

Submission from QQI to the

Consultation on the Further Education and Training Strategy

2020-2024

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QQI

Quality and Qualifications Ireland
Dearbhú Cáilíochta agus Cáilíochtaí Éireann

Adding Value to Qualifications



QQI welcomes the opportunity to make a formal submission to the development of the Further Education and Training (FET) strategy. In making this, we take into account the consultation document, our initial engagement with SOLAS on the next strategy and the six themes identified as being core to the next strategy. We welcome and support SOLAS in leading the development of the next FET strategy.

Based on our work and our strategic aims for qualifications and quality assurance in FET (see Appendix attached)¹, we make the case for the next FET strategy to address three inter-related themes:

- Articulate a vision for the quality of FET
- Enhance the standing of FET through critical evaluation, transparency and accountability to learners
- Provide flexibility and resources to deliver high quality education and training

Articulate a vision for the quality of FET that is shared by stakeholders.

SOLAS' vision for "FET programmes to be recognised for their demonstrable benefits to learners, enterprise and communities, where FET is valued for its effectiveness and quality" is a useful starting point for developing a shared vision for FET. A shared vision of quality can create shared expectations and clarity for the many stakeholders in FET. This must take private providers and awarding/qualifications bodies into account, given their importance in meeting learner and employment needs and that legislation will enable the National Framework of Qualifications to be opened up to other awarding bodies.²

Enhance the standing of FET through critical evaluation, transparency and accountability to learners

We note that among SOLAS' primary responsibilities is that of "promoting the standing of Further Education and Training". If FET is to be viewed as a valid and integral component in Ireland's education and training system, enhancing the reputation (and, by

¹ QQI Statement of Strategy 2019-2021

² Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) (Amendment) Bill 2018, final stage, 10 July 2019
<https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/bills/bill/2018/95/>



extension, the attractiveness) of FET should feature as an explicit strand and ambition in the next strategy. This is necessary as the Department of Education and Skills is moving towards an integrated framework for tertiary education³.

The mid-term review of the current FET strategy recommended that this be addressed through demonstrating impact and value. We argue that this needs to be done through critical self-evaluation by Education and Training Boards (ETBs) themselves through developing their capacity to interrogate the quality of provision, undertaking peer reviews and by bringing public transparency to evaluations of provision. It requires the systematic engagement of learners in the different levels of ETB quality assurance mechanisms (class, centre, ETB).

We suggest that key measures to enhance the standing of FET include:

- create and make transparent mechanisms to assure and enhance the quality of FET provision; and
- support and invest in activity to drive innovation and quality enhancement such as targeted funding
- FET graduate tracking⁴
- raise public awareness of the diversity of learning modes and opportunities available to FET learners

These measures can impact considerably on the outcomes and opportunities for learners and, by extension, for industry and society more broadly.

Provide flexibility and resources to deliver high quality education and training

Our work with ETBs on quality assurance shows that it is taking significant time for them to develop and integrate quality assurance systems. The quality assurance system is the backbone for developing curricula, teaching and learning, assessment, maintaining standards and enhancing quality etc..This is because of restrictions in their ability to

³ QQI considers that the term includes FET, higher education, professional education and training and initial VET. This draws attention to the pathways that could be developed or strengthened within and across the tertiary framework and with the schools' sector.

⁴ See CSO Further Education Outcomes, 2010-2016, July 2019 <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-feo/furthereducationoutcomes-graduationyears2010-2016/>



assign staff to this work and to design the systems that they would like to have. This limits the ability of ETBs to take ownership of quality and to demonstrate the value of their education and training.

Our experience with ETBs who develop new apprenticeships and new programmes for validation shows that staff largely engage on the basis of goodwill and dedication rather than on the basis of strategic resource allocation by ETBs. This is not sustainable. Programme development requires significant knowledge, expertise and time to develop materials, standards, assessment tools, and especially in the case of apprenticeships to build and manage partnerships with employers.

A shared vision and understanding, amongst ETBs, SOLAS and the Department of Education and Skills, for the quality and standing of FET, with associated goals and objectives could address the inter-related issues of priorities, leadership, funding and contract inflexibility that inhibit the development and integration of quality assurance systems and the ability of ETBs, for example, to develop national or local curricula/courses/programmes and, therefore to offer timely, valid options to learners and employers.

RELATED MATTERS:

Our forthcoming Green Paper on Qualifications aims to engage stakeholders in a discussion of a shared vision for the qualifications systems and how it may evolve. This will deal with many of the elements proposed for the next FET strategy e.g. pathways, flexibility and responsiveness in programme development, deployment of resources, collaboration across FET and HE and links with employment.

We consider that the next strategy also needs to give attention to guidance, the international dimension, in particular Ireland's performance in skills matching (where enhanced tracking of FET graduates will be important)⁵ and the on-going work in the future of VET in Europe⁶, and Brexit.

Finally, while we understand that the next FET strategy is confined to public FET, we suggest that there is a value in clarifying the term 'public FET'.⁷ We also support the

⁵ See European Skills Index and FET Graduate Outcomes:
<https://skillspanorama.cedefop.europa.eu/sites/default/files/Country%20Fiches%202018.pdf> ,
<https://www.qqi.ie/News/Pages/Further-Education-Outcomes-2010---2016.aspx>

⁶ See <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/changing-nature-and-role-vocational-education-and-training-vet-europe>

⁷ E.g. offered in public institutions and publicly funded, offered in public institutions but privately funded, offered in private institutions but publicly funded, offered in private institutions but publicly regulated, offered in public institutions but privately regulated (ETB/City and Guilds)



Intention to further invest in the FET data infrastructure and benefits of sharing relevant data and evaluations.

Appendix: Key areas of QQI's work in FET (public and private)

- Supporting the further development and integration of quality assurance systems in ETBs as a means to bolster public confidence in FET provision
- Streamlining QQI awards so that providers can deliver more flexible, responsive programmes
- Certifying learners
- Facilitating providers to take greater ownership of education and training programmes, from developing standards and curricula to assessment
- Opening up the National Framework of Qualifications to a wider range of trustworthy awarding bodies to provide assurances to FET providers, regulators and funders about the quality of the awards those bodies make and to allowing such awards to be integrated into NFQ qualifications
- Providing assurances about the *bona fides* (e.g. legal personality, ownership, corporate governance and financial viability) of private providers to offer high quality education and training and to protect learners in the event of unforeseen closure or cessation of programmes
- Continuing to quality assure and validate new apprenticeship programmes
- Providing reliable information on qualifications through the Irish Register of Qualifications
- Providing analysis and evaluations of measures to improve quality
- Engagement in international networks and cooperation on FET matters (including with peer bodies in the UK)