes issue Student Handbooks, providing an overview of the ETB, all relevant policies and procedures and potential supports available. Students are also provided with expected codes of behaviour and associated policies and procedures (e.g. misconduct, malpractice, disciplinary, plagiarism), which support the student experience.

Investment in FET Centres

Donegal ETB has invested heavily in the maintenance and development of its fourteen FET centres which are located across the county, as a way of demonstrating its commitment to serving its large and widely-dispersed rural population. The quality of the physical environment is recognised as being central to the teaching and learning experience and investment has been made in physically adapting and improving the centres, as well as in providing the up-to-date ICT and other equipment required for the delivery of a first-class service to students. Health guidelines during the pandemic has resulted in an increase in rented premises. A FET Buildings Working Group has recently been established with membership from the Buildings Unit of the OSD division of the ETB and FET management. The group's purpose is to manage the FET building stock and its enhancement in a systematic and fair manner and to ensure that Donegal ETB is availing of the national capital funding to the maximum amount possible.

Teaching and Learning

When recruiting staff, applicants for teaching and instructing positions are evaluated at interview on their understanding of pedagogical methods and knowledge of best practice in classroom management. This is especially evident in programmes being delivered at lower NFQ levels, where services such as literacy match tutors to class groups with specific needs. During the teaching and learning, content is very often derived from the interest and experiences of the student and the creation of a safe learning environment is paramount.

Student Consultation Jan 2020

"Our tutor is very experienced, she is always very helpful and giving. She knows what she is doing."

Donegal ETB encourages formative assessment. The content is then linked to the learning outcome for summative assessments. Staff meetings and events are used to allow teachers, tutors and instructors to share good practice and support each other. Contextualised resources have been developed and support the acquisition of skills, knowledge and competencies in a meaningful way.

The materials are designed to 'layer learning' and the 'spiral approach' ensures consolidation of new skills. While these meetings are generally programme specific, an unexpected outcome from the introduction of the Assessment Review Cycle was the emergence of communities of practice on the higher-level courses. TEL CPD offered during the COVID-19 pandemic enhanced learning communities by including the staff of multiple FET programmes across all fields of learning. Teachers, tutors and instructors from the FET Service worked together on projects, getting to know each other and learning from their shared experiences in non-formal environments, which was as beneficial as more formal professional development opportunities. CPD is flexible and responsive to the needs identified to enhance the learning environment.

Case study: TEL Staff Mentoring Programme

The TEL Mentoring Programme was implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic when we suddenly moved to ERT. Mentees who wished to access support in using technology in their lesson delivery were paired with mentors from across programmes, centres and departments. An evaluation of the programme found that 91% of mentees rated their experience as excellent. On completion of the programme 91% were more confident using digital.

"Found the course very beneficial and thought provoking in that it has made me want to make changes to different aspects of my teaching."

"Just to say I was very lucky to be paired with a mentor who understood my lack of experience and with whom I had a good relationship, I think this was key to my enjoying the experience."

The quality of the learning experience is monitored through reflection, evaluation and feedback. A number of programmes conduct formal evaluations, seeking feedback directly from students regarding their learning experience. Most of the course evaluations include module evaluation feedback, which is used to inform delivery. Teachers and tutors on some FET programmes conduct progress reports and progress meetings with individual students. These progress reports are forwarded to programme coordinators for action where necessary. Students are monitored while on placement through a combination of site visits and progress calls. However, this differs from programme to programme in frequency and format.

Case study: IT Induction for QQI Level 5 Courses

The BTEI programme conducts regular evaluations throughout the courses and also completes an exit review with our students. From these processes it became clear that some students who had applied for QQI level 5 courses were lacking in relevant IT skills at the start of their course.

This prompted BTEI to action the following, to ensure that students had sufficient IT skills to enable them to be successful in their course of study.

BTEI would build in class time for teaching IT skills into the induction process for QQI level 5 courses which would include -

— word processing
— file management
— researching using the internet
— email
— guide to academic writing
— Google Classroom

This would be delivered alongside the Communications module as there are overlaps in Learning Outcomes. When completed, not only had students achieved a mandatory module but they also developed their IT, reading and writing skills so they could complete the subject based modules with confidence.

A strong emphasis is placed on the learning environment for Youthreach students. Youthreach provides an inclusive learning environment where diversity is facilitated, and students are supported to reach their full potential. Each Youthreach centre is evaluated annually against a well-established and nationally audited quality assurance system. Reviews are conducted with students and issues, concerns and progress reports are discussed at staff meetings.

Teaching and learning are monitored continuously on an informal basis but is examined annually under section eight of the Centre Evaluation and Improvement Plan. Many Youthreach centres have a Student Council that meets weekly to give feedback on all aspects of the Youthreach experience. Some centres have Circle time each week, which has been developed through the involvement of all the Youthreach centres through two Peace funded Restorative Practices projects rolled out by Donegal ETB from 2011-2014 and 2018-2020. They also have notice boards and an ideas box where the student's voice is gathered. Once the information has been fed back, the programme coordinators have an opportunity to respond. Codes of Behaviour are strictly enforced.

Working Towards Collaboration

Teachers, tutors and instructors' classroom delivery is not subject to formal evaluation, and Donegal ETB's FET Service encourages professional development through CPD opportunities. When updating assessments, a community of teachers and tutors from the same fields of learning came together to create relevant content. The feedback from the shared experience was positive. The teachers and tutors learned from each other, and relationships that facilitated the sharing of resources and expertise were formed. To build on this approach a further CPD event was held in the Autumn of 2020 around Creating Professional Learning Networks. It is hoped that by continuing this approach, staff groups will form outside of their specific centres and programmes.

Guidance and Information

The Adult Guidance and Information Service is a support service for students on some programmes under the FE System. The Adult Guidance and Information Service's first interactions with groups under their purview is 'Induction'. During this process, students beginning their course are invited to reflect on their hopes and expectations for their learning experience. They are also encouraged to look for potential barriers to learning (including solutions), work together as part of a team and finally express their needs concerning the creation of a positive learning environment suitable for everyone. Students are asked to evaluate their experience with the Adult Guidance and Information Service. When this service is utilised, the inductions, one-to-one meetings, employment preparation courses and progression talks are essential factors in student retention and progression to employment or higher education. The Adult Guidance and Information Service is available to students and apprentices across FET should a person identify as having difficulty. This is not an effective strategy, as often the student is in distress by the time they meet with the guidance counsellor.

It would be more beneficial to have support throughout the education or training cycle to lessen the impact of potential issues arising through early identification and intervention. Student support research carried out by DMH Associates and feedback from the Adult Guidance and Information Service baseline document highlighted the need for the role of the service to be rolled out across the FET Service.

DMH Associates)

"The fact that the [Adult Guidance and Information] service provides support and make referrals that help learners stay on and complete their courses enhances overall retention."

Use of Technology Enhanced Learning

Under the direction of the TEL Working Group, the TEL Coordinator has conducted surveys of teachers, tutors and instructors (centre by centre) to assess the level of digital literacy and confidence among staff and the digital resources available within FET centres. This data was used to inform the on-going development of the TEL strategy. Based on the feedback from these centre evaluations (SELFIE) a number of CPD sessions were organised for staff to build their capacity in integrating digital technologies within their delivery. Staff undertook training in using Google Classroom and other aspects of the Google education software. Plans were put in place to allow for each centre to have a TEL mentor and seventeen staff were nominated to attend a CPD session in early February 2020 which was hosted by FESS to support these TEL mentors. Further staff CPD sessions were then organised in delivering 21st Century Teaching and Learning in conjunction with H2 Learning. All of these initiatives were as a result of the TEL centre surveys and the linkages to the TEL strategy and the key objectives of this.

COVID-19

The urgent need for the immediate and accelerated use of technology to facilitate remote teaching and learning during the pandemic generated an extraordinary set of circumstances in which teachers, tutors and instructors across all FET provision worked together to facilitate remote teaching and learning, sharing experiences and good practice.

This was greatly facilitated by the initial work undertaken which is detailed above. An account of the Teaching and Learning response to COVID-19 and the associated successes and challenges are outlined in research carried out by the FET Service on modifications to teaching, learning and assessment carried out in summer of 2020. COVID-19 has presented multiple opportunities to identify best practice models that could be adopted for the FET Service as a whole. For instance, the use of ePortfolios has been identified as an area for development. In another example, a Youthreach teacher was inspired to create a website for cooking and baking as a result of the training undertaken during the COVID -19 pandemic. Students on the programme have used the site, and snippets have been used on the Donegal ETB Facebook page.

Work Placement

Work placement has been identified as an area for improvement. At present, there are no policies or procedures regarding the appropriateness or quality of work placements. A lack of consistent formal monitoring in work placements prevents a quality review of arrangements and placement providers. Given the importance of work placement in so many of the programmes offered by the FET Service, this has been identified as an important area for development. Once again, the COVID-19 crisis provided a unique opportunity for the FET Service to act uniformly. The QASS developed guidelines, principles and protocols for educational programmes to follow in respect of student placements in the context of the COVID-19 situation and public health guidance. This document passed through all of the QA processes necessary to be implemented across the FET Service.

Student Voice

Joint AONTAS-ETB Learner Voice seminars were organised in 2018 and 2019 and the first Donegal ETB FET Service Student Voice Forum was introduced in February 2020 as a means of collecting and collating feedback from students across the service. This will be an annual event, used to inform the self-evaluation, monitoring and review process. A standardised and comprehensive FET Service student survey is under development. It will include an induction, course mid-point and course end-point survey. (The COVID-19 pandemic has delayed this process). It will be the first single procedure for monitoring and evaluation to be implemented across all programmes, and it represents another step in the transition process from the legacy QA systems to the single integrated QA system.

However, strong evidence has already emerged from the staff and student feedback gathered to demonstrate the monitoring of student experience. Some programmes undertake progress reports, while others use end-of-week and course reviews. Whilst both were acknowledged as beneficial; this is not a service-wide practice.

The standardisation of support services and centre facilities must also be addressed. The Student Voice Forum in particular was cited as an effective way of meeting students from across the service and sharing experiences. The forum highlighted the disparity in available resources between different FET Centres. The availability of canteen facilities was complimented by one attendee; yet a lack of canteen facilities was also highlighted as an issue.

In light of the above, it is important to state that at the Student Voice Forum in February 2020, 84% of students rated their experience of Donegal ETB as good or excellent. In the Student Survey issued in November 2020, 92.4% of respondents rated their learning experience with Donegal ETB as positive or very positive.

Student Survey

"I love coming to class every Friday and feel I have learned a lot."

94.7% said the teaching methods used in the classroom were varied; 94% said they knew how and why they were being assessed; 96% had received feedback on their assessments; and 79% were aware of the existence of supports such as reasonable accommodation or compassionate consideration. It can be reasonably asserted, therefore, that whilst there is scope for improvement in the creation of the single system, there is clear evidence that the core components of a quality assurance system, including a quality culture, exist within the organisation.

Conclusion

Given that teaching and learning is a core purpose and mission of further education and training, it is unsurprising that baseline evaluations, surveys and research gave considerable attention to it. Alongside a critical appraisal, several future enhancements were identified by staff, students and external stakeholders. These enhancements are offered to demonstrate the strong commitment across the FET Service to achieving and maintaining high standards that ensure quality delivery at all times and in all areas.

Students would benefit from a systematic approach to evaluations of their experience of learning with the FET Service. Availability of broadly similar supports, such as centre facilities, guidance and induction, would standardise the student experience and ensure equality of access. The development of student hubs in four of the FET Centres will further help disadvantaged students access the support they need to succeed. Investment in FET centres and facilities is a key priority area of the FET service and will assist in supporting the diversity of our student population. Yearly investment to maintain and improve the fabric of our buildings is ongoing and current initiatives are in place to investigate aspects of our building design including universal accessibility, energy efficiency and environmental considerations.

It has been suggested that student inductions should be designed to incorporate the pre-assessment of students' IT skills prior to starting a course, alongside the learning style questionnaires, to aid in developing group profiles. Staff CPD, such as that provided by the TEL/Universal Design for Learning (UDL) training during the COVID-19 pandemic, could then be utilised to support students, based on these profiles. A FET CPD strategy with significant input from HR would be beneficial in identifying useful, relevant opportunities across the service.

The FET Service needs a comprehensive suite of integrated quality assurance policies concerning teaching and learning and, within that, work placements too. These placements must be monitored to ensure they are consistent in their quality. Several sources identified scope for a Work Placement Officer across the service. Developing opportunities for work placements with new employers was also mentioned. The ETB is beginning to take action in these areas; the new Work Placement Handbooks will make some progress in benchmarking minimum requirements for work placements. Added to that, events such as 'Nice to Meet You', which are to be repeated and extended to new occupational areas, will create new possible placement leads within the county.

The communities of shared practice should be extended into other fields of learning. Staff should be encouraged to use and evaluate the new QA Portal. It is a repository of shared supports for teaching and learning. Communication between staff and the Senior Management Team and QASS should be in both directions, and when reports or surveys are undertaken, the findings should be routinely shared with staff.

2.2 Assessment of Students

Donegal ETB operates under the two legacy systems concerning the assessment of students. Both systems have clear and robust policies and procedures. They are longstanding, well understood and implemented by staff. High levels of compliance are demonstrated consistently across all programmes.

Approach to Assessment

Donegal ETB's FET Service has taken a centralised approach to assessment with the QASS prioritising the review and integration of assessment instruments across the service. As a result of feedback from EAs during centralised authentication visits, and because it is the level at which the majority of practitioner level qualifications and programmes are offered, this work has initially been focused on NFQ Level 5 courses. A review and update process and schedule is being implemented on a phased basis across the remaining assessment instruments with related policies and procedures currently under development to ensure the continued fair and consistent assessment of learners. However, inconsistencies still arise in supporting repeat assessments, the timely release of results and the practice of draft assessment submissions, however with the introduction of common assessment procedures similar processes will be adopted across the service. Internal Verification takes place locally with a centralised External Authentication coordinated by the relevant Training Standards Office. An integrated Certification Approval Board (CAB) reviews and approves all assessment results in line with the QQI Certification calendar including approval of other awarding bodies.

Approach to Assessment cont.

Oversight of the process is provided by the Quality Council as well as the FET Senior Management Team. To facilitate transparency, CAB reports are shared with the QA Governance and Management committees and summary of the certification data is shared at FET Coordinators meetings.

Student handbooks explain how and why students are assessed. The assessment instrument is contained in packs, and it provides all of the information students need to complete their assessment, including assessment criteria. Teaching and Learning packs contain the module information including the learning outcomes, indicative content and an overview of the assessment. Teaching and Learning packs and Assessment packs are available on the QA Portal and summative exams which are prescribed within certain modules are maintained and controlled by an Examinations Office.

Areas for development in learner assessment include the regular updating of assessment materials in a systematic and cross programme way. This will consist of standardisation and moderation events to enhance the QA process. With further implementation of UDL there will be scope for the development of choice and flexibility in assessment. The creation of an integrated student handbook which is reflective of the FET Service is underway. There is a lot of commonality to the policies that are issued from the ETB HR department, such as internet usage and discipline, for example. New additions such as FET support for students in academic writing and referencing are also used across the service. A member of Donegal ETB staff played an integral role in the development of these resources. Deviations will continue to occur where a handbook contains information on student payments or absenteeism. This is largely due to the specific programme funding requirements. The need for consistency in assessment information within this handbook is integral to the fair and consistent approach required to assessment across the service and must be in line with the revised assessment policies and procedures in development.

Whilst many centres have an archive room for storing assessment evidence securely, this is not the case in every centre, due to a lack of space. Often Further Education and Training Centres are repurposed VEC Technical Schools that have become multi programme hubs with limited rooms. The ETB recognises that an Archive room and recording system are good practice, and the archive facility within the Training Centre in Letterkenny is a model for best practice. However, safe and secure interim arrangements are in place until a more permanent solution can be implemented in some of the other FET centres.

When the single integrated QA system is implemented, it will mean the integration of the two current examination offices, further ensuring a consistent approach across the service.

Recognised Prior Learning

The successful implementation of Recognised Prior Learning (RPL) by Donegal ETB's FET Service necessitated the development of a rubric to support grading RPL students to demonstrate the depth of their knowledge and experience, and to document and evidence their learning against national standards. This supported the integrity, consistency and security of assessment instruments, methodologies, procedures and records. In line with best national and international practice, policies and procedures were adopted and this culminated in the creation of an RPL Handbook for Donegal ETB's FET staff.

"The RPL was really beneficial to me, being able to use the experience I had because of COVID was so helpful, the assignments where good because it enabled me to tap into situations and experiences I had working in care, there was no pressure either and lots of support from the coordinator, she was very helpful as you all are at the ETB, it was great to be able to utilise the RPL due to COVID circumstances… I'm so happy I was given the opportunity to do it this way, all in all it was a positive experience and I was so thrilled with my result."

The rubric itself has evolved since its initial development; it now includes much more detail for the assessor. EA consultations resulted in further feedback which has been incorporated also.

Assessment in the Workplace

Where assessment of learning outcomes is required within work placements, some programme areas provide competency sheets for students to use to track their progress, which the workplace supervisor/assessor signs off. The teacher, tutor, instructor will always have final oversight of any assessments that take place in the workplace or are marked by the workplace supervisor.

The need for a wholly consistent service approach to work placement has been highlighted again also. Students in the Student Voice Forum asked for assistance with the organisation of work placements. The FET Service is cognisant of the different student experiences in seeking, undertaking and reviewing the effectiveness of work placements. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the ETB acted quickly to develop a single comprehensive procedure for the safe return of students to work placements during the Autumn of 2020. This was essential given the importance of work experience to the awards offered on education and training courses.

In creating this an opportunity now exists for the roll-out of a FET Service work placement handbook for students and employers, which sets out the expectations and requirements for both.

Modified Arrangements for Assessment during COVID-19

In March 2020, Donegal ETB introduced modified arrangements for teaching, learning and assessment as a response to COVID-19 related restrictions. Social distancing meant many of the existing teaching, learning and assessment practices that were normally used, were no longer feasible. Modified arrangements were quickly put in place where possible to ensure continuity in teaching and learning. Contingency planning for alternative assessments was identified as a priority. Substantial changes and modifications were undertaken to ensure standards were comparable to pre COVID-19 practice, and to maintain the integrity of the assessment process in exceptional circumstances.

Following a QQI directive, Donegal ETB established a Contingency Assessment Policy incorporating all associated procedures which was approved through the agreed QA Governance and Management processes. It was then sent to QQI for noting and published on the ETB website.

The Contingency Assessment Policy represents a proactive, flexible and imaginative solution to an unprecedented situation. Where practicable it enabled the graduating classes of 2020 to achieve their awards as planned whilst maintaining academic integrity.

It was recognised that all students needed to be supported to the maximum extent possible to continue with and/or complete their learning while the COVID-19 response was underway, and not to be unduly disadvantaged, slowed down or stopped in their progress.

Conclusion

The FET Service continues to work to roll out the single integrated QA system in a way that supports and enhances the existing good practice on the ground. When surveyed, 94% of students who responded said they had a clear understanding of how and why they were being assessed. 96% of students who responded were given feedback on their assessments by teachers, tutors and instructors and 79% of students were aware of the existence of student supports such as reasonable accommodation.

Feedback on the student experience of assessment has been overwhelmingly positive in both the Student Voice Forum and the recent student survey undertaken for the SER. This has been reflected in staff surveys and programme baseline activities also. However, there is currently no centralised procedure or system to collect, record, analyse and action this information in a consistent way. FET Senior Management and QASS are developing actionable outcomes to utilise the feedback in a systematic way as part of improvements to the self-evaluation, monitoring and review process; this feedback will then be further shared with all staff to improve or enhance practice. This demonstrates a cycle of reflection and review within FET, further highlighting the presence of a quality culture among staff while enhancing communication across the service.

2.3 Supports for Students

Donegal ETB's FET Service offers a range of support for students on its programmes. This can take the form of a guidance counsellor, support worker, tutor, teacher or instructor, programme coordinator or centre manager as the first point of contact. The biggest challenge in the provision of supports is that they are not consistently applied across the service, and the level of support provided is not equitable within each FET programme.

In December 2019, Donegal ETB commissioned DMH Associates to undertake desk research, along with focus group interviews with staff and external agencies, in preparation for a quality review and to inform and guide its FET student support services going forward. The findings from the resulting report, Learner Support Services within Donegal ETB's FET Service 2020, highlighted the variation within FET programmes based on staff experience. These findings were supported also by feedback from the FET Service's Student Voice Forum in 2020.

Fostering Inclusion is one of three strategic priorities of the National Further Education & Training (FET) Strategy 2020 Future FET: Transforming FET published by the SOLAS (the others are Building Skills and Creating Pathways) and represents one of the most significant drivers of student engagement and support. FET programmes support active inclusion in multiple ways.

Supporting Access

In keeping with its ethos and through active engagement in local communities, Donegal ETB brings the county's rural and isolated students together in a broad range of accredited and non-accredited learning programmes. The Basic Education, Back to Education Initiative and Community Education Support Programmes offer educational opportunities to some of the most disadvantaged communities in the county, including an extensive range of literacy, numeracy and introductory digital skills courses which are provided in a warm and welcoming environment. Programmes will often provide support in the form of lending devices or equipment to local community centres so that a conducive learning environment can be established in outreach locations as well as FET Centres. The Basic Education programme (whether in FET centres or the community) will often match the needs of a particular group of students to the skillset of a specific tutor, demonstrating once again the care and attention taken when organising classes.

Community Provider Self Evaluation Survey 2020

"Donegal ETB understands the ethos of Community Development and want to work with the Community and voluntary sector to respond to identified needs."

Outreach activities, programmes and services are offered in community settings to support under-represented groups' participation. For example, a pilot project provided a Guidance Counsellor in economic black spots to target those from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds. This pilot project built on existing relationships between the Basic Education, BTEI and Community Education Support Programmes.

Learning Support

Programme staff discuss the accessibility and availability of learning support at the interview stage. Students are asked if they have a difficulty or disability that may impact on their ability to learn or their learning experience with Donegal ETB. Interviewers will ask if any issues disclosed have been formally diagnosed. Prospective students at the interview stage are encouraged to share this information for the benefit of their learning. When a student declares a learning difficulty or disability, programmes have a specific policy and procedure on reasonable accommodation which forms part of the broader Assessment policies and procedures. Most programme areas also have student handbooks that contain information on supports available.

Often during guidance one-to-one sessions when a student is on a course, students may disclose difficulties or concerns that can then be communicated to the relevant programme staff, with the student's permission, to investigate and arrange support. Guidance Counsellors are professionally qualified staff who use a wide variety of tools to identify a range of personal, social, educational, employment and counselling needs and barriers and support students who experience them. They have access to and are trained to use software packages that give indicative responses where a student believes they may have an underlying difficulty such as dyslexia.

Students undertaking the Adult Leaving Certificate programme do not have access to a Special Educational Needs Coordinator to arrange for Reasonable Accommodations at the Certificate Examinations (RACE), unlike their second level counterparts. One programme has suggested a panel of suitably qualified staff be formed so that students without a formal diagnosis of a learning difficulty can be tested using Wide Range Achievement Test (WRAT V) to obtain reasonable accommodation for QQI assessments. This process should then be rolled out across the FET Service to ensure consistent, systematic assessments are carried out by qualified staff. Feedback from the Student Voice Forum supports this. It was noted by DMH Associates that the experience of students was often contradictory. Some felt there was no proper assessment or support for people with dyslexia or other learning difficulties, whilst others on programmes such as Youthreach had the opposite experience.

Student Health and Wellbeing

All FET staff, including frontline, co-ordination, teaching, ancillary and administration staff are intrinsically involved in supporting the health and wellbeing of FET students. Availability of refreshments, free hygiene products and well-maintained facilities are some of the supports in place to ensure that surroundings are welcoming. Guidance counsellors arrange support in the form of frontline counselling services and identify when to make appropriate referrals to other Professional Services. Literacy Organisers offer frontline support and ensure a safe and caring environment for vulnerable students. The Back to Education Initiative (BTEI) programme has a designated support worker who can access support for students on that programme. Phase 2 of the apprenticeship courses delivered by Donegal ETB's FET Service have access to a tutor as an additional support to assist the apprentices to manage the rigours of their training whilst in the centre; canteen services are an important element here. The Training Standards Office for Training Services courses will arrange assessment support in response to requests from students or staff.

Within the VTOS and Youthreach programmes, a strong emphasis is placed on additional supports to enhance or develop health and well-being. These can include the provision of breakfast/lunch to students, basic health assessments, talks on mental health, drug and alcohol awareness, driver safety and sexual health. Students are also encouraged to become involved in fundraising or community-focused projects. The Youthreach programme also integrates the Health Quality Mark developed by the National Youth Council of Ireland. This initiative is integrated into the programme's 'quality framework initiative'. VTOS (Letterkenny) introduced a pilot 'FIT-4-FET' programme to offer students and staff free basic health screening. Participants' blood pressure, weight, blood sugar and pulse were all checked by a qualified nurse, information on positive physical and mental health behaviours was offered, and referral to GP was advised if necessary. The programme aimed to assess the physical and psychological well-being of students and staff. It highlighted the importance of health and wellbeing in academic success and represented a holistic approach to providing support and creating a safe, caring environment within which students learn.

Within the Youthreach programme, young people at risk of or currently experiencing disadvantage receive assessment and learning support as needed, and they also have access to counselling support and advocates to assist with their future education and employment plans.

Students with Disabilities

Under PLC guidelines, students presenting with disabilities can access support under the 'Fund for Students with Disabilities'. Students with disabilities who may need a higher level of support are encouraged to look at the Specialist Training Provider (STP) courses funded by the FET Service. These providers offer a tailored programme of certified learning with additional supports over a longer period with extended work placement opportunities. Students progressing from STP may move into supported employment or further education and training or higher education.

Supporting Educational Disadvantage during COVID-19

Collaboration across the FET Service was further supported by the rapid response training in TEL to facilitate Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT) during COVID-19. Alongside the transition to online learning, the ETB supported teaching and learning during the pandemic by moving the CAB online and facilitating the EA process remotely to ensure students would still receive their QQI awards. Donegal ETB's Policy, Procedure and Processes for Alternative Assessment were updated to ensure that work experience was carefully considered and planned for in light of the pandemic. Where possible, this allowed students to return to placements safely during very challenging times. Understanding the needs of the most vulnerable students, the ETB continued with classroom-based learning for Youthreach and Basic Education programmes during the second lockdown. These classes were conducted within the Health Service Executive (HSE) Health and Safety guidelines. It was thereby providing essential support for students at risk of experiencing isolation. Delivery of provision continued online where possible during the lockdowns including the theory related content on the Phase 2 apprenticeships.

Donegal ETB invests in equipment and facilities to meet the teaching and learning needs of staff and students. Both are allocated 'Donegal ETB' email addresses. Computer suites are maintained, internet and device usage policies are implemented, and access to platforms and software (such as Microsoft 365) is available. As Donegal ETB uses Google Workspace, Google Classroom was immediately available for ERT. Where specific software is required for courses such as Software Tester, this is readily available.

Supporting Educational Disadvantage during COVID-19 cont.

The FET service successfully supported many community education providers to secure funding under the Mitigating Against Educational Disadvantage Fund (MAEDF) in 2020. This funding will help to support community-based education by equipping digital hubs across the county; some funding was also secured to set up small digital hubs in four of our FET centres, which will accommodate students who may have issues at home with connectivity or access to digital devices. The Digital "SELFIE" Survey which was conducted in each FET Centre in 2020 identified Youthreach as the programme which was most lacking devices or under equipped. A set of twenty Chromebooks were subsequently purchased for each Youthreach Centre.

Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

During the COVID-19 pandemic, a number of ETB staff undertook training in Universal Design for Learning (UDL) with AHEAD, a nationally recognised non-profit organisation working to create inclusive environments in learning and employment for people with disabilities. Thirty-five FET staff have successfully achieved the UDL digital badge with four undertaking additional work to become future facilitators of the badge. Whilst this was an area for development previously identified in FET under the TEL strategy and the Quality Improvement Plan, the pace of its rollout and number of participants significantly increased in the first and second COVID lockdowns. Representatives from across the FET programmes and support services took part in the online training.

Supporting Equality and Diversity

Donegal ETB and its FET Service encourage participation in their courses by offering welcoming and inclusive education and training environments to all students. In the student surveys, the welcome received in the FET centres and facilities provided was highlighted as a strength of the FET Service. Its level of engagement in every part of the county through community centres, resource centres and local development companies allows the FET Service to be accessible in the most remote locations and to the most-at-risk groups. During the pandemic, when these centres had to close, the Community Education Support Programme worked alongside the Age Friendly Alliance to develop and distribute activity packs to over 5,000 older people. This collaboration was so successful that it was picked up as a news story by a national radio broadcaster. Furthermore, working within the limitations of the COVID-19 restrictions, the Community Education Support Programme moved its annual seminar online in December 2020, in recognition of the importance of maintaining close links with community providers at a time of great isolation.

Recognising the impact of lockdown on the most disadvantaged students, the Basic Education Programme devised a workbook, 'Le Cheile', which included stories, crosswords, puzzles, tips for using technology and numeracy activities. Three hundred and fifty copies of the workbook were posted out in June 2020, with a second publication circulated in November 2020. The response from tutors and students was excellent.

Overall, the student survey conducted in December 2020 found that 96% of students felt the service they received from the FET Service was reflective of the ETB mission statement, and 94.7% felt the teaching methods used met their needs. It would seem evident then that most programmes deal with presenting issues adequately, however in some cases when students require additional support, it may not always be readily available in that programme.

Conclusion

The FET SMT and associated programmes and QASS has again prioritised the need to have an integrated and consistent approach to learner support. The development of a draft policy is currently in progress. Whilst most daytime full-time and part-time programmes do interview applicants, the evening classes and Skills to Advance programmes do not. Students on programmes other than Literacy, BTEI and VTOS do not have access to the Adult Guidance Service as part of their learning journey. The service will offer support to students or apprentices experiencing difficulties, but this is on an individual needs basis only. A recent pilot Induction with apprentices on the Electronic Security Systems phase two course was well received by staff and apprentices:

"I just want to send a note of thanks to you both for your induction session this morning with my group.

Although I was open minded, I was fairly sceptical about how it would be received. I am delighted to report back that the class have been nothing but complimentary in their feedback and that they found the intervention to have been extremely positive.

It is safe to say that you'll both be "let back"!

Thanks a million for covering this with them, hopefully it is something that could be extended to all of our groups."

Conclusion

A constant theme that emerges in the review of teaching and learning within Donegal ETB's FET Service is commitment. The service consistently demonstrates commitment to its students, the community and external stakeholders. A quality culture is evident in the service and strongly reflected in the feedback and research. Where areas for improvement have been identified, they represent opportunities for the FET Service to enhance the student experience immensely.

The ETB's FET Service demonstrates a commitment to recruiting suitably qualified staff to deliver courses to the highest standards. CPD is encouraged across FET and teachers, tutors and instructors are offered opportunities to look at new pedagogical approaches, develop knowledge and confidence using Technology and UDL principles, and supportive training in understanding mental health through expert speakers, ASIST and Safe Talk.

Communities of good practice for the review and updating of assessments have been established, with the dual purpose of ensuring the course content is up to date, relevant and accessible to all and building support networks where teaching staff can share expertise and resources. This opportunity has been well received by all involved in the process.

EA Report June 2020
"Organisationally flawless, accessibility was made more efficient than conventional approaches to EA and shows what can be achieved, even under pandemic conditions. Standards are safe as houses with an approach like this - well done."

EA Report June 2020
"Excellent alternative assignments, really well mapped, well explained, great solutions provided - it was a showcase in how to do this."

Student Consultation Jan 2021
"They're teaching us to work with the best material as well… I didn't think that would have been the case."

Student SER Survey 2020
"I am doing an accounting technician's course, and all essential materials were provided to me including a calculator, binders and notepads and pens - which went beyond my expectations as a student doing a course, in all my years of education I have never experienced this level of support."

FET Centres are appropriately equipped to ensure students are familiar with up-to-date industry practices. Where equipment is no longer needed it is redistributed to other FET Centres. Examples are evident in the healthcare and welding courses. In response to the ever-evolving labour market, the FET Service strives to provide education and training opportunities that have currency with employers. Qualifications are sought from several awarding bodies as well as vendor based certification to ensure students seeking employment after their course have knowledge and skills that make them job-ready.

Objective 2 Conclusion cont.

The strategic approach devised within FET for Enterprise Engagement through Skills to Advance demonstrates Donegal ETB's agility in responding to identified needs. Employers and FET staff have worked together to create and deliver courses that support and develop business from multinational companies to small and medium enterprises. Participant evaluations have consistently mentioned the support from tutors as integral to the success of the course.

Student Consultation Jan 2021

"I can't imagine attending a job interview after completing this course and not being able to hold my own."

Donegal ETB's FET Service supports active inclusion, offering provision (accredited and non-accredited) that is situated across the county making it accessible to all students including those at risk of isolation.

A crucial factor in the success of any teaching and learning policy is its capacity to provide learning support to students. These include but are not limited to supports for students with learning difficulties or disabilities (psychological, behavioural or physical); experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage; illness or bereavement. Although Donegal ETB still operates under two QA systems, both do have comprehensive policies and procedures about learning support regarding assessments. These policies and procedures are well known and widely utilised across the service. Beyond module assessment, the Adult Guidance and Information Service provides a high level of support to students on centre-based BTEI and VTOS programmes, induction helps improve retention of students and workshops on progression and employability help focus students on their end goal and prepare for their next step. One-to-one meetings throughout the courses can identify and assist students who are struggling to stay on course.

Guidance counsellors may make referrals to external agencies for additional support for students such as GP or therapeutic counselling. Students with disabilities who undertake a PLC course can access supports in line with those available in Higher Education through the Fund for Students with Disabilities. STPs also provide extensive support to students with disabilities.

"They [teachers, tutors, instructors] make it very clear that if you have difficulty learning, they're there to help and will do anything in order to facilitate that. Myself, having been out of education for a long time, I was quite apprehensive in the beginning, and they understood that, and they were there for support—to make sure that if I needed the support that they were available, so I found that very good."

An area for improvement within teaching and learning is consistency. This is evident in relation to student support and work placement. It is acknowledged that whilst compliance with policies and procedures in the legacy QA systems is very high concerning the assessment of students, there are inconsistencies in the broader provision of student support across programmes. Some programmes such as PLC can access high levels of support, whereas others must find funding from existing already limited resources. The role of the guidance counsellor in FET is to facilitate access, transfer and progression for all students into the FET sector and beyond. Students who cannot utilise the service miss out on information, support and guidance that can be vital to staying on course and effective future planning.

Broadband infrastructure in Donegal remains a barrier for teaching and learning. Students may not be able to access a stable internet connection. The cost of using data from mobile devices can also be prohibitive. Additionally, many students have no device at home. These problems were particularly acute during the COVID-19 crisis.

The extensive support offered through the STPs for students with disabilities is often underutilised. As many more students with disabilities undertake their education through the mainstream education system, there is a reluctance to engage with a specialist service provider, a perceived stigma exists. However, unlike primary, secondary and tertiary education, funding within the further education and training sector has not increased adequately to meet the requirements of a more diverse student body. Teaching, tutoring and instructing staff featured in the DMH Associates report highlighted the need for more training in areas such as working effectively with individuals and/or groups who have autism, special education needs and/or disabilities, drug and/or alcohol dependency. Related to this, is the need for a dedicated student support section, looking after the welfare of FET centre-based Donegal ETB students. Whilst this would be a challenge given the dispersed nature of ETB provision, it is currently under consideration.

Communication once again presented as an area for continued development and enhancement. As previously stated, whilst many programmes do undertake monitoring and evaluation on an ongoing basis, there is no consistency in how or when it is gathered. The silo approach to evaluation inhibits the sharing of experience; therefore, good practice and fine examples of quality culture are not used to inform future planning. Nor are they used effectively as part of the evaluation, monitoring and review of the oversight of the service. Once again, the adoption of a single QA system with robust policies and procedures relating to all aspects of teaching and learning would be immensely beneficial.

In recognition of some of the challenges outlined above, Donegal ETB has purchased over five hundred laptops and Chromebooks as part of the government scheme to lessen the impact of COVID-19, the addition of four hubs in FET centres will further support the engagement of disadvantaged students.

The FET SMT are committed to the implementation and development of the single QA system and the QASS have several policies and procedures in development presently to progress this need. Our FET Service is actively seeking to improve the teaching and learning experience, particularly concerning support for all students across the FET Service in Donegal ETB.

Self-Evaluation, Monitoring and Review

Objective

3

3.1 Self-Evaluation, Monitoring and Review

Both legacy quality assurance systems operating in Donegal ETB's FET Service contain policies and procedures for the ongoing monitoring and evaluation of quality assurance practice on the programmes under their aegis. Quality assurance systems were designed to assist the organisation with planning, defining, developing, assessing and improving practice. They encompass the ETB's legislative obligations, teaching and learning, assessment, curriculum, learning environment, human resources, accessibility, student support, finance, planning, stakeholder partnerships and governance and management.

The Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) which is submitted to QQI on a yearly basis is an important part of the monitoring, review and evaluation of our QA system. It allows the FET service to look at enhancements and areas for improvement across all the areas of the quality assurance guidelines. It also helps to monitor stated objectives within the plan.

Evidence-based planning, monitoring and evaluation processes are integrated in the work of the FET service as outlined in table 2 below:

Table 2: **Planning Processes**

	Purpose	Lead
Lean ar Aghaidh: Donegal ETB Strategy Statement 2017-2021	Donegal ETB organisational strategy	Chief Executive & SMT
ETB Service Plan (annual)	Context and projected outcomes for the year	Chief Executive and SMT
ETB FET Action Plans / Frameworks: FET TEL Action Plan (annual) FET ETB/SOLAS Enterprise Engagement plan (annual) FET ETB/SOLAS CPD plan (annual)	To articulate and plan specific FET service actions, in line with the FET Strategic Performance Agreement and yearly planning and funding parameters.	FET SMT
FAR 1, 2, 3 & 4 & FARR Database	To present programme and FET service indications and projected outputs for the annual funding allocation request to SOLAS.	FET SMT & FET Funding and Planning Group.
ETB/SOLAS FET Strategic Performance Agreement (2018-2020)	3-Year Strategic Performance Agreement with targets agreed with SOLAS.	FET SMT & FET Service staff
Annual Quality Improvement Plan (QIP)	A Quality Improvement Plan is developed and monitored with quality improvements and enhancements reported upon under each of the QQI Core Quality Assurance Guidelines.	FET SMT and QA Coordinator

Monitoring Processes

	Purpose	Lead
FET Risk Register	This document is prepared by the FET SMT and FET Coordinators and feeds into the overall ETB Risk Register to signpost the strategic, operational, financial, compliance and reputational risks to the ETB and its operations.	ETB wide
QA Governance structure meetings (Quality Council and Sub-committee meetings)	Quality Council sub-groups have delegated responsibilities for monitoring, Quality Assurance, Programmes, Assessment, Monitoring and Evaluation.	FET Quality Council
FAR 4 funding submission	Monitoring of budgets and spends associated with the yearly FET grant allocation from SOLAS within the terms and conditions of the fund.	FET Funding and Planning Group
External Authenticator/Verifier Reports	Monitoring of feedback to support assessment enhancement	QASS and FET Coordinators

Table 2 cont:

Review/Evaluation Processes

	Purpose	Lead
FET Programmes have embedded self-evaluation mechanisms at local level to inform their course planning and delivery	To review course provision at programme and centre level to inform course planning and delivery	Programme Coordinators and staff
Student Voice Forum	Annual forum comprising students across all Donegal ETB FET programmes. Comprehensive feedback is gathered on key aspects of the students' experience of Donegal ETB's FET provision	QA Coordinator
Staff Briefing and Consultation Events	Briefing and Consultation events held to inform staff of QA progress and gather comprehensive feedback regarding the development of the QA system	QA Coordinator
ETB Self- Evaluation Report on the COVID-19 Modifications to Teaching, Learning and Assessment (June 2020)	An analysis of qualitative feed-back from learners and learning practitioners on the effectiveness of modified QA arrangements during the COVID-19 pandemic	FET SMT and QA Coordinator
Student Feedback/Evaluations	Comprehensive feedback is gathered on key aspects of the students' experience of Donegal ETB's FET provision	Programme Coordinators and QASS

Reporting Mechanisms

	Purpose	Lead
FET Coordinators meetings and reports	Monthly meetings of FET Coordinators, FET SMT (e.g. Adult Education Officers, Training Managers) and QA Coordinator. This facilitates flow of information in both directions between FET programmes and Donegal ETB Governance and Management groups.	FET SMT and FET Coordinators
FARR database/PLSS reports	FET Data and reporting group share information and report on data completion and programme planning within the PLSS and FARR database	FET SMT and FET Coordinators
ETB Annual Report	Report on FET activity as part of ETB annual report	Senior Managers

Meetings That Support Planning, Monitoring, Review And Evaluation Processes

	Purpose	Lead
FET SMT meetings	Planning, monitoring and reviewing FET provision within the 8 cross cutting FET areas.	FET Director
FET cross-service working group meetings	Progressing strategic priorities of the FET service in line with Strategic Performance agreement and Planning and Funding parameters	FET SMT
Centre Managers' meetings	To share information and to plan for overarching or cross cutting areas of FET such as Health and Safety, Building, COVID-19 Centre plans, Staff Health and Welfare	FET SMT
Course/programme, teacher, tutor instructor meetings	To review course provision and services and review feedback at programme and centre level to inform course planning and delivery	FET Programme Coordinators and staff

The FET Service recognised that there is a gap in the collection of information from the monitoring and review processes, and this was supported by feedback from the baseline documents and staff surveys. Two issues presented: firstly, there is no new integrated QA policy or procedure developed for self-evaluation, monitoring and review; secondly, although there is evidence of course evaluation taking place under the legacy systems this information is not recorded or analysed beyond class or programme level. Some teachers, tutors and instructors evaluated weekly, others at the end of a module or a midpoint in the course delivery. On a positive note, however, there is evidence that when feedback is given, it is acted upon.

Conclusion

The completion of the Self Evaluation Review itself is an excellent starting point for how self-evaluation, monitoring and review can be developed in the future. We have good practice within FET also to draw on. The CAB is an example where a subcommittee does engage in a quality cycle, the development of a feedback process and the implementation of a continuous improvement log to standardise responses to recurring issues. Improvements are ongoing from this group around communicating the outcomes and decisions of CAB and back through to the FET programme coordinators and relevant staff so there is a consistency and standardisation across the programmes and centres. Other examples of monitoring and evaluation include the Digital Equity Surveys that were designed to identify best practices during the COVID-19 pandemic. They measured the equity of access to devices and applications across all FET programmes, the preferred communication methods of students and any issues with broadband infrastructure. This information was used in the application for funding for the four FET Centre Hubs to mitigate against disadvantage. The TEL coordinator also regularly reports back on evaluations carried out on the CPD arranged to facilitate Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT) and Universal Design for Learning (UDL).

Looking forward, the QASS is working on a suite of policies and procedures that will integrate both legacy QA systems and be applicable across the FET Service. The appointment of a FET Systems and Data Reporting Officer will support the robust systematic collection of data vital to any effective self-evaluation, monitoring and review process compliant with QQI Core Guidelines.

3.2 Programme Monitoring and Review

Both Donegal ETB's legacy QA systems, QQI Quality Assurance System and Transition Quality Assurance System (TQAS) include a reference to the monitoring and review of programmes. The TQAS System from Training Services suggests a systematic approach to the monitoring of programmes and related services. The benefits of such an approach include identifying initiatives for continuous improvement, ensuring programmes meet labour market needs, improved social cohesion and economic competitiveness at a national, geographical, sectoral, organisational and individual level.

TQAS recommends that the scope of QA monitoring should include:

— Access, Transfer and Progression
— Communications
— Equality
— Evaluation of programmes and services
— Fair and Consistent Assessment of Learners
— Procuring Programme Delivery Through Utilisation of Second Providers
— Programme Development Delivery and Review
— Protection for Learners
— Staff Recruitment and Development

Within TQAS a programmatic review process ensures a training programme remains valid; knowledge is continuously developed and transferred into practice. Curriculum content and assessment are reviewed for appropriateness, and student feedback is also collated through mid and end of course evaluations. **Information collected is analysed and used to develop an improvement plan with actions identified and followed up. Evidence of a systematic review process is available from:**

— Student, staff and other stakeholder feedback reports.
— Monitoring reports: Internal and second provider monitoring reports
— Programme corrective, preventative and improvement actions
— Transition Quality Assurance System (TQAS) Documents and Forms

Therefore, within TQAS, policies, and procedures do exist for programme monitoring, evaluation and review, however, they are not yet part of an integrated QA system in operation across the FET service. Aspects of these policies and procedures may be in line with the QQI Core Statutory QA guidelines however, they need to be reviewed in tandem with programme evaluation, monitoring and review which takes place within the other FET programmes. The baseline evaluations and staff feedback demonstrated strongly that evaluation does happen at a local level. Monitoring is undertaken in Training Services both internally, and with second providers and EA reports are shared via the CAB with FET programme coordinators to allow for monitoring, evaluation and review. The BTEI Student Support Worker carries out course evaluations in the BTEI programme.

Conclusion

Moving forward, Donegal ETB's FET Service is committed to the implementation of a comprehensive suite of policies and procedures relating to programme evaluation, monitoring and review. Over the last three years, this has been highlighted annually as an area for development in the Quality Improvement Plan submitted to QQI. As the FET Service integrates further, an evaluation, monitoring and review policy will form a crucial part of the development of the service and its provision. The recruitment of a Programme Development Officer will support the QASS and the wider FET Service in progressing the policies and procedures required; already, an underpinning policy is currently in development. This will form the basis of a review framework.

Staff consultation and information event February 2020
Staff member feedback

"Courses must be monitored and reviewed to improve them. Course review can show what the students achieve out of the course and how it can be changed to suit the needs of students. Look at each course, using the feedback from teachers/tutors/instructors and students, to improve the course. What went well? What did not go so well?"

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

Donegal ETB engages with a wide range of external stakeholders and third-party organisations. These can be broadly categorised as follows:

— Community Sector
— Department of Education
— Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS)
— DPER
— DSP
— ETBs/ETBI
— Local FE and HE Institutions
— HSE / TUSLA / CYPSC
— Industry representatives
— Local and regional Enterprise groups
— Local Authorities
— Local Partnerships
— Other Awarding Bodies
— QQI
— SOLAS
— Specialised Training Providers
— Stakeholders
— Work Placement Employers

Donegal ETB's FET Service has a wide range of relationships in the community. Through the extensive outreach delivery of basic education, BTEI, community education support and the Adult Guidance Service, a partnership relationship exists with community organisations across the county (Appendix 11). The Community Education Support Programme had over four thousand students registered in 2019. Funding for the programme is administered through the issuing of grants to community providers ensuring the ETB provides an inclusive and far-reaching provision. It is by far one of the largest parts of our provision and has been referenced nationally as an exemplary model. A recent fund to mitigate against educational disadvantage has been administered through the Community Education Support Programme to providers to further support the providers during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Community Education Support Programme holds an annual seminar which is always well attended. Beneficiaries of the programme are afforded an opportunity to present items they have created that reflect the skills they have gained, groups network with each other, one or two students or groups speak about the impact of the programme, and guest speakers are invited to add to the experience. In a survey conducted as part of the SER, one community provider said:

"The ETB provides vital supports to Community groups and directly to the community in regards to education and skills. Their support, in my own experience, is especially important in rural, marginalised areas which do not have access to mainstream educational facilities."

The feedback from the survey was overwhelmingly positive. Challenges identified, were related more to increased costs and student unease with the level of information required by the PLSS Learner Details Form, particularly when students were participating in non-accredited hobby type courses.

The Basic Education Programme through the work of Adult Literacy Organisers (ALOs) works with a wide range of partners at a grassroots level in Donegal. In parallel with their colleagues in community education and guidance, basic education staff also deliver courses for parents through local schools, they offer classes for people in communities of interest such as Irish Language, Horticulture or Local History. Students from the basic education programme have also participated in the National Adult Literacy Association (NALA) research and been invited speakers at AONTAS events nationally highlighting that programmes are utilising networks at a local, regional and national level.

Where appropriate and as a reflection of their importance, the ETB has formalised relationships with external stakeholders through Memoranda of Understanding and Service Level Agreements. For example, Donegal ETB has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Letterkenny Institute for Technology (LYIT) and North West Strategic Growth Partnership (NWSGP). MOUs are essential to communicate the mutually accepted expectations of all the parties involved in a negotiation. Recently, the FET Service and LYIT have cooperated to map out a specific articulation pathway for FET students into LYIT undergraduate programmes. Negotiations include exploring paths for students undertaking qualifications with awarding bodies other than QQI or State Examinations Commission (SEC).

The MOU with NWSGP is the result of successful collaborative working between four education sector providers—Ulster University, LYIT, North West Regional College (NWRC) and Donegal ETB—with the aim of improving access to higher and further level education and training to students living and studying in the North West City region.

A Strategic Performance Agreement (SPA) with SOLAS, the product of an extensive consultation process, in which annual targets for delivery are outlined, was agreed for 2018-2020 and is due for renewal in 2021. A review meeting with SOLAS took place in February 2020.

Contracted training through second providers is integral to the agility of the FET Service in responding to identified training needs. Contracted training providers are engaged to deliver FET funded courses in external locations throughout the county and, in some instances, in Donegal ETB's training centres. Other types of training, such as that delivered by Specialised Training Providers for people with disabilities, are also delivered in outreach locations. These providers continue to operate under the TQAS quality assurance framework and associated policies and procedures.

With an ever-evolving labour market, the FET Service works closely with many awarding bodies to ensure that the qualifications offered by Donegal ETB are relevant, fit for purpose and of the required standard. This enables students to progress into employment or other further or higher education opportunities upon completion. The FET Service must demonstrate its suitability for and commitment to the quality assurance policies and procedures of each awarding body. Adherence to robust and comprehensive QA governance processes; adherence to policies on student support; teaching and learning; and the learning environment must be met and implemented.

Donegal ETB's FET Service provides important representation on the boards of local development companies and Donegal County Council. They actively participate in joint projects with Donegal Travellers Project, North West Drug and Alcohol Task Forces', Community Employment Scheme for those in recovery from addiction, Donegal Children and Young People's Service Committee (CYPSC) and the Garda Youth Diversion Project.

Through Peace IV funding, Donegal ETB secured funding for three projects, one of which was Restorative Practices. The six Youthreach centres worked with thirteen ETB and non-ETB post-primary schools and youth work organisations around the county to develop restorative practice skills within students and staff, some of whom completed a Postgraduate Certificate in Restorative Practices with Ulster University. This was built on an earlier project from 2014.

The strategic enterprise engagement approach taken by the FET Service has identified many opportunities to work in partnership with local employers, Chambers of Commerce, LEO and multinational companies. Through occupational skills profiling (OSP), in-depth meetings and research, the FET Service can match businesses with relevant courses to meet knowledge or skill deficits. An engineering Traineeship was developed to meet the requirements of engineering companies across Donegal.

Conclusion

Whilst it can be demonstrated that there is compliance and oversight concerning the review of FET Service relationships with external stakeholders much of it is localised and there are no systems to collect and analyse this information when it is gathered. At programme level where issues are identified, they are dealt with and satisfactorily resolved. Feedback from the community and employer groups indicates they are very happy with the service provided by Donegal ETB.

Through the SER, areas for improvement have been identified. The Community Education Support Programme is considering a form of Service Level Agreement with the larger community providers. It is recognised that while there is no obvious cause for concern and the system has been successfully audited, there are opportunities for a more systematic approach to and review of grants awarded.

The success of the Enterprise Engagement strategy has highlighted the need for an effective and comprehensive Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system to track, record and collate the nature and frequency of the work undertaken with employers. A CRM is a vital part of monitoring and reviewing these stakeholder relationships. Significant research was conducted, to ensure the system which was adopted fulfilled the complete range of tasks required within the public sector value for money framework.

Conclusion

Donegal ETB recognises that to enhance the current QA system and satisfy the Core Sector-Specific Quality Assurance Guidelines concerning monitoring and review, a systematic quality-assured approach to the collection and analysis of information must be implemented across the service.

Currently, there is no systematic and consistent method of doing this. Not all programmes or aspects of the FET Service undertake evaluations, to monitor or review their services. Donegal ETB's FET Service further accepts that there are areas of good practice that could be adopted at a more comprehensive and unified level. Critical to the success of any QA system will be the improvement in the use of the data collected. Quantitative and qualitative data for review, including stakeholder feedback, destination statistics and certification information, should also inform quality assurance and future service planning. Adopting a more consistent approach to data capture and reporting will improve the accuracy of the information gathered, make it verifiable and readily available to support evaluation, monitoring and review. This along with systematic programme review will lead to a more informed approach to provision planning and the identification of future enhancements.

Conclusion

ETBs are a relatively new feature of the Irish educational landscape. In Donegal, the FET Service of Donegal ETB has made the integration of the single Quality Assurance (QA) system a strategic priority. The need to set up and implement a new Quality Assurance Governance and Management structure as required by the QQI Core Statutory QA guidelines has focussed the FET Service to rethink quality assurance and what it means.

Recently, by undertaking dialogue, focused discussions and reports for the Self Evaluation Report (SER) baseline activity, staff have had an opportunity to reflect on the current quality assurance practice that exists and the serendipitous nature of the completion of this activity may also lead to systematic evaluations and enhancements in the years ahead. The completion of the SER has also offered a unique opportunity to measure both the progress and success of the new QA Governance and Management structure essential to facilitate the embedding of the new single QA system.

Undoubtedly the implementation of a new QA Governance and Management structure within FET, the creation of the Quality Assurance Support Service, and recruitment for positions such as Programme Development Coordinator and FET Systems and Data Reporting Officer will all support the move toward a single integrated QA system. Policies and procedures including Public Information and Communication and Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) have been developed and adopted; others are in the development process thereby demonstrating transition from legacy policies and procedures to new integrated ones. The modest success to date of committees such as Certification Approval Board set up under the new QA Governance and Management structure illustrate the effectiveness and benefits of integrating the legacy systems and pooling staff expertise in areas of critical importance.

It is recognised that challenges are present in the areas of internal communication; monitoring, evaluation and review; and access to support services for students. The FET SMT has already recognised the need to capture an accurate picture of the disparity in student supports through the DMH Associates report completed in June 2020. The impact of legacy funding structures present challenges in the standardisation of access, transfer and progression opportunities also. The impact of legacy funding structures presents challenges in the standardisation of access, transfer, and progression opportunities also. Similar challenges also exist with some legacy QA policies and procedures; however, adherence remains particularly strong in the area of fair and consistent assessment of students. The integrity of the assessment process is seen as crucial to maintaining the standards and outcomes of the courses, programmes and awards which the ETB are offering.

Through the baseline documents and engagement with students, staff and external stakeholders, the commitment to quality in further education and training was very evident. Engagement did highlight the importance once again of devising and implementing a system of monitoring and evaluation, not just of awards and programmes but also of the QA system itself. Examples of good quality assurance practices were not recorded outside of a particular programme, and although evident within that particular programme, were in many cases never integrated across the wider FET Service programmes. Where a teacher, tutor, instructor or coordinator has resolved an issue, this is not shared either. Sharing of good practice or a collaborative approach to problem solving would all assist in the development of the new QA system. Examples of good practice should be highlighted and celebrated and the learning from them utilised. Some of these examples are already evident however having them integrated into the QA system and utilised in wider areas of the service takes time. The move from a centre based quality assurance system to a provider-based system is both an opportunity to integrate and also a challenge. Standardised approach to evaluation across the FET programmes supporting the integration of successful courses and highlighting areas of good practice in many cases are happening in isolation.

At present, data on course completion, student satisfaction and stakeholder feedback are in place, however the need to build this information into programme and quality review, monitoring and evaluation across the FET service in a provider-based approach is evident. It has been highlighted as a deficit within the service when completing the SER and will be prioritised as an area for development within the new QA system. Presently the proposal and process of consultation has just begun the journey within the new QA governance and management structure. The benefits of this will not be in isolation within this area alone as it will also lead to enhancements in other areas such as student support and welfare, and the learning environment along with other aspects of a quality assured approach to programme development, evaluation and monitoring.

Whilst each programme will work to support students with additional needs or disabilities, the FET service acknowledges that there is a disparity in the range of supports available across the FET Service.

Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) students with disabilities can access additional funding under the Fund for Students with Disabilities (FSD), whereas on other FET programmes such as the Back to Education Initiative, the costs for additional support must be drawn from existing resources. It is hoped that with the continued development of staff and the integration of inclusive education practice such as Universal Design for Learning (UDL) a more holistic approach will be taken across programmes to support the diverse needs of our student cohorts. While recognising that individualisation is required in certain cases for certain students, an integration of UDL practices within teaching, learning and assessment will help to support many. The inconsistent student support is also reflected in the lack of accessibility across the FET Service to the Adult Guidance and Information Service (AGIS). Guidance Counsellors provide a comprehensive service in relation to social and emotional support, enhanced skills for employability and an understanding of progression opportunities within education or training. They represent an invaluable support for student retention.

COVID-19 has had an indelible impact on the FET Service, as it has across all sections of society. The Community Education Support Programme, which is a strong support to grass-roots education in every corner of the county, has been severely impacted as community education providers have had to close their doors to adult learners. Other vulnerable students on programmes such as Basic Education and Youthreach have been attending a blend of socially distanced, face-to-face and remote learning while higher level courses have had to transition to remote online learning where possible with limited access to labs and classrooms for skills demonstrations and summative assessment only.

The FET Service response in creating contingency plans and adapting policies and procedures for alternative assessment of students and in relation to quality assuring work experience placements during the pandemic under the new integrated QA system further shows the new QA Governance and Management structure working as it should and being responsive to the demands. However, delivering the service within the pandemic has not been without its challenges. Broadband issues, social and economic deprivation, lack of devices, home caring responsibilities, and time have presented as barriers within the emergency remote teaching and learning environments and modes that have been created.

Opportunity has also presented itself, with the COVID-19 pandemic highlighting the need for a strategic and planned approach to blended learning. Students have highlighted the positives such as flexibility, accessibility and multiple means of engagement and expression through alternative assessment. Even at the lower certification levels the continuation of provision was supported in a blended approach with learner packs being issued followed up by support calls, texts and emails. All of these initiatives helped to keep the connection with the student cohorts even in stages where access to face-to-face learning was not permitted. The pandemic along with the use of technology to enhance teaching and learning have both laid the foundation for a new future which will most likely include blended or online learning opportunities particularly in the higher NFQ levels.

Alongside the accredited centre-based programmes, Donegal ETB's Community Education and Basic Education Programmes will continue to be found supporting and delivering classes in community locations across the county. These programmes can be conduits for the most isolated students to engage and progress onto other part-time and full-time programmes. In a recent response to the support required for these Community providers, the ETB processed Mitigating Educational Disadvantage funding to allow for technology, devices and resources to be allocated to these providers. When guidelines allow for the safe re-opening of these community locations, they will be well placed, enabled and responsive to allow the continuation of our Community Education Support Programme in even more accessible modes and with additional resources.

Much progress has been made in recent years in the area of enterprise engagement and a strategic approach is paying dividends in terms of employers availing of FET training opportunities. The CRM system will assist in the co-ordination of information and the recent appointment of a Programme Development Officer will help to improve agility of response.

In the years ahead, Donegal ETB's FET Service will continue to phase out the legacy QA systems. A review of the communication practices in consulting and reviewing on QA is planned. This will be important in progressing the development, consultation and evaluation processes for new policies in a timelier manner. Regular and continuing engagement with students and stakeholders through a systematic and transparent review process is also planned. Again, in the current pandemic, technology has been used effectively to collect feedback electronically, which is less time consuming and less costly than traditional consultations.

These methods of engagement can be utilised to good effect going forward and when out of the pandemic, will be used to enhance traditional methods of consultation. Data will also help inform programme and course review and this data supported by the wider qualitative information gained from the wider stakeholder consultation will allow the service to continue to grow strategically in an informed and consultative manner.

A central theme throughout the staff and student feedback in this SER process has been the commitment of staff to the creation of a learner centred education and training experience.

Whether through the cross-programme communities of good practice in curriculum areas or the utilisation of CPD to upskill in pedagogical approaches, new technologies or understanding mental health, staff engagement is strongly in evidence.

A critical feature of the new QA system is the creation of a quality culture within the FET Service. The feedback from staff, students, employers and other external stakeholders highlighted the presence of that quality culture across FET already. The challenge is to systematically capture and review this feedback, share it across the service and then implement it within the policies, procedures and review cycle of the quality assurance system.

The ETB accepts the Self Evaluation Report highlights areas for improvement within the FET Service, but that it also demonstrates the commitment of FET staff across all levels and programmes to provision of a quality learner centred education and training experience.

Donegal ETB

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Inaugural Review of Quality Assurance
Further Education & Training Service
Self-Evaluation Report

Appendices

2021

Donegal ETB

FET Quality Assurance

Self-Evaluation Steering Group

Terms of Reference

Version 2

13/01/2021

Background

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

Self-evaluation and review of quality are fundamental elements of a provider's quality assurance system and the ETBs' external quality assurance obligations include a statutory review of quality assurance by QQI.

Context

The legislation underpinning QQI's functions states that providers of education and training must establish quality assurance procedures and these procedures for all of the ETBs were approved in 2018.

The primary responsibility for the quality assurance of ETB provision lies with each ETB who are responsible for operating, monitoring and reviewing their QA arrangements on an ongoing basis.

External Review of Quality Assurance Procedures

There is also an external dimension in the form of monitoring and periodic review by QQI. The first such review (as per section 34 of the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act (2012) of ETB FET QA procedures is due to take place on a scheduled basis in 2020-2021. Each ETB will be required to undertake a comprehensive and inclusive self-evaluation of the implementation and effectiveness of their QA procedures which will result in the production of a Self-Evaluation report by the ETB.

As the ETBs were all established at the same time and this will be the first review of its kind within the sector, the inaugural review is being undertaken as an omnibus review whereby all sixteen ETBs will be reviewed within a relatively short timeframe. Each ETB will be reviewed as a standalone corporate entity and an individual review report will be produced in respect of each ETB. The full context and methodology for the reviews are outlined in the *Inaugural Review of Quality Assurance in Education and Training Boards Terms of Reference and Handbook*.

This review is aimed at an institution-wide level, and is about the preparation and publication by ETBs of individual, inclusive, whole-of-organisation self-evaluations of how effectively they assure the quality of teaching, learning and service activities, particularly focusing on three core themes:

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

The role and responsibility of the group is to ensure the Self Evaluation Report (SER) is produced using a coordinated and consultative approach within the required timelines.

- · Coordinate Self Evaluation Process
- · Monitor the progress
- · Ensure the production of the SER
- · Ensure approval through the appropriate governance structure and
- · Production by the required date

1. The group will coordinate the production and submission of the Donegal ETB FET Quality Assurance Self-Evaluation Report (SER)
2. Facilitate QQI planning and the main review visits.
3. Identify key stakeholder groups (Students, Staff, Employers, Community etc.) who will be involved in the self-evaluation process and report.
4. Agree mechanisms and a schedule of engagements with key stakeholders and how responses will feed into the SER.
5. Participate in QQI inaugural review meetings as required.
6. Consider the QQI Review Team report and contribute to a formal response from Donegal ETB.

The Self-Evaluation Report will be channeled through FET QA Governance and Management structures and the final report will be published on the Donegal ETB website and submitted to QQI in hard copy in February 2021.

Role of individual group members

The role of the individual members of the Self Evaluation Steering Group includes:

1. Attending regular meetings as required and actively participating in the group's work.
2. Representing the interests of the organisation and all stakeholders.
3. Be committed to, and actively involved in, pursuing the group's outcomes.

Membership

The FET Self Evaluation Steering Group shall comprise of

Title	Role
Director of Further Education and Training	**Chair**

Quality Assurance Coordinator	**Secretary**
Adult Education Officer	Member
Communications Officer	Member
Head of Human Resources	Member
Staff representative	Member
Administration representative	Member
Head of Corporate Services	Member
Head of ICT	Member
Head of Finance	Member
Adult Education Officer	Member
Senior Training Advisor	Member
Assistant Training Centre Manager	Member
Assistant Training Standards Officer (Further Education)	Member
FET QA Administrator	Minute Taker

The Group may invite persons with relevant expertise to attend meetings to provide advice and assistance.

A quorum of 6 members must be present before a meeting can proceed, inclusive of the Chair and Secretary.

Chair/Convenor

The group will be chaired by the Director of FET, Cróna Gallagher.

All agenda items will be forwarded to the Secretary by close of business 5 working days prior to the next scheduled meeting.

The agenda, with attached meeting papers, will be distributed at least 3 working days prior to the next scheduled meeting.

Minutes and meeting papers

The minutes of each FET Self-Evaluation Steering Group meeting will be prepared by the FET QA Administrator.

Full copies of the minutes, including attachments, will be provided to all FET Self-evaluation Steering Group members no later than seven working days following each meeting.

Decisions will be made by those in attendance and recorded in the minutes.

Timeframe

- The Group will ensure the production of the final Self-Evaluation Report for QQI by 26th February 2021.

- The Group will support the facilitation of the QQI Planning Visit on the 31st March 2021.

- The Group will support the facilitation of the QQI Main Review Visit to be taking place from 24th – 28th May 2021.

- The Draft Review Report will be received from QQI by the 3rd September 2021 and a formal response to this will be coordinated by the SER Steering group by the 1st October 2021.
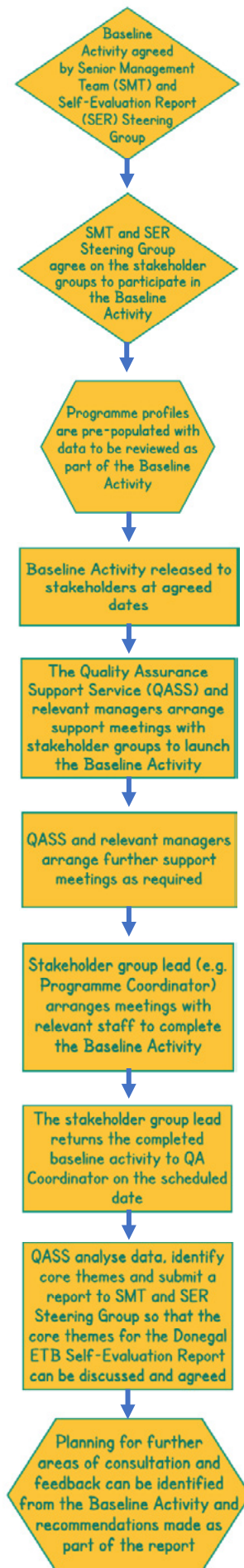
Names and Roles of Current Self-Evaluation Steering Group Members

Name	Title	Role
Cróna Gallagher	Director of Further Education and Training	**Chair**
Joe Whitelock	Quality Assurance Coordinator	**Secretary**
Charles Gorney	Adult Education Officer	Member
Sandra Buchanan	Communications Officer	Member
Eileen Doherty	Head of Human Resources	Member

Eileen Doherty	Head of Human Resources	Member
Con Ferry	Staff representative	Member
Bridin McMahon	Administration representative	Member
Brenda Doherty	Head of Corporate Services	Member
Ciaran Cunningham	Head of ICT	Member
Sharon McColgan	Head of Finance	Member
Martina Needham	Adult Education Officer	Member
Lorraine Murray	Senior Training Advisor	Member
Mairead Carlin	Assistant Training Centre Manager	Member
Tina O Donnell	Assistant Training Standards Officer (Further Education)	Member
Madhu Kambamettu	FET QA Administrator	Minute Taker

**Appendix 2.
Donegal ETB
QA Self-Evaluation Report
Baseline Activity**

Baseline Activity agreed by Senior Management Team (SMT) and Self-Evaluation Report (SER) Steering Group

SMT and SER Steering Group agree on the stakeholder groups to participate in the Baseline Activity

Programme profiles are pre-populated with data to be reviewed as part of the Baseline Activity

Baseline Activity released to stakeholders at agreed dates

The Quality Assurance Support Service (QASS) and relevant managers arrange support meetings with stakeholder groups to launch the Baseline Activity

QASS and relevant managers arrange further support meetings as required

Stakeholder group lead (e.g. Programme Coordinator) arranges meetings with relevant staff to complete the Baseline Activity

The stakeholder group lead returns the completed baseline activity to QA Coordinator on the scheduled date

QASS analyse data, identify core themes and submit a report to SMT and SER Steering Group so that the core themes for the Donegal ETB Self-Evaluation Report can be discussed and agreed

Planning for further areas of consultation and feedback can be identified from the Baseline Activity and recommendations made as part of the report

Appendix 3: Overview of First Draft of SER Consultation

Focus Group/ Meeting links	Action	Area for consultation	Date/Time
Students levels 1-4 **Zoom meeting**	• Email students to confirm participation and arrange first meeting • First consultation focus group	**Objective 2**	26th January 10.30 am
Students levels 5-6 Students cross representative **Team Meeting**	• Email students to confirm participation and arrange first meeting • First consultation focus group	**Objective 2**	26th January 2.30 pm
Apprenticeships/ Traineeships **Team Meeting**	• Email students to confirm participation and arrange first meeting • First consultation focus group	**Objective 2**	26th January 2.30 pm
Students second providers **Team Meeting**	• Email students to confirm participation and arrange first meeting • First consultation focus group	**Objective 1**	26th January 10.30 am
Teachers/Tutors/Instructors (including contracted training) **Online Survey**	• Issue survey • Individual responses received	**Objective 2**	22nd January
Programme Sub Committee	• Issue survey • Lead to arrange a meeting of the individual groups to review and discuss draft SER extract • Compile a group response • Complete and return survey	**Objective 1**	22nd January
Quality Sub Committee			
CAB			
Administration	• Issue survey • Lead to arrange a meeting of the administration group to review and discuss draft SER extract • Compile a group response	**Objective 1**	22nd January

	• Complete and return survey		
OSD	• Issue survey • Lead to arrange a meeting of the OSD staff to review and discuss draft SER extract • Compile a group response • Complete and return survey	**Objective 1**	22nd January
Adult Guidance Service	• Issue survey	**Objective 2**	22nd January
QASS (including TEL and Programme Development Coordinators)	• Issue survey	**Objective 2** **Objective 3**	22nd January
Programme Coordinators	• Issue survey	**Objective 1**	22nd January

Appendix 4: An Overview of Self Evaluation Engagement

January 2020
23 January: AEO Charlie Gorney gives presentation on development of the integrated QA System to meeting of Donegal ETB Quality Council.
27 January: SER template and SER steering group discussed at meeting of Quality Assurance Support Service (QASS)
February 2020
11 February: Student Voice Forum, Radisson Hotel, Letterkenny
24 February: QA Review Gantt Chart presented and SER Steering Group discussed at QASS meeting
26 February: Staff Briefing and Consultation Event, Central Hotel, Donegal Town
27 February: Staff Briefing and Consultation Event, Inishowen Gateway Hotel, Buncrana
28 February: Staff Briefing and Consultation Event, Radisson Hotel, Letterkenny
March 2020
Stakeholder groups identified and communications strategy designed in consultation with QA Subcommittee and FET Senior Management Team
30 March: Donegal ETB FET Provider Profile, SER and QA Baseline Activity discussed at QASS meeting
April 2020
16 April: Update on preparation for QA Review provided to Quality Council

May 2020
7 May: First meeting of SER Steering Group
11 May: QA Review discussed at QASS meeting
18 May: SER discussed under AOB at QASS meeting; QASS informed of SMT approval for QA Baseline Activity
26 May: Analysis of data gathered at Student and Staff forums in February discussed at QA staff meeting
June 2020
8 June: Donegal ETB FET Provider Profile and QA Baseline Activity discussed at QASS meeting
23 June: First standalone Senior Management Team QA meeting
25 June: QA Baseline Activity presented and discussed in detail at QA Subcommittee meeting
25 June: Facilitated QA Baseline Activity session with Adult Literacy Service
29 June: Facilitated QA Baseline Activity session with Adult Guidance Service
Students and staff surveyed on the impact of COVID-19
July 2020
1 July: Facilitated QA Baseline Activity session with Youthreach
6 July: QA Review discussed at QASS meeting
14 July: QA Baseline Activity discussed at QA Subcommittee meeting
15 July: Meeting of SER Steering Group

22 July: First draft of Donegal ETB FET Provider Profile presented at SMT QA meeting; Progress on Baseline Activities discussed
September 2020
7 September: QA Review, SER and Donegal ETB Provider Profile discussed at QASS meeting
8 September: Facilitated QA Baseline Activity session with VTOS
9 September: Facilitated QA Baseline Activity session with PLC programme staff
11 September: Facilitated QA Baseline Activity session with TEL Working Group
15 September: Facilitated QA Baseline Activity session conducted during meeting of Quality Council
17 September: Facilitated QA Baseline Activity session with Training Services
18 September: Facilitated QA Baseline Activity session conducted during meeting of FET Senior Management Team
22 September: Updated Donegal ETB FET Provider Profile presented at SMT QA meeting
23 September: Meeting of SER Steering Group
28 September: Facilitated QA Baseline Activity discussion with QA Subcommittee
30 September: Facilitated QA Baseline Activity discussion and Mentimeter survey with Clerical Administration
October 2020
5 October: Facilitated QA Baseline Activity session with QASS
13 October: Updated Donegal ETB FET Provider Profile and engagement with workplace providers discussed at SMT QA meeting

14 October: Facilitated QA Baseline Activity session with FET Programme Subcommittee
November 2020
9 November: QA Review discussed at QASS meeting
11 November: Meeting of SER Steering Group
17 November: Analysis of information for SER and final draft of Donegal ETB FET Provider Profile presented at SMT QA meeting
19 November: SER discussed and SER Timeline presented at Quality Council meeting; Donegal ETB FET Provider Profile approved for submission to QQI
23 November: Student Survey Issued
Survey of Community Education Providers for SER
December 2020
8 December: Draft SER discussed at SMT QA meeting
9 December: Meeting of SER Steering Group
4th December: Student survey complete and results analysed
14 December: SER and QA Review discussed at QASS meeting
Survey of workplace providers for SER
January 2021
11 January: First draft of SER reviewed by SMT, SER Steering Group and Quality Council
12 January: SER planning and progress discussed at QA Subcommittee meeting
13 January: Meeting of SER Steering Group

15 January: SER consultation planning meeting 19 January: SER planning and progress discussed at QA SMT meeting
22 January: SER staff consultation events held.
26 January: SER student consultation events held.
26 January: SER planning and progress reviewed at Quality Council meeting
28 January: SER planning and progress discussed at FET Coordinators meeting
February 2021
1 February: SER planning and progress reviewed at QASS meeting
3rd February: Review of consultation feedback at SER Steering Group meeting
4th February: SER planning and progress discussed at FET Coordinators meeting
8th February: SMT meeting to review final draft of SER
9th February: Quality Council meeting for approval of SER
26th February: Submission of Self Evaluation Report to QQI

Appendix 5A:

<u>Overview of the Mapping of Donegal ETB Legacy Policies and Procedures with QQI QA Core Guidelines</u>

QQI 11 Core Guidelines	Further Education Policies and Procedures	Training Services Policies and Procedures
1. Governance and Management of Quality	Quality Assuring Assessment for Programme Coordinators (Page 29)	TQAS Overarching Quality Assurance Manual (page 65)
2. Documented Approach to Quality Assurance **2.1 Documented policies and procedures** **2.2 A Comprehensive system**		TQAS Overarching Quality Assurance Manual Transition QA System (page 12-15)
3. Programmes of Education and Training **3.1 Programme development and Approval**	Operational Policies and procedure for Programme Coordinators (page 14)	TQAS Overarching Quality Assurance Manual Subsection 5.4 (page 40)
3.2 Learner admission, progression and recognition	Operational Policies and Procedures page 10, Information Provision and Learner Entry Arrangements. 4.3 Recognition of Prior Learning, page 12 Quality Assuring assessment for programme providers, 4.2.4 Exemptions for other certification	TQAS Overarching Quality Assurance Manual Section 4, Access Transfer and Progression policy (page 34) RPL, Section 4.3 page 34
3.3 Programme Monitoring and review	Operational Policies and Procedures, page 19, Review Cycle of Existing Programmes	TQAS Overarching Quality Assurance Manual Section 5.7 Programme Review (page 41)

4. Staff Recruitment, Management and Development		
4.1 Staff Recruitment	Operational Policies and Procedures, Staff Recruitment Allocation and Staff Induction (page 8)	TQAS Overarching Quality Assurance Manual Section 3, Staff Recruitment and Development (page 28)
	VEC Staff Handbook, Section 1 Recruitment and Selection Procedures	Fás Intranet (archived)
	Section 2 General Terms and conditions of employment	
4.2 Staff Communication	Operational Policies and Procedures, Communications with Staff (page 4 and 5).	TQAS Overarching Quality Assurance Manual Section 1, Communications (page 17)
4.3 Staff development	Operational Policies and Procedures, Staff Development (page 9)	TQAS Overarching Quality Assurance Manual Section 3, Staff Recruitment and Development (page 28 & 31)
	Equality Policy Section 2, 2.1 Equality Policy	TQAS Equality Policy and Procedure
5. Teaching and Learning		
5.1 Teaching and Learning	Operational Policies and Procedures, Programme Development, Delivery and Review, Section 5.6 Learner Records, (page 17)	TQAS Overarching Quality Assurance, Section 5.8 Programme Development, Delivery and Review, page 52
	Operational Policies and Procedures, 5.5 page 16	TQAS Overarching Quality Assurance Manual Section 5, Programme Development, Delivery and Review
5.2 A Provider Ethos that Promotes Learning		

5.3 National and International Effective Practice		
5.4 Learning Environments	Operational Policies and Procedures, Section 5.7, Provision and maintenance of resources, (page 17) Section 2, 2.2, Equality Planning	TQAS Overarching Quality Assurance Manual Section 5.6, Programme Development, Delivery and Review, (page 41) Equality planning, 2.4, (page 24)
6. Assessment of Learners **6.1 Assessment of Learning achievement**	Quality Assuring Assessment for Programme Coordinators. Quality Assuring Assessment for Programme assessors. Quality Assuring Assessment for Learners. Operational Policies and Procedures, Fair and Consistent Assessment of Learners Policy, Section 6 page 20-28	TQAS Overarching Quality Assurance, Section 6, page 53-69
7. Supports for Learners **An Integrated approach from the perspective of the learner** **Pastoral Care** **Access to services related to programmes** **Learner Representation**	Operational Policies and Procedures, Programme Delivery Section 5 (Additional Support for Adult Learners), 5.6 Provision of Support 5.7 Provision and Maintenance of Resources Operational Policies and Procedures Access, Transfer and Progression 4.4 Facilitating Diversity	TQAS Overarching Quality Assurance, Section 4.4 Access, transfer and Progression, Facilitating Diversity

Guidance		
8. Information and Data Management **8.1 Information Systems** **8.2 Learner Information Systems** **8.3 Management Information Systems** **8.4 Information for further planning** **8.5 Completion rates** **8.6 Records maintenance and retention** **8.7 Data Protection and freedom of information**	Staff Handbook, General terms and conditions of employment	TQAS, Control of Documents, & Control of Records (page 12-13)
9 Public Information and Communication **9.1 Public Information** **9.2 Learner Information** **9.3 Publication of quality assurance evaluation reports**	Operational Policies and Procedures, Section 1, Communication with Learners, Staff and other Stakeholders. Adult Learner Handbook Learner Complaints Policy and Procedure	TQAS, Communications Policy (page 17) TQAS - Customer complaint (page 20)

10 Other Parties Involved in Education and Training		
10.1 Peer Relationships with the broader education and training community	Memorandum of Understanding with IOT's and certification bodies.	
10.2 External partnerships and second providers		TQAS Procuring Programme delivery through utilisation of second training providers.
10.3 Expert panelists, examiners and authenticators	Section 6, 6.7 Authentication Process, page 24. Quality Assuring Assessment for programme coordinators, Section 5, 4.2.6 preparing for the external authentication visit, 4.3 External Authentication.	TQAS External Authentication, page 64, TQAS Assessment Regulations,
11 Self-Evaluation, Monitoring and Review		
11.1 Provider-owned internal review, self-evaluation and monitoring	Operational Policies and Procedures, Section 5, 5.9, Review cycle of existing programmes.	TQAS Page 84, Self-evaluation of programmes and services.
11.2 Internal self-monitoring	Operational Policies and Procedures, Evaluation Process.	TQAS, Section 11.1, page 81 Internal monitoring

Appendix 5B:

Link between Donegal ETB Integrated Policies and Procedures and QQI QA Core Guidelines

QA Area	Policies and Procedures	Date approved by Quality Council
1. Governance and Management of Quality	Quality Assurance Policy	
2. Documented approach to Quality Assurance	Ongoing Review and Update of QA Documents Policy	
3. Programmes of Education and Training	Programmes of Education and Training Policy 1. Programme Planning and Approval Procedure 2. Development and Validation of Programmes Procedure 3. Updating Programmes and Course Material	
	Access, Transfer and Progression Policy	
	Recognition of Prior Learning Policy	October 2020
4. Staff Recruitment, Management and Development	Recruitment and Induction of Teaching Staff Policy	
	Professional Development of Teaching Staff Policy	
5. Teaching & Learning	Teaching and Learning Policy 1. Learning Environment Procedure	
6. Assessment of Learners	Fair and Consistent Assessment of Learners (QQI Programmes) Policy 1. Management & Administration of the Assessment Procedure ● The Assessment Procedure ● Devising Assessment Instruments ● Devising Sample Answers / Assessment Rubrics / Marking Schemes	

	• Planning the Assessment Procedure
	• Coordinating the Assessment Procedure
	• Notification of Assessment event
	• Preparing for the Assessment Event
	• Updating Assessments Instruments
	
	2. Conduct of Assessments Procedure
	   • Conducting an Assessment Event (Exam, Skills Demo)
	   • Concluding an Assessment Event (Exam, Skills Demo)
	   • Non-attendance or Lateness
	   • Marking of Assessment
	   • Learner Assessment Rechecks and Reviews
	   • Learner Feedback
	   • Malpractice
	   • Plagiarism
	   • Reasonable Accommodation
	   • Extensions and deadlines
	   • Compassionate consideration
	   • Notification of provisional assessment results
	   • Repeats and resubmissions
	
	3. Authentication of Assessment Procedure and Approval of Results
	   • Internal Verification of Assessment
	   • External Authentication of Assessment
	   • Approval of Assessment Results
	   • Notification of Approved Assessment Results
	   • Appeals
	   • Requesting Certification	

	4. Archiving of Assessments and Records Management Procedure • Security of Assessment Documentation • Evidence and Record Retention	
7. Support for Learners	Approval and Management of work placements Policy	
	Support for Learners Policy 1. Protection of Enrolled Learners Procedure 2. Student Complaints and Accolades Procedure 3. Student Voice Procedure 4. Student Induction Procedure	
8. Information and Data Management	Information Management Policy	
	Data Protection Policy	
9. Public Information & Communication	Public Information and Communication Policy	October 2020
10. Other parties involved in Education and Training	External Authentication Policy Other Parties involved in Education and Training Policy	
11. Self-Evaluation, Monitoring and Review	Ongoing Monitoring of Programmes and QA Framework Policy	
	Periodic Programme Review and Revalidation of Programmes (QQI Programmes) Policy	

Appendix 6A: TEL/CPD Case Study

Supporting the Transition to Emergency Remote Teaching and Learning during 2020

Context:

The '**Technology Enhanced Learning**' (TEL) Working Group was set up in response to the SOLAS/ETBI TEL strategy 2016-2019 where technology is used to facilitate and support innovation in teaching and learning practices. The group is inclusive of staff from across the FET service programmes and also includes the ETB's head of IT and IT support staff. The group is chaired by one of the FET SMT and meets monthly to progress the strategic objectives which are submitted yearly to SOLAS. These objectives are based around 4 areas of development:

- ICT Infrastructure
- CPD
- Learning Content Creation/Programme Development
- Organisational Structure

In October 2019 the ETB appointed a TEL Coordinator to progress the work of the group along with coordinating the yearly work plan as submitted to SOLAS and as outlined in our Funding Allocation Request submission (FAR) to SOLAS.

The Case Study Example/Quality Improvement:

As an area for improvement within our Quality Improvement Plan's of 2019 and 2020, a range of staff CPD sessions had been organised in late 2019 and early 2020 to build staff capacity in utilising technology to enhance teaching and learning in the classroom.
COVID-19 restrictions mean that access to centres was not possible anymore for staff development. The idea was proposed to move the **May 2020 TEL seminar online** and have 5 days of different TEL themes showcased and presented by both our own staff and by external experts or organisations.
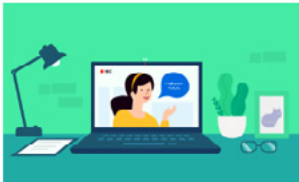
Tel Webinar

Like many other events, this year's plan for the TEL Seminar had to be redesigned by the TEL Working Group.
I'm delighted to announce that we will host a series of short Webinars from Monday May 25th to Friday May 29th at 2pm each day. We have planned a great variety of content within the webinars to meet the needs of all our target audience.

The 5 Day seminar included:

- **AHEAD** who showcased UDL principles and **accessibility** software available to staff,
- **ETB Staff** who benefitted from undertaking the nation NCI TEL courses who showcased technology and how it has supported enhancements in their teaching and learning practices.
- **Prodigy Learning** outlined the benefits of a national agreement for FET centres allowing for support for assessment of students in industry awards.

- **Optimising Video for Content Creation** was hosted by **Poca Productions**
- A presentation on **Digital Citizenship** by an ETB staff member ended the seminar

376 staff attended the seminars over the course of the week; this immediately evidenced some of the benefits of online delivery of CPD as in normal circumstances staff would have been obliged to travel long distances to attend and the expected participation rates would have been much lower.
Post this seminar and in response to the research on the 'Modifications of Teaching, Learning and Assessment during COVID-19', carried out for a QQI evaluation, further CPD was initiated to support staff and students. A very successful 6-week mentoring programme was rolled out in conjunction with H2 Learning and Donegal ETB TEL Mentors. This included TEL mentoring for staff who were starting out on the journey of utilsing Technology in their classroom delivery methods. To further build staff capacity 3 iterations of an Intermediate level course '21st Century Learning Design' supporting staff who were more confident in using technology in their approaches to teaching and learning were also rolled out across the FET service in the Spring and Autumn of 2020.

Future Enhancement

The accessibility of online webinars has led to extensive planning and time being allocated to a range of **CPD interventions** during COVID-19 and the latter half of 2020 (Attached CPD Record). This has also led to the further development of a **CPD calendar** for the Spring of 2020 which is available to FET programme staff and other ETB staff also.

To build on the FET service capacity to deliver blended learning in the future Donegal ETB have procured **H2 learning** to produce a **Blended Learning Framework**. Five focused discussions have taken place in late 2020/2021 with the draft findings being available in mid-February 2021. This will help further support the staff and students in transitioning towards the use of technology as a tool to enhance the student experience.

Further supports enhancing the technology supports required for students include the availability 550 devices under the **'Devices for Disadvantaged Students'** Loan Scheme. All students accessing ETB devices will be set up with an ETB email account and given access to Microsoft 365 online.

As a further support, funding was approved from the Mitigating Educational Disadvantage Fund to equip **"Digital hubs"** in 4 FET of our FET centres to assist and support students and tutors to engage fully in teaching and learning with technology by providing a fully accessible learning space with broadband internet access.

Appendix 6B: TEL/CPD Report 2020

Date/Hours/ Delivered by	Training Content	Which staff Groups attended	Attendance Numbers
Oct 19 - July 20 1 year course **NCI**	Level 7 National College of Ireland TEL Certificate	1 TEL Coordinator 1 Instructor 1 BTEI Coordinator 1 LFL Tutor	4
Nov 19 - Jan 20 12 week course **LYIT**	Level 8 LYIT Digital Citizenship Special Purpose Award	AEO, Comms Officer, Head of Corporate Services, Instructor, Tutors, teachers, ALOs and Admin Staff	13
Nov 19 - May 20 1 year course **NUIG**	Level 8 NUIG TEL Diploma	1 ALO	1
29th Jan 2020 Letterkenny 3 hours **Inservice**	Google Drive & Classroom Training	Teachers/Tutors/Instructors/Coordinators/Adult Guidance/ QA Staff	20
Dec 19 - Jan 21 6 week course 9 hours **H2 Learning**	21st Century Learning Design.	Teachers/Tutors/Instructors/Coordinators/Adult Guidance staff & QA	16
Feb 26th TEL Dev Day 3 hours **Facilitator: Mary Rafferty**	Discussions on the future planning of Donegal ETB's TEL Strategy.	Teachers/Tutors/Instructors/Coordinators/Adult Guidance/ QA/TEL Working Group	28
March 2020 TELMS Training Full day **FESS**	TEL Mentoring Support Training. Each FET Centre had 1 representative attend.	Teachers/Tutors/Instructors/ QA staff	20
March - April 20 8 hours **Poca Productions**	Smartphone Video Editing training	Teachers/Tutors/Instructors/ Coordinators/Adult Guidance/QA/Admin	10
April - May 20 10 hours **H2 Learning**	21st Century Learning Design for Remote. Understanding the pedagogy and redesigning	Teachers/Tutors/Instructors/ Coordinators/Adult Guidance/QA	15

	your learning activities to better enable remote teaching.		
April - July Varied TEL Mentors	Donegal ETB TEL" Buddy Up" support programme.	Teachers/Tutors/Instructors/ Coordinators/Adult Guidance/QA	7
May 25th 2020 1 hour **Donegal ETB Staff**	Donegal ETB TEL Tools webinar	Teachers/Tutors/Instructors/ Coordinators/Adult Guidance/QA	96
May 26th 2020 1 hour 30 min **AHEAD**	Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and using technology for accessibility Webinar	Teachers/Tutors/Instructors/ Coordinators/Adult Guidance/QA/Admin	69
May 27th 2020 1 hour 30 min **Prodigy Learning**	Prodigy Learning webinar - resources available to FET practitioners.	Teachers/Tutors/Instructors/ Coordinators	53
May 28th 2020 1 hour **Poca Productions**	Optimising your camera settings & techniques for looking more professional on a video conference call.	Teachers/Tutors/Instructors/ Coordinators/Adult Guidance/QA/Admin	84
May 22nd 2020 1 hour **Donegal ETB Staff**	Digital Citizenship & more TEL Tools Webinar	Teachers/Tutors/Instructors/ Coordinators/Adult Guidance/QA/Admin	74
June 22nd 2020 1 hour 30 min **Miriam O'Donoghue**	Zoomergiser Webinar	Teachers/Tutors/Instructors/ Coordinators/Adult Guidance/QA/Admin	16
June - July 20 8 hours **Poca Productions**	Smartphone Video Editing training	Teachers/Tutors/Instructors/ Coordinators/Adult Guidance/QA/Admin	8
July 13th-24th 20 4 webinars **AHEAD**	UDL Summer School	Teachers/Tutors/Instructors/ Coordinators/Adult Guidance/QA/Admin	15
Aug 31st-Sept 1st **Camara Education**	E-Portfolio Training	Teachers/Tutors/Instructors/ Coordinators/Adult Guidance/QA	80
4th Sept 1hour 30mins	Zoomergiser Webinar	Teachers/Tutors/Instructors/ Coordinators/Adult	22

		Guidance/QA/Admin	
10th Sept 1 hour **An Cosann**	Assessing your Students Digital Capabilities	Teachers/Tutors/Instructors/ Coordinators/Adult Guidance/QA	32
11th Sept 1hour 30mins **Miriam O'Donoghue**	Zoomergiser Webinar	Teachers/Tutors/Instructors/ Coordinators/Adult Guidance/QA/Admin	10
14th Sept-Oct12th 10 hours **H2 Learning**	Designing Blended Learning Experiences	Teachers/Tutors/Instructors/ Coordinators/Adult Guidance/QA	23
23rd Sept-Oct 22nd 10 Hours **H2 Learning**	Designing Blended Learning Experiences	Teachers/Tutors/Instructors/ Coordinators/Adult Guidance/QA	13
28th Sept- Nov 10th 10 Hours **H2 Learning**	Supporting Staff to use Digital Technologies supported by TEL Mentors	Teachers/Tutors/Instructors/ Coordinators/Adult Guidance/QA	15
Oct - May 21 1 year course **NUIG**	Level 8 NUIG TEL Diploma	TELl Coordinar & BTEI Teacher	2
Oct - Dec 12 week course **NCI**	Level 6 TEL Certificate	Teachers/Tutors/Instructors	2
Oct - Dec 10 week course **AHEAD**	UDL Digital Badge	Teachers/Tutors/Instructors/ Coordinators/Adult Guidance/QA	38
26th Nov 1hour 30min **Shane Martin**	Minding Ourselves Wellbeing	All ETB Staff	73
30th Nov 1 hour **Carrie Archer**	UDL in the Clouds	Teachers/Tutors/Instructors/ Coordinators/Adult Guidance/QA	38
7th Dec 1 hour **Miriam O'Donoghue**	Festive Zoomergiser	Teachers/Tutors/Instructors/ Coordinators/Adult Guidance/QA/Admin	22
9th Dec 1 hour	Communities of Practice	Teachers/Tutors/Instructors/ Coordinators/Adult Guidance/QA	16

Carrie Archer			
10th Dec 2 hours **H2 Learning**	Blended Learning Focus Group 1	Managers & Coordinators	25
16th Dec 2 hours **H2 Learning**	Blended Learning Focus Group 2	Teachers/Tutors/Instructors/ Coordinators/Adult Guidance/QA	22

Other CPD/Webinars recommended

- AHEAD "Through the Looking Glass" Conference
- AHEAD webinars
- Wriggle Learning webinars
- Camara Education webinars
- FESS webinars
- ETBI webinars
- E- college courses
- Dyslexia Ireland webinars
- Openteach CPD provided by DCU
- National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching & Learning webinars
- NALA webinars
- Socrative webinar
- Showbie webinar
- Microsoft webinars
- Edchat webinars

Appendix 7: Literacy Case Study

Case Study: Themed provision in the basic education – linking social practice model to accredited provision.

Donegal ETB's Basic Education Service uses the social practice model of literacy to engage students. This case study outlines how this approach has been used to deliver thematic provision that map topics and content to learning outcomes.

The first programme to focus entirely on thematic provision was Cultural History and Awareness of Tourism (CHAT). The use of cultural heritage as a theme to support acquisition of a major award in general learning at level 3 created a meaningful learning experience and attracted a cohort of students that may not have engaged. The success of this approach led to the development of other thematic provision.

Sowing the Seeds and Nurturing Learning

A major award at QQI Level 3 that used horticulture as the main theme was rolled out in 2019. Participants were students who may not necessarily have identified themselves as potential 'Literacy' students, but this theme appealed to them and the integration of generic skills facilitated the delivery of more than just horticulture. The programme included the following QQI Level 3modules:

- Communications
- Career Preparation
- Functional Mathematics
- Internet Skills
- Planting & Potting by Hand
- Outdoor Vegetable Crop Production
- Plant Propagation
- Event Participation
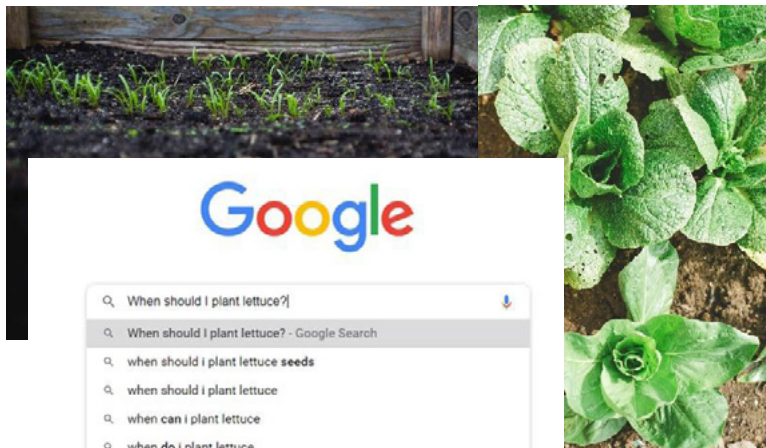
Themed teaching and a combination of indoor and outdoor classrooms worked well to support delivery, with tutors communicating on lesson plans and student progress. Programme delivery focused on 4 integrated projects; Introduction to Plants, Sowing and Reaping, In the Fresh Air, and Moving On.

Enhancements for the Future

The social practice model will be used to explore further opportunities and themes that deliver accredited provision that meets the needs not just of our students but of our wider communities also. This case study concludes with the feedback by one External Authenticator:

"This is an area of study that needs to evolve and be integrated into all levels of education and learning. Exceptional work has gone into the programme design and the assessment process appears to have been very well received by both the assessors and the LR's involved."
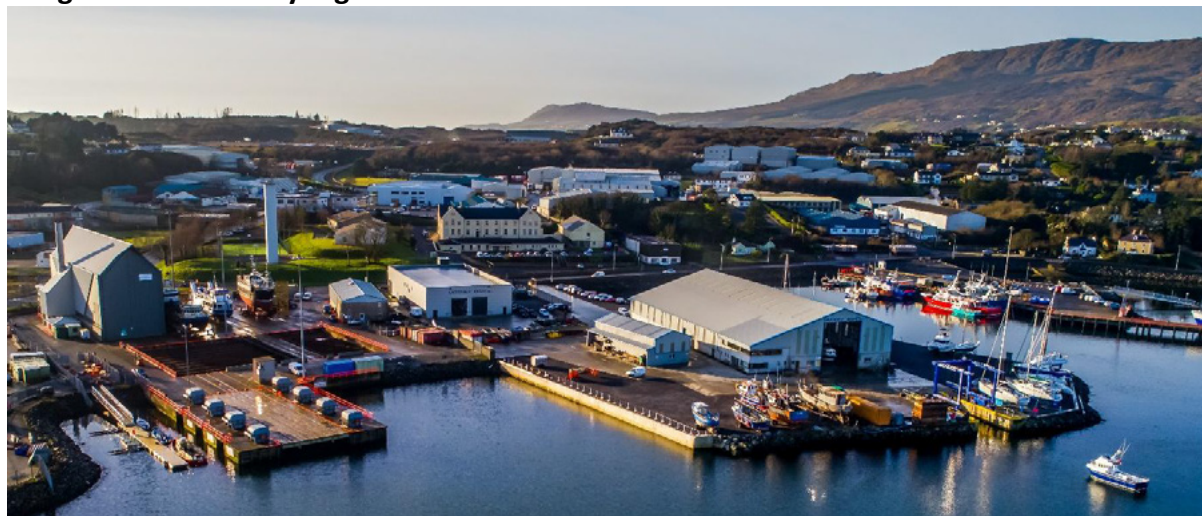
Appendix 8: Enterprise Engagement Case Study

Skills to Advance- Killybegs Harbour Development Group Case Study – focus on Swan Net Gundry

Background/ Brief context:
In December 2019, Donegal ETB's Enterprise Engagement Team met with MMG Welding and Mooney Boats to discuss a synergy between Skills to Advance and Skills for Work and the future growth opportunities in Killybegs as a key Marine Service Port. This meeting arose from previous positive interactions with these organisations with our Apprenticeship Services, as well as training provided by our Welding Instructor Cathal Mc Gee.
Mooney Boats and MMG Welding, both proactive members of the Killybegs Harbour Development Group proposed a meeting with Donegal ETB and the 19 group members. Both Vinny Mc Groary and Dearbhla Kelly made a presentation on the Employer Services to the group on January 29th 2020. The following case study emanates from this initial engagement.

Image: Section of Killybegs Harbour

Case Study Swan Net Gundry
At the meeting on January 29th 2020, Evelyn Kierns, Director of Swan Net Gundry requested a meeting with Dearbhla Kelly, Enterprise Engagement Officer to look at their training needs. On 12th of February, Dearbhla Kelly met with Evelyn Kierns and John Cunnane, their Consultant. They indicated their support for training and innovation and an appetite for excellence in operations. The following two areas were identified as key to enhancing capacity and the confidence of their employees, thereby enabling Swan Net Gundry to remain innovative and proactive

1. **Retail Sales** -the technical skills around selling merchandise that is fishing/outdoors related as well as methods to grow the business. They outlined that this could extend to others in the group such as KER, Mooney's, as well as EK Marine.
2. **ILM- Leadership and Management** - 4 middle management employees.

Enhancement in provision of a response to Retail Sales request:
We carried out research on Retail Sales that fitted Swan Net Gundry's needs as their sales differentiation is based on their technical know-how. We proposed the following workshops *Master Class in Sales and*

In response to the impact of the Covid Lockdown Donegal ETB sponsored a series of workshop based webinars to support the retail sector. All of these events were offered to the Killybegs Harbour Development Group, as we were no longer allowed to deliver training on site or in person.
Swan Net Gundry did partake in the following webinars:

- **Communicating with Your Customers in a Time of Crisis** with Jo Collins of Sales Performance on 14th of April.
- **Restart Retail** series of 3 webinars on Agile Trading, Emerging Trends and Creating a Plan with Miriam Simon.
- **Selling Strategies for a New Landscape**, with Jo Collins
- **Lead Generation**, with Jo Collins.

The above webinars were a direct result of a collaboration with Letterkenny Chamber of Commerce, Donegal Business Network, Donegal Women in Business and sponsored by Donegal ETB under the Skills to Advance Initiative. We also showcased the Diploma in Social Media for Business, the ILM course in Leadership and Management and the Infection Prevention and Control in a pitch at the end of these webinars.

Direct Engagement in Skills to Advance Certified Training

These initial engagements with provided opportunities for participants to progress to two different certified programmes under the Skills to Advance initiative.
From engaging in the above webinars and in order to increase their competitive edge in Sales, two members of Swan Net Gundry progressed to certified training on the **Diploma in Social Media Studies**. Feedback from these participants is provided below:

"Initially, it was intimidating for me returning to learning as it has been a long time since I was at school. However, I found that the course has built up my confidence and makes me want to learn other things. I am able to schedule the learning around my day and generally I get stuck in after the kids go to bed. I find the Tutor super patient and very good at explaining things. There is great value in the learning and practical application for Swan Net's social media and for showcasing merchandise."

Pia Bach, Swan Net Gundry, Killybegs

"I find the course very beneficial and how it could give us a marketing advantage going forward. I find online learning really suits me as I find it easy to concentrate and to manage my additional learning after work"

Christopher Murrin, Swan Net Gundry, Killybegs

After some communication with Director of Swan Net Gundry in June, she confirmed that 4 staff would also do the **Certificate in Leadership and Management**. She also outlined that they required Digital Skills-IT Support around Excel. In hindsight, we should have made the referral to Skills for Work at that point as the participants' digital skills provided challenges during the course.

The group had their first online session on 14th July in a boardroom at the company. Paddy Kelly, Enterprise Engagement with DETB communicated regularly via the MS Teams portal. There were 16 participants in the overall group with participants from Swan Net Gundry, Abbotts and Optum.

We followed up with Swan Nets on 12th of July with an offer of IT support training. On the 26th of August, Dearbhla Kelly arranged a feedback session with Evelyn Kierns and Angela Sherlock of Swan Net Gundry. The positives highlighted were as follows:

We followed up with Swan Nets on 12th of July with an offer of IT support training. On the 26th of August, Dearbhla Kelly arranged a feedback session with Evelyn Kierns and Angela Sherlock of Swan Net Gundry. The positives highlighted were as follows:

‣ The course was helping build a strong management team which is in line with Evelyn's vision as Director as she is keen to build the capacity of the management team.

‣ The 1-1 sessions were really beneficial with the Tutor, as participants could prepare questions in advance and that the tutor gave great direction.

‣ The assignments around problem solving were really relevant and challenging and developed critical thinking skills within the team.

‣ The course itself makes managers very aware of their managerial role, the needs of the employees and of the need to work their way to find a solution.

‣ It is a great team building exercise for the team to do the course together.

However, it was very apparent that their participants were struggling on two levels- from a digital skills perspective and with the standards required of a level 6 course. In response to their challenges we negotiated a range of steps to support these participants, which are outlined below.

Quality Improvements/ Enhancements

We provided a range of responses to the difficulties Swan Net Gundry participants encountered, which included additional MS Teams training, Digital Skills training in MS Office over an 8-week period delivered by Skills for Work, onsite visits and discussions, as well as additional supports on site from the Tutor. From that on site visit, it became clear that the employees felt pressured into doing the course by the company.

Swan Net Gundry employees on the Diploma in Social Media for Business completed their programmes. Whereas, the ILM participants chose not to continue. The door remains open to Swan Net Gundry and the Director was very appreciative of the support by the ETB and from an internal succession planning point of view was disappointed in the results with the ILM course.

Recommendations

● The learning from this case study highlights the need to do a digital skills audit and assessment of abilities prior to the roll out of the 2021 ILM courses with manufacturing companies.

● Our approach to Gallagher's Bakery, where participants for the next cohort are based, has been informed by our learning here as they have a similar workforce profile.

● We have offered MS Training to all 300 staff to upskill in digital skills and we focused on the L5 in ILM Leadership and Management for Shift Work Managers and will encourage a progression onto Level 6.

● We will outline that employees should choose to do training rather than feeling forced into training programmes by the Company.

● In the case study above, we endeavoured to respond as quickly as possible during the lockdown to put our learning online, whereas our full complement of supports was not available until the end of August 2020.

In 2020 and to date in 2021, as an organisation we have remained strategic in all our relationships with the Killybegs Harbour Development Group as we recognise the scale and potential of Killybegs as a service marine port. We have kept the communication channels fully alive with the group throughout the three lockdowns. We have plans in place for the upskilling and recertification of welders as well as CAD and Solid Works for key Engineering Companies. We have strategically placed, MMG Welding on our panel discussion for Enterprise Week on SMEs Weathering Covid and Brexit Storms using Digitalisation and online learning.

We have also secured a place on the Killybegs Cluster Group along with LYIT, Donegal County Council, LEO, and the Killybegs Harbour Development Group. We will continue to be part of meetings and certified training responses to keep supplying the pipeline of much needed future skills flowing to Killybegs.

Appendix 9: RPL Case Study

Case Study: Recognition of Prior Learning for an Award

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is a key process within Donegal ETB's FET Service. This case study outlines the development of Donegal ETB's RPL practice.

Donegal ETB's initial engagement with RPL was through a collaborative project with the Defence Forces which was implemented in 2016. The overall objective of the project was to validate the knowledge, skills and competencies acquired by Privates outside the formal learning environment. The implementation process followed the four stages outlined in the Guidelines for Validating Non-Formal and Informal Learning CEDFOP (2015). The stages are: identification; documentation; assessment and certification.

The results were wide ranging:
- Between 2016 and 2018, 20 Defence Force personnel gained 6 major and 5 minor awards at levels 3, and 10 major and 15 minor awards at level 5. All had readily recognisable skills and competences that were not supported by formal accreditation.
- A national project, TOBAR, was rolled out between the ETB sector and the Defence Forces to implement and use the RPL process to validate skills, knowledge and competences gained through their work.
- A handbook to support FET Practitioners implement RPL was developed and FET staff participated in RPL Workshops. Collaboration between Donegal ETB and Cork Institute of Technology resulted in a RPL Handbook for FET Practitioners.

In respect of Donegal ETB's RPL practice, this project identified the need to move away from the module assessment criteria and focus on the learning outcomes. Practice and competence continued to grow. Frontline administration staff and the Adult Guidance Staff achieved awards through RPL. This enhanced their understanding of the process and validated skills they had gained through workplace experiential learning. In 2019, 214 participants achieved awards through the RPL process. The interim RPL policy which underpinned the Defence Force collaboration was replaced with a FET service wide RPL policy.

In June 2020, Donegal ETB embarked on a second RPL collaborative project, with a focus on validating the competences of care sector employees (VCCSE). This time the partners are Limerick and Clare ETB and Letterkenny Institute of Technology. Destination awards include the Level 5 Major awards in Health Service Skills and Healthcare Support. The range of modules are: Care of the Older Person, Care Skills, Safety and Health at Work, Work Practice, Team Working, Work Experience, Palliative Care, Activity of Living Patient Care, Customer Service, Activities of Living Patient Care, Nursing Theory and Practice and Personal Effectiveness.

By the end of 2020:
- 30 staff from both ETBs participated in a Level 9 Special Purpose Award in RPL.
- 26 experienced care sector employees in Donegal gained a range of level 5 awards through participation in the project. 5 of these achieved the major award in Health Care Support, 7 achieved 4 modules, and another 10 achieved between 1 and 3 modules each.

- A RPL staffing structure for the ETB Sector is being explored.

The continued development of RPL will require carefully designed procedures that will ensure that it is fully accepted as an inclusive and valid process that acknowledges all learning.

Appendix 10: Donegal ETB Communications Case Study

**Case Study: A Digital Approach to Communications - #GoFurtherWithDonegalETB**

Background

Communications is a strategic management function in any organisation and in 2017, Donegal ETB's Director of FET and Chief Executive made the decision to enable the post of Communications Officer in order to clearly communicate to the communities it serves across the county and its islands who Donegal ETB is and what it does. The creation of this role was accompanied by the creation of a Communications Advisory Group, comprising staff with various skill sets in this area and chaired by the Chief Executive. This advisory group provides organisation wide strategic direction on the development and implementation of Donegal ETB's communications structures and operations in seven key communication areas: Strategic, Media/Press, Digital, Corporate, Internal, Crisis and Marketing.

This has resulted in a much more coherent and consistent approach which has greatly increased the quality of its communications output, resulting in a huge growth in awareness of its provision in recent years. This case study focuses on its approach to digital communications which Donegal ETB has placed significant efforts on over the last four years, developing its digital communications outputs through the use of its website and social media platforms to raise awareness of its brand, communicate its work and engage with its many communities across the county and its islands and external audiences and stakeholders to deliver on its public service remit.

How it started versus How it's going

Following the creation of Donegal ETB, considerable time was spent developing a new website, its 'shop front' (launched in 2019), in both English and Irish, to allow it to better present and explain the many functions of a complex organisation.
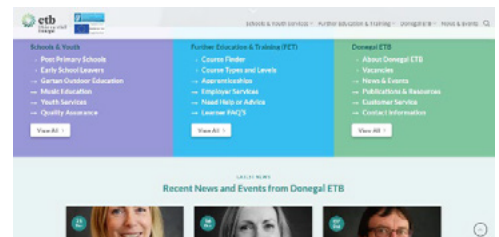
This was enhanced by the creation of a number of animated explainer videos to explain the three pillars of the organisation. A FET course finder was built into the website and is consistently its second most viewed page. In January 2021 there were 9.3k user visits to the website overall.

Donegal ETB has hugely increased how it digitally communicates its FET provision by growing the number of social media platforms its uses and taking a consistent and planned approach to growing its reach and engagement with current and potential students. When its Communications Officer took over running the only two platforms Donegal ETB used in 2017, Twitter and Facebook, it had approximately 1,000 and 1,500 followers on both platforms and little mention of FET; by February 2021, these have grown to over 3,500 and 9,000 followers respectively and the ETB has joined YouTube, LinkedIn and Instagram to enable it to communicate to different audiences.

Metrics highlight how it has also increased its engagement. The 2018 report *The State of Social Media in The Public Sector* (Digital Training Institute) which analysed the social media accounts of 330 public sector organisations from 10 October-12 November 2018 in terms of metrics such as followers and engagement rate found that the average engagement rate for a public sector body on Facebook was 0.3% (Facebook

considers 'Above 1% as Good Engagement; 0.5%-0.99% Average Engagement; Below 0.5% You need to revisit your content and messaging to align them with the needs of your audience') and 0.4% on Twitter (Twitter considers '0%-0.02% Low Engagement; 0.2%-0.09% Good Engagement; 0.09%-0.33% High Engagement; 0.33%-1% Very High Engagement'). The results for Donegal ETB were very positive in terms of engagement:

- Donegal ETB's Facebook page had the fifth highest Engagement Rate out of the 330 organisations analysed and the highest number of followers out of all ETB accounts in the country at 1.38% (the next nearest ETB was placed 36) which is considered Good Engagement by Facebook.
- Donegal ETB had the third most engaging Twitter account out of all 330 organisations analysed at 1.7% (the next nearest ETB account was placed at 27) which is considered a Very High Engagement rate by Twitter.

A further analysis of Donegal ETB's Twitter account in February 2021 highlights how it has increased its impressions (the number of people who see its tweets) from 138,000 in 2016 to over 1.9 million impressions in 2020, while it's engagement rate on LinkedIn is consistently above 6% (for example it maintained a 6.73% engagement rate for the 30 days up to 3 February) - a 2% engagement rate is generally considered good.

One of the many attributes that has contributed to this has been investment in its visual communications assets. The Communications Officer has begun creating a bank of professional images to ensure high quality, relatable outputs. This has been coupled with a reduced reliance on stock images and editorial oversight provided by the Communications Officer on additional images submitted by staff. Many of these professional images of our own students and staff can be seen throughout this report.

Another aspect of this engagement is the use of Facebook messenger. The messenger function allows the general public to contact Donegal ETB on a 24/7 basis and in the main, these messages relate to the FET Service. They are usually answered quite quickly and often outside of traditional office hours. This enhances the ETB's approachability and public service remit.

As a new organisation, an inclusive approach to building its digital communities was required. With this in mind a number of personalised hashtags were developed - #WeAreDonegalETB and #GoFurtherWithDonegalETB - to support this process across the whole organisation. These are used by schools, Gartan Outdoor Education and Training Centre on their social media accounts and by FET through the ETB's own accounts and those belonging to Youthreach which

has its own suite of social media accounts, the three schools that run PLC courses and Apprenticeships and Adult Guidance which have their own Twitter accounts. This has also been supported visually. In June 2019, Donegal ETB updated its logo to the Pride colours across all its social media platforms during Pride month in solidarity with its LGBTI+ students and staff, the first ETB in the country to do so and this received a hugely positive reaction. This now happens every June and also in October to support the national Stand Up Week initiative.

Within the overall communications remit, considerable time has also been spent developing relationships with local media. From a digital communications perspective, a valuable working partnership has been developed with the largest online media platform in the county (www.donegaldaily.com, with a 100k+ following on Facebook and 20k+ following on Twitter) to advertise specific courses from time to time but to specifically develop and publish a monthly advertorial highlighting courses through the experiences of former FET students. The purpose of this has been threefold – to increase the standing of FET and the FET Service, to increase knowledge and understanding of the ETB and to guarantee publication of Donegal ETB's FET and corporate communication outputs. Many of these student stories are now embedded in the relevant FET programme sections of the website. This particular approach has been complimented by the development of a YouTube video playlist of student testimonials to support course promotion.

In June 2019, the Communications Officer was asked to present Donegal ETB's digital communications journey up to that point to as a case study, '*Integrating Social Media across Our Organisation*', at the second Public Sector Digital Marketing Summit in Dublin to over two hundred public sector marketers from across the broad spectrum of the Irish public service.

To compliment this work, the Communications Officer began the process of branding and rebranding a number of programmes and offerings for school leavers in 2019/2020. In terms of branding, specific promotional materials have been created to highlight FET options for school leavers (and an adapted version of this for others), including highlighting reasons to apply for a FET course and creating a dedicated suite of online (and print) materials for PLC options which are delivered by three post-primary schools who, until now, had undertaken their own promotional activities. A dedicated promotional brochure, flyer, posters, pop up banners, social media assets, promotional videos and student testimonial videos have been developed.

Work has also been completed on rebranding the Youthreach programme which is viewed as having a particular stigma attached to it, to highlight its fit within the overall FET Service. Previous to the creation of Donegal ETB, Youthreach, a programme for young early school leavers, was part of the Adult Education Service, a fit that was difficult for many to understand. The creation of the FET Service provided a better home; a new logo, brochure, flyer, GIFs, pop up banners and updated social media accounts highlight this fit with a more professional approach.

The increased use of digital communications has also required the development of key policies and guidelines to support communications across the organisation. The Communications Officer has developed quite a number, including (1) Advertising Guidelines for FET Contractors, (2) Advertising Guidelines for FET re Print, (3) Branding Guidelines re Name Use, (4) Email Signature Template, (5) Guidelines for Developing Promotional Videos in Schools, (6) Guidelines for Social Media Accounts to Promote Student Projects, (7) Image Consent Form and (8) Social Media Usage Policy and Guidelines. All documents are available in English and Irish.

Future Enhancements
Donegal ETB has made huge strides in the last number of years in improving how it communicates its work but there is a lot more to do in all areas. From a digital perspective, further work will be carried out to build the YouTube playlist of FET Student Stories as a standalone playlist and embedding into the website.

To compliment this, plans are currently under development for a soon to be launched ETB blog to allow people to 'get under the skin' of Donegal ETB with stories that are too informal for website news and too long for social media posts. It is intended that the blogs will be written by ETB students, staff and stakeholders from across the organisation. By involving FET students and staff, the blog will empower FET students in particular, to make a richer contribution to sharing the story of Donegal ETB's FET Service through their eyes and their experiences, which will be widely disseminated but held in one central depository.

Additionally, there are tentative plans to further enhance the website by exploring an online messaging or chat function.

Development work is currently ongoing on a number of other policies and guidelines also require development to underpin a whole organisation approach to brand Donegal ETB.

Examples of Public Information and Communications

Donegal Daily – Advertorials 2019 and 2020

1. **January 2019** - Jason Tastes Success in the Kitchen After Returning to Education with Donegal ETB
   http://www.donegaldaily.com/2019/01/14/jason-tastes-success-in-the-kitchen-after-returning-to-education-with-donegal-etb/

2. **February 2019** - From Quitting School at 16 to Software Development – Piaras Reaches His Goals with ETB
   http://www.donegaldaily.com/2019/02/04/from-quitting-school-at-16-to-software-development-piaras-reaches-his-goals-with-etb/

3. **March 2019** - Inspirational Woman Carves Out a Non-Traditional Career with the Help of Donegal ETB
   https://www.donegaldaily.com/2019/03/08/inspirational-woman-carves-out-a-non-traditional-career-with-the-help-of-donegal-etb/

4. **April 2019 -** Seamus McDonagh Cultivates a New Career with Donegal ETB
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9. **08 March 2020** - Women Steeled for Success in Welding
   https://www.donegaldaily.com/2020/03/08/women-steeled-for-success-in-welding/

10. **03 April 2020** - How Anthony's job prospects grew in the field of Horticulture
    https://www.donegaldaily.com/2020/04/03/how-anthonys-job-prospects-grew-in-the-field-of-horticulture/

11. **05 May 2020** – *Message in a Bulletin Leads Donegal Woman Back to Employment*
    https://www.donegaldaily.com/2020/05/05/message-in-a-news-bulletin-leads-donegal-woman-back-to-employment/

12. **02 June 2020** – *Post Leaving Cert Course Open Doors for Donegal Students*
    https://www.donegaldaily.com/2020/06/02/post-leaving-cert-courses-open-doors-for-donegal-students/

13. **01 July 2020 -** *Irene joins community with confidence with guidance from Donegal ETB*
    https://www.donegaldaily.com/2020/07/01/irene-joins-community-with-confidence-with-guidance-from-donegal-etb/

14. **04 August 2020 -** *How IT Courses Helped Tiffany and Meghan Click onto New Skills*

https://www.donegaldaily.com/2020/08/04/how-it-courses-helped-tiffany-and-megan-click-onto-new-skills/

15. **01 September 2020** - *Patrick counts up his options with an Accounting Technician course*
https://www.donegaldaily.com/2020/09/01/donegal-man-adds-to-his-achievements-with-accounting-at-donegal-etb/

16. **06 October 2020 -** Jasmine crafts a career with Youthreach
https://www.donegaldaily.com/2020/10/06/jasmine-crafts-a-career-with-youthreach/

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Adult Guidance: Career Support for Adults during COVID-19

01 April:
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22 April:
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Appendix 11: Community Education Support Programme Case Study

Case Study: Community Education Research
Donegal ETB's Community Education Support Programme supports Community Education Providers to organize and deliver low-cost locally based education opportunities for groups of people who do not usually avail of such opportunities.   This case study outlines the background and outcomes of research which Donegal ETB and Donegal Community Education Forum undertook in 2018 on community education in the county. The key objectives of the research were to provide an assessment of the current nature of community education and its capacity to deliver as a transformative education process within Donegal.

Purpose, People, Process: Community Education in Donegal 2018 was the outcome of the research which included survey, focus groups and one-to-one interviews community education providers and participants supported by Donegal ETB. The findings of the report established that community education in Donegal fulfilled an important role in engaging people within their community. It also suggested the Donegal ETB Community Education Support Programme was diverse in the issues and content of its courses; and integral in holding the space for non-formal education whilst providing opportunities for participants to do accredited training. The report also commended the programme's focus on individuals and communities in the broadest sense, but especially its focus on those affected by poverty, exclusion, racism and disadvantage. The focus on the local as being important, but at the same time an awareness of the global, not least the challenge of climate change and community gardens were also acknowledged as important signposts to Donegal ETBs focus and planning towards building a sustainable future.

A number of recommendations for consideration by the Donegal Community Education Forum, Donegal ETB's Community Education Support Programme and all stakeholders involved in community education in Donegal were made as result of the report.   These concerned the Vision, Values and Principles of Community Education; governance and leadership of the Community Education Forum; Teaching and Resourcing; an Annual Providers Forum and Community Education and Community Development Collaboration. Donegal ETB's Community Education Support Programme has started the process of responding to these recommendations resulting in:

- A **Toolkit for Community Education Providers** was developed, with information for providers, tutors and participants. In 2020, the tutor section was published as a stand-alone resource.
- A **Community Leadership project** which aimed to facilitate collaboration by strengthening relationships and provide training opportunities for community leaders across Donegal and managed by Donegal ETB and the two local Partnership companies, IDP and DLDC. As a result of this, 69 participants across 10 community hubs availed of training in QQI L5 Working with Teams and QQI L5 Social Analysis modules. 28 participants achieved one award and 23 both awards. Certification outcomes were deemed to have been somewhat adversely affected by the Coivd-19 emergency. Two structured cross-community/ diversity events brought participants from different hubs together and provided opportunities for shared learning and dialogue.

Recommendations of the research will continue to be implemented and more supports made available to our providers.
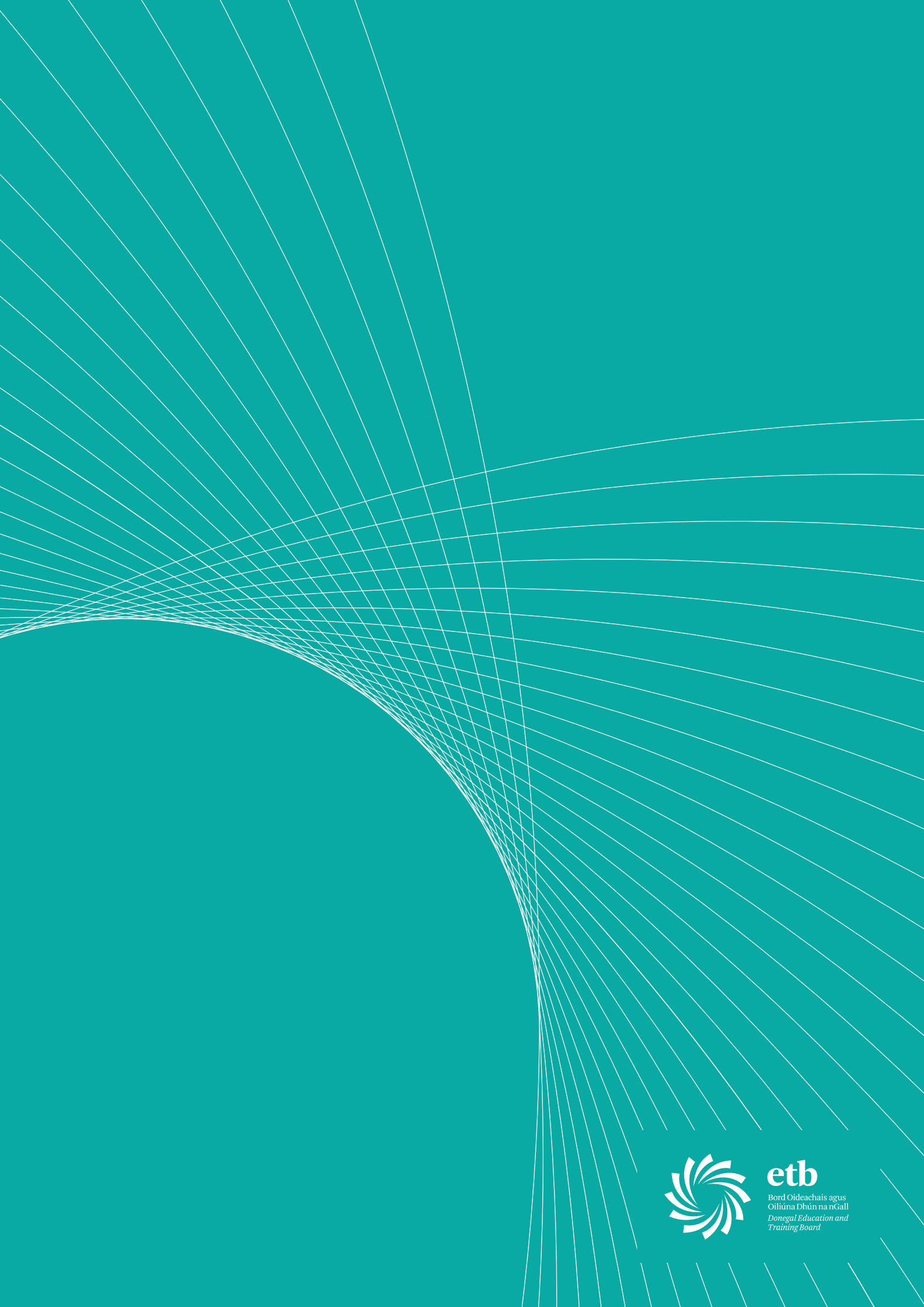
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