

Case Study: Governance and QA in KWETB: changing systems

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The back-story: Legislative change; Two VECs; Further education, Training; Common Awards System; Quality Assuring Assessment; Programme Development, Delivery and Review...

With complex change came the realisation of the need to maintain services, while at the same time embracing change.

There were immediate pressures which lead to the evolution of the current system in KWETB, including:

- **Learner results** – robust systems in place BUT... Further Education Vs Training. Necessity drove development: to ensure that certification would continue to be issued during transitions. **Responsibility/Sign-off:** EDO (Further Education)/ AEO (Training)
- **'Programme development'** (production/development of materials) linked to 'area-based Programme Planning. **Responsibility/Sign-off:** Area-based Coordinators and Principals – AEOs - SMT
 - Driven by FET planning and linked to decision-making
 - A number of awarding bodies
 - Market-led rather than strategic – 'Is it out there?' 'Does it meet my needs?' 'Can I manipulate it to meet my needs?' 'Where can I find it?'
 - Functional rather than 'Blue skies'
 - Developments based on availability of other funding (e.g Dormant Accounts), and some special projects
 - A plethora of validated programmes – ETBI National development process; QA58s; KWETB Validated programmes.
- Planning timelines influenced by timeframes for inputting courses into **PLSS**.
- **Further Education** – Single point of contact for information about what is available/what is possible/ what can be adapted and used now.
- **Changes and innovation based on absolute need** – little room/space/resourcing for innovation/in-depth development. Culturally, planning is not linked to timeframes associated with development of new initiatives. R&D is a luxury.
- **Self-evaluation** – FE – analysis of EA and IV reports; Appeals and Awards (and lately of Programme Database) to identify areas for improvement. Change in IV reporting to gather data on Student Support policies. Training sector operated differently. **Responsibility/sign-off:** EDO/AEOs

The System: What we do now (Some of the solutions)

Support Structure for Quality Assurance in Further Education – 1.5 people

- SharePoint platforms for Further Education – QA Site and Community of Practice
- On-line submission of estimates (5 times per year)
- External Authenticator Panel – from recruitment to payment
- Area-based/central Results Approval
- Management of Appeals

**Provider and centre ownership of quality and distributed responsibility is really important.*

CPD : Collaboration for Good Practice and Problem Solving

Developing a positive culture of quality in the organisation, based on innovative delivery, analysis of assessment and certification data and issues arising - Centred on the FE sector at the moment. WHY?

- Telling stories - the narrative, and celebration of achievement
- Learning from one another
- Dissemination of good practice
- Information updates
- Presenting challenging issues/outcomes for discussion following reviews in an open and safe environment - no wrongs - just room for improvement/development.

What data? What evidence?

Quantitative and Qualitative

- New data sources – Programme and Learner Databases
- Changing what we know - we know more about the whole organisation and participants
- Number of courses; Number of awards; location of awards delivered - challenges - highlights levels of equity and inequity
- Qualitative data informs provision of CPD and Programme Review (EA/IV/Appeals)
- QQI Awards Data reviews
- Potential for comparative analysis

Questions raised

Factors to be explored

- Where does curriculum development rest or sit? Who should be responsible for this? Who takes responsibility for programme development (not standard development)?
- Is a single, simple integrated system within large organisations like ETBs desirable/feasible?
- Where, and how, will Quality Assurance link with wider elements of ETB governance – HR; Corporate Services Governance and Finance; Buildings....?
- How might we create a system where all personnel involved understand and come to know it well?
- What is the most effective way to achieve knowledge transfer in this area?
- How might we create an environment where there is understanding of the role of governance as a mechanism for relieving pressure and enabling rather imposing more pressure

What are the challenges gaps/ obstacles?

- Quality Assurance "Gap": perceived gap between central or senior management/governance and management of Quality Assurance (Really? Or just imagined?)
- Communications cascades - dependent on plethora of different groupings slowly moving to shared identity – alignment is a challenge – mission, strategy, services...
- Challenge of hierarchies
- Challenge building cyclical approaches which include scoping and development of projects

How has work/ thinking on governance assisted work on QA?

- Focus shifting to quality as a value
- Quality Assurance as a mechanism to support the achievement of greater quality
- Quality Assurance – new paradigms for administration built on equity - administrative functions need to be clear and unambiguous in order to contribute to, and support an education and training service that makes the best offer to learners; employers and society.
- Linking of functions is important – crosscutting teams doing work defined by clearly understood strategy/mission
- FE QA Strategy: Driving principles behind QA System: Deming's Quality Cycle and Peter Senge's Five Disciplines (Personal Mastery; Mental Models/understanding; Building Shared Vision; Team Learning; Systems Thinking).
- Lightbulb moments:
 - Signing documents that state that the learner has achieved a national standard is a significant statement to other stakeholders with legal connotations and consequences
 - Based on this – each element of the jigsaw is important and cannot be excluded
 - Corporate identity –clearly stated and robust policy and procedures enhance the brand and identity of the organisation

Areas of governance that are tangible (FE):

- Management of programme versions
- Communication to managers and Principals
- Programme Development and Approval
- Internal Verification; External Authentication; Staff Development
- Bespoke and general improvement plans
- Planned strategic approach to CPD

- Staff Recruitment (managed through existing HR processes, but not related to programme requirements)
- Facilities - in some cases managed, but in other cases, ad hoc approach has caused issues
- Reporting to the ETB: How much does the ETB know?
- Two weekly reporting to AEOs a norm for all provision except PLC. PLC Principals report to Director of Schools.

Areas of governance that are tangible (Training):

- Distribution of assessment materials and programmes from centrally held archive
- Internal Verification Process - labour intensive
- Little trust in professional integrity of assessors/ focus on standard and consistency through control
- Control is important
- 'Off the shelf' assessments and 'off the shelf' programmes.
- Inherited FAS/Solas systems
- Planning closely linked to needs identified through DSP protocols
- Tendering and procurement processes applied to selection of contractors –robust procurement procedures
- Apprenticeship - driven by national approaches to QA
- At local level -governance applies to supporting learners

Recommendations and thoughts

- Scope for national supports to ensure integrity and neutrality - External Authentication; Validation of Programmes (QQI); Curriculum Development; Evaluators' panel; Self-evaluation or monitoring team for sector at national level/inspection team.
- WHO drives integration of governance and quality into strategic plans?
- Need for clear scoping and planning of goals and tasks - there is a sense of thinking 'what you have you hold' - holding on to the equivalent of household clutter
- Lack of 'blue skies thinking' - allowing time to imagine what might be
- IT competence - leadership of this depends on capacity or humility or both of leaders concerned
- Barriers between administration/knowledge of education and training/how people learn/curriculum development and design vs organisation of the processes. The hierarchical system is problematic,
- TRUST is important - but for trust to exist there must be honesty - the data is revealing stuff that can no longer be hidden, but we need to perceive it as an opportunity rather than a reason for feeling shame.