

# QQI Review Report 2021

Inaugural Review  
of Donegal Education and Training Board



QQI REVIEW

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# Foreword

Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) is responsible for the external quality assurance of further and higher education and training in Ireland. One of QQI's most important statutory functions is to ensure that the quality assurance procedures that providers have in place have been implemented and are effective. To this end, QQI conducts external reviews of providers of further and higher education and training on a cyclical basis. QQI is currently conducting the inaugural review of quality assurance in education and training boards. Cyclical review is an element of the broader quality framework for ETBs composed of: statutory quality assurance guidelines; quality assurance approval; annual quality reporting; dialogue meetings; the National Framework of Qualifications; validation of programmes; and, most crucially, the quality assurance system established by each ETB. The inaugural review of quality assurance in education and training boards runs from 2020-2023. During this period, QQI will organise and oversee independent reviews of each of the sixteen education and training boards. On conclusion of the sixteen reviews, a sectoral report will also be produced identifying system-level observations and findings.

The inaugural review evaluates the implementation and effectiveness of the quality assurance procedures of each ETB with a particular focus on the arrangements for the governance and management of quality; teaching, learning and assessment; and self-evaluation, monitoring and review. These are considered in the context of the expectations set out in the relevant QQI statutory quality assurance guidelines and adherence to other relevant QQI policies and procedures.

The review methodology is based on the internationally accepted and recognised approach to review:

- a self-evaluation conducted by the provider, resulting in the production of a self-evaluation report;
- an external assessment and site visit by a team of reviewers;
- the publication of a review report including findings and recommendations; and
- a follow-up procedure to review actions taken.

This inaugural review of Donegal Education and Training Board was conducted by an independent review team in line with the Terms of Reference at Appendix A. This is the report of the findings of the review team.

# The Review Team

Each inaugural review is carried out by a team of independent experts and peers. The 2021 inaugural review of Donegal Education and Training Board (Donegal ETB) was conducted by a team of six reviewers selected by QQI. The review team attended a briefing session with QQI on 30 March 2021 and the planning visit to Donegal Education and Training Board took place on 31 March 2021. The main review visit was conducted by the full team between 24 May and 28 May 2021. A full schedule of stakeholder meetings with the review team was held, during which the full review team met with students, staff and external stakeholders.

The timetable for the visit is appended to this report (see Appendix B). As a result of public health restrictions put in place in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, site visits were not possible, and the team briefing and initial meetings, planning and main review visits were rescheduled as virtual visits.

This review of Donegal ETB was conducted by an external review team in line with the terms of reference in Appendix A. This is the report of the findings and evaluation of the review team. In this report, the review team has examined quality assurance (QA) in its totality as it impacts the quality of the ETB's provision. The efficacy of the virtual review process was confirmed by the review team chair on behalf of the review team in the oral feedback report provided to Donegal ETB on the final day of the virtual visit.

## Chair

Aileen McKechnie took up the role of Principal and Chief Executive of South Lanarkshire College in March 2020, where she is responsible to the Board of Management for the financial health, internal organisation, management, and discipline of the college and accountable for managing the finances of the college.

Previous experience includes working for the Scottish Government for 20 years in a variety of roles, including three senior positions in tertiary education policy, most latterly as Director of Advanced Learning and Science, where she was responsible for £3 billion of public funds to secure teaching, learning and good governance and to support research, innovation and science in tertiary institutions and science centres. She also had sponsor responsibility for the Scottish Funding Council, the Students Awards Agency for Scotland and the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership.

Aileen is passionate about lifetime learning and committed to supporting the critical role of the college sector in securing social and economic regeneration, and in providing second (and third) chances for individuals.

She is a graduate of Glasgow University, where she secured an MA (Honours) in French and German and a Master's in Business Administration. She is married with two teenage sons, both still in the education system.

## **Coordinating Reviewer**

Dr Orlaith McCaul is an education specialist with a particular interest in quality assurance and governance. She has worked with the Irish community development sector for over 30 years and has been involved in policy development across the education sector in Ireland and internationally. In 2020, Dr McCaul conducted a thematic analysis of QQI's reengagement process as applied to independent and private providers of FET and HET in 2020. She presented an overview of her report at two QQI peer learning events for future reengagement applicants.

Dr McCaul is an Adjunct Professor at Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada and formerly served as Head of Quality Assurance and Learner Assessment at the Higher Education and Training Awards Council.

## **Learner Representative**

Michael Harte is from Mullingar and is currently employed as an Administrative Assistant with Westmeath GAA. Michael holds a BA in Finance.

Michael has worked in a variety of diverse occupations and in various locations, both in Ireland and the UK. After a long period of unemployment, he returned to full-time education with Longford Westmeath ETB, in their Mullingar FET Centre, completing the QQI Level 4 in IT Skills in 2019, and the QQI Level 5 in Business through Computing in 2020. He enjoyed this experience immensely, which boosted his self-confidence and helped him to make new friends and equipped him with the computer knowledge and IT skillset for a modern office/ administrative working environment.

As the first member of his family to complete secondary and third-level education, and to return to full-time education as a mature student, he has always had a huge interest in education and in the lifelong learning process.

Michael's interests are reading (especially biographies or anything historical), walking, and going to the cinema. Occasionally he and his family like to go horse racing for a family day out.

## **Peer Expert**

Anastasia Crickley led the Dept of Applied Social Studies at Maynooth University until 2015, successfully promoting university access for marginalised and minority groups. She remains committed to furthering the right to lifelong education and training for these groups through her roles as Chairperson of Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre and membership of the Steering Group for the National Action Plan on Equity of Access to Higher Education. She was first chairperson of the EU Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) and a member of the Council of Europe's Convention on National Minorities Advisory Committee.

Anastasia is committed to social justice and human rights including the rights of women, and as a "community worker collective" progress to achieve these. She is chair of Community Work Ireland's policy group, European Director International Association for Community Development, a founder of the Migrants Rights Centre Ireland and member of the National Anti-Racism Committee.

## **Peer Expert**

Rob Schuur studied history at the University of Groningen (Netherlands) and started his career as a teacher of history at a small secondary school in the eastern part of the province of Groningen. After 8 years of teaching, he became vice-principal at a college for vocational education and training for health and social care.

In 2000 (till May 2020) after several merging processes, he was appointed CEO/Principal at Noorderpoort College in Groningen, a college with about 15,000 students and 1400 employees with programmes at different levels for all disciplines (except agriculture).

For more than six years, Rob was a member of the board of the MBO Raad, the branch-organisation for VET institutes. At the European level he was a board member of EFVET. In the Netherlands he was involved in setting up the system of quality control in VET. Since 2012 Rob has been a member and vice president of the National Education Board, the main council (10 members) of the Minister of Education and members of Parliament.

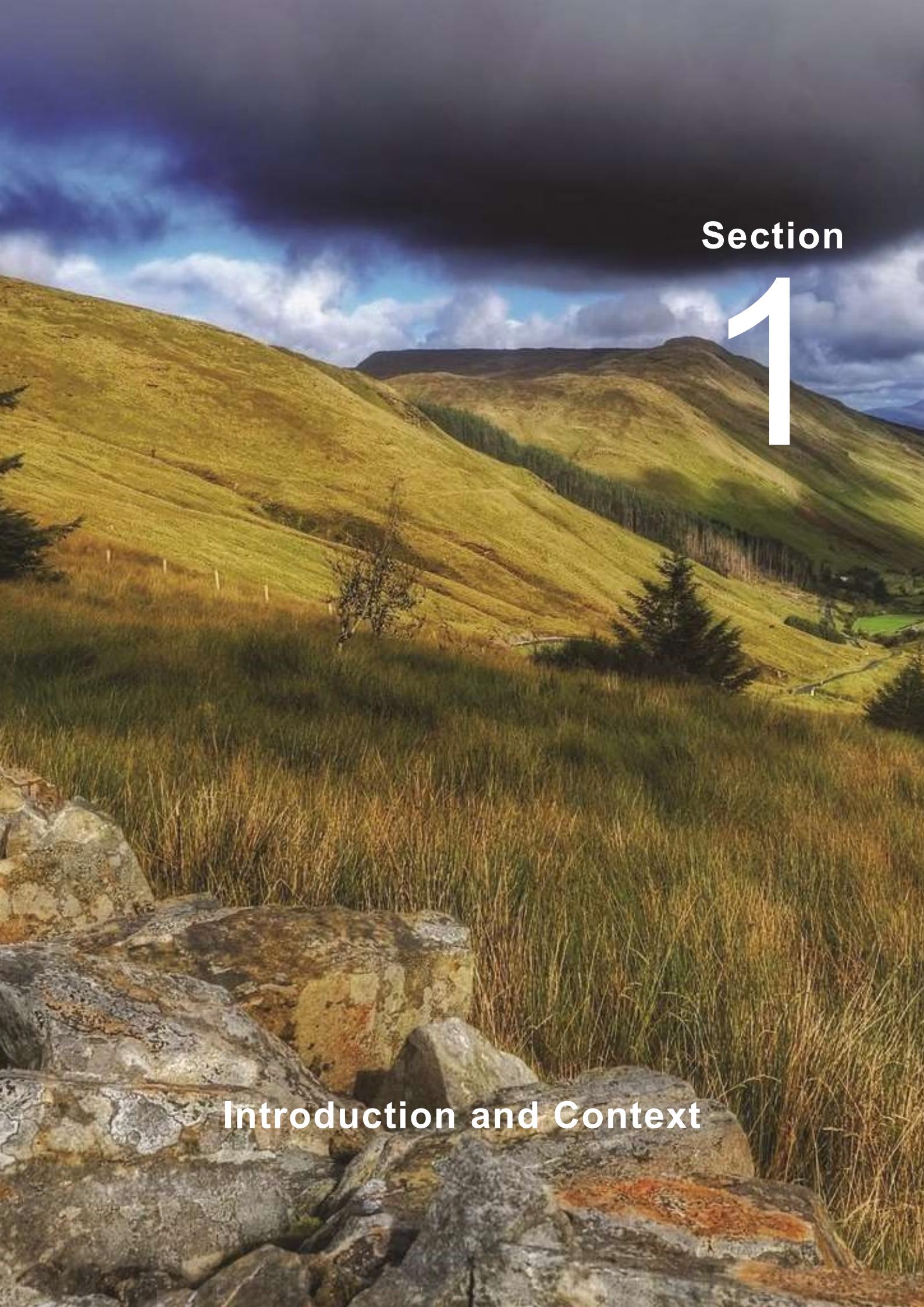
Beside his involvement in education, Rob is a member of many boards in relation to the labour market and local community initiatives.

## **Industry Representative**

Síobhra Disdale is a graduate of the University of Limerick where she completed a BBS with Japanese specialising in HR. Since graduation she has worked in a number of diverse sectors including hotels and hospitality, automotive, and currently grocery retail.

Síobhra is a learner-focused and commercially aware HR professional with experience at all business levels and skilled in HR Consulting, Coaching and Training Design & Delivery. She has led numerous learning and development projects and initiatives and is currently the Programme Manager of the Feed Your Mind Programme where participants complete a degree in Management Practice with a Specialism in Retail with Ulster University. She has recently been granted Recognised University Teacher status with this university and delivers elements of several modules on this programme.

Síobhra is also a member of the board of CLAY Youth Project, where she served as Vice Chairperson for several years.

A wide-angle photograph of a rural landscape. In the foreground, there are large, light-colored rocks with some orange and brown lichen. Beyond them is a field of tall, golden-brown grass. In the middle ground, several green hills roll away towards a dark, cloudy sky. The lighting suggests either sunrise or sunset, with strong highlights on the hills and deep shadows in the valleys.

# Section 1

Introduction and Context

# Section 1: Introduction and 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 and absorbed the provision of Foras Áiseanna Saothair (FÁS) training centres. Donegal ETB is a statutory provider with responsibility for education and training, youth work and other statutory functions. It operates and manages a range of centres administering and providing adult and further education and training (FET). Donegal ETB also administers secondary education through schools and engages in a range of non-accredited provision, as well as provision from other awarding bodies, over which QQI does not have a direct regulatory remit and which was not considered by the review team.

Donegal ETB is the largest statutory provider of FET in Donegal. In 2019 it was engaged with over 11,000 students across 17 centres in the county. Furthermore, community education, part-time and contracted training provision allow for an established presence in multiple community settings on an outreach/partnership basis, in addition to recognised ETB FET centres. The ETB's FET provision is directed by a series of documents designed to reflect the ETB's mission and value statements. These include a five-year (2017-21) strategy statement<sup>1</sup> and a strategic performance agreement (2018-2020)<sup>2</sup> for its FET service, which was developed in consultation with SOLAS.

The geographic context of Donegal ETB was recognised by the review team – it is Ireland's most northerly county and the fourth largest in the country. The 2016 Pobal HP Deprivation Index<sup>3</sup> identified Donegal as the most deprived county in Ireland, while the 2016 census<sup>4</sup> showed that Donegal was the county with the fourth highest age dependency ratio in the state. The population is spatially dispersed, which presents its own challenge for public service delivery. The SER (p. 17) includes a map that shows the locations of Donegal ETB's centres, and that map is replicated below.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.donegaletb.ie/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Donegal-ETB-Strategy-Statement-2017-2021-Lean-ar-Aghaidh-English.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.donegaletb.ie/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Donegal-ETB-Strategic-Performance-Agreement-2018-2020.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <https://data.gov.ie/dataset/pobal-hp-deprivation-index>

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/government\\_in\\_ireland/national\\_government/copy\\_of\\_census.html#/162965](https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/government_in_ireland/national_government/copy_of_census.html#/162965)

*Figure 1 – Location of Donegal ETB’s centres*



## **Contextual Factors**

This review was conducted in the context of a global health pandemic, which has required Donegal ETB to respond with flexibility and agility to both the delivery and the development of its portfolio, as well as its approach to governance, management and operations. Throughout the pandemic, Donegal ETB provided emergency remote teaching and learning which included online resources and lessons for students, as well as teaching and learning packs that were issued to students who could not engage online. Other operations, such as student support and general management, also had to be organised in a remote way. Donegal ETB was obliged to cease face-to-face provision to complete academic year 2019-20 and also needed to engage in detailed planning to prepare for delivery of its teaching and skills portfolio in 2020-21.

## **Approach to Quality Assurance**

QQI established core statutory quality assurance guidelines for all providers in April 2016, and sector-specific quality assurance guidelines for education and training boards (ETBs) in May 2017. These guidelines collectively address the quality assurance responsibilities of ETBs as significant public providers of further education and training. The scope of these guidelines incorporates all education, training and related services of an ETB, regardless of whether these lead to QQI awards, other

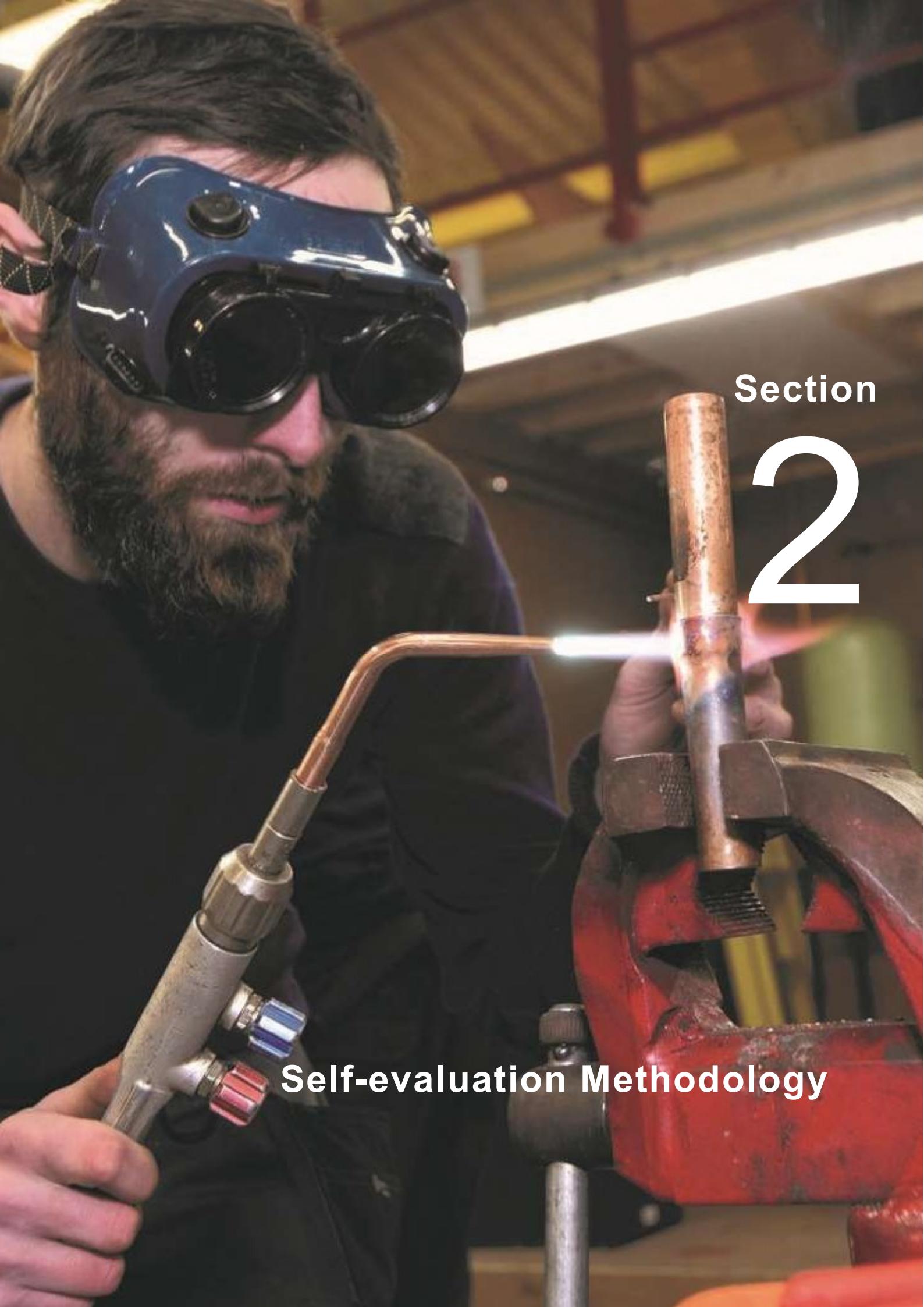
awards recognised in the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ), or awards of other awarding regulatory or statutory bodies.

In 2018, Donegal ETB re-engaged with QQI to commence the establishment of its quality assurance (QA) policy and procedures in accordance with section 30 of the Qualifications and Quality (Education and Training) Act 2012. It is recognised that these policies and procedures are reflective of the evolving and developmental nature of quality assurance within the wider ETB sector as it continues to integrate the legacy body processes.

As outlined in QQI Core Statutory QA Guidelines, quality and quality assurance are primarily the responsibility of the provider, Donegal ETB, and the review and self-evaluation of quality is a fundamental element of Donegal ETB's quality assurance system. The external quality assurance obligations include a statutory review by QQI of the effectiveness of quality assurance procedures, as outlined in the 2012 Act.

This external review by QQI of quality assurance in Donegal ETB is an inaugural review process. The review programme is designed to evaluate the effectiveness of quality assurance of further education and training within the ETBs and aims to encourage a quality culture which will improve the experience of the ETB community as well as improving outcomes for learners.

While each ETB is responsible for evaluating and improving its own quality and quality assurance, QQI is responsible for carrying out external quality reviews. The process of review entails the conduct of a review by an external team of national and international members, independent of the ETB; each review team is convened by QQI. Each ETB conducts an initial evaluation of the implementation of its quality assurance procedures and produces a self-evaluation report to be considered by the external review team and discussed with staff, learners and stakeholders during a week-long site visit.

A close-up photograph of a man with a beard and long hair, wearing a dark leather apron over a white shirt. He is wearing a blue welding helmet with a clear visor and safety glasses. He is holding a torch with a curved copper-colored tip, which is being used to heat a vertical copper pipe. The pipe is held in place by a red metal clamp. The background is blurred, showing what appears to be a workshop or industrial setting with wooden structures and yellow caution tape.

# Section 2

**Self-evaluation Methodology**

# Section 2: Self-evaluation Methodology

Donegal ETB began the process of preparing for this review in January 2020. A steering group was established to guide the self-evaluation process and the production of the self-evaluation report (SER). The steering group included staff from across the ETB in recognition of the integrated nature of quality assurance within the organisation. The team was chaired by the Director of Further Education and Training and included the QA Co-ordinator, and staff members representing Donegal ETB's administrative, teaching, finance, human resources and information technology units. It also included members of the FET Senior Management Team and the FET Coordinator's Team.

The steering group adopted a consultative process when agreeing on the structure and thematic content of the SER. The group held consultative events to discuss the objectives of the review and to evaluate staff and student experience of the ETB. It conducted a QA baseline study to assess how legacy QA systems were being implemented across programme areas and governance and management of QA. The methodology included:

1. Engagement with external stakeholders including employers, work placement providers, community education providers and second providers
2. Surveys
3. Formal reports including student support research, external authenticator reports, external verifier reports
4. Consultation events, including the first Donegal ETB FET Service Student Voice Forum, which was held in February 2020.
5. Regular SER-focused team meetings

These methods were established to consider the three objectives of the review:

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

Significant efforts were made by Donegal ETB to consult with a wide range of interests from across the organisation during the self-evaluation phase, including staff and students, as well as with

collaborative partners and other key external stakeholders. The timeline of events which made up the self-evaluation can be found at pp. 28-29 of the SER.

Both the SER and the supporting documentation provided a clear reflection of the current approach to quality assurance and enhancement at Donegal ETB and described a number of areas of good practice. The documentation was particularly helpful in highlighting an approach which was flexible and robust enough to allow Donegal ETB to respond swiftly and effectively to the evolving COVID-19 situation.

The methodology and widespread consultative approach has shown an awareness within Donegal ETB of the need to move to a more integrated approach to quality assurance as a matter of priority. The openness with which Donegal ETB has approached the review process has led to some consideration already being given to the development of a single quality assurance policy. Efforts are underway to ensure that the different QA systems, policies and procedures currently in place are developed in a way which is congruent with the QQI Core Statutory QA Guidelines and which reduces the complexity of operating within two predecessor systems.

By engaging in the review process, Donegal ETB has identified the need for an improved evidence-based approach to self-evaluation and the necessity to quantify delivery against set objectives. The self-evaluation process has also revealed the need for greater stakeholder input and review including improved access to the learner voice and greater opportunity for all staff and stakeholders to shape the QA approach; and for greater consistency across the service provision to offer assurance about a consistent and equitable learner experience.

The self-evaluation methodology reflects the fundamental ethos of Donegal ETB to empower learners to reach their full potential. To achieve this, Donegal ETB recognises the need to put the learner at the centre of all delivery across the service. Donegal ETB recognises the importance of hearing the FET learner voice and has made efforts throughout the review process to secure this through a variety of formal and informal methods in order to garner feedback from learners. Formal methods have included learner surveys, the AONTAS Learner Forum, notice boards and an ideas box. These methods, which were utilised for the inaugural review are, however, not applied across all programmes and participation is not mandatory. The impact of this on capturing the learner voice in the self-evaluation has been difficult to evidence for the review team. Given the very low response to student surveys which makes it difficult for comparator analysis, it will be important for Donegal ETB to consider how best to ensure student views are heard and able to influence policy development across the ETB and that there is effective learner influence in governance structures. The review

team **recommends**, therefore, wider representation of learners within the governance structures to strengthen the learner voice in ongoing self-evaluation at Donegal ETB. The regular systematic collection of student views and ensuring the inclusion of a wider diversification of voices within the formal structures will be fundamental to shaping Donegal ETB's improvement journey.

The review team **commends** Donegal ETB for the significant investment in establishing a new approach to quality assurance, supported by the introduction of an inclusive approach to self-evaluation to provide a robust and fair analysis of the service and identify key areas of success and improvement. The considerable efforts made to engage with the Donegal ETB community, both internally and externally in the self-evaluation, has allowed them to shape emerging thinking about quality assurance and enhancement. To support ongoing development of the QA process, the review team **recommends** wider and deeper engagement with both internal and external stakeholders to ensure that all voices, particularly the learner voice, are able to shape and influence the emerging single QA process.

Throughout the review process, Donegal ETB has recognised that a critical deliverable from an integrated QA system will be the implementation of a consistent, systematic quality process, which will capture the existing quality culture within the service; drive forward enhancements where required; and support the achievement of its mission and vision. The review team notes that the lack of progress in achieving the integration of the two predecessor systems has led to complexity, confusion about the expected approach and has driven inconsistencies across the FET service, with an ensuing impact on learners, staff and external stakeholders. There remains a risk of diluted messaging, with stakeholders continuing to reference the predecessor bodies and, with such a wide set of offerings across the service, making it difficult to identify a core brand for the service.

Engaging in the inaugural review process has allowed Donegal ETB to formally recognise that there is a general requirement to implement a more coherent approach to QA. It is evident that quality assurance and enhancement are actively managed by Donegal ETB, and that this has been a growing focus over the recent period. The review team **commends** the reflective practice which has been evident throughout this review process, recognises the introduction of governance structures and processes to support the management of QA and quality enhancement, and the ongoing learning which has led to an appraisal of the existing structures and recognition of the need to improve communications to ensure messaging is cascaded consistently across the service and to partners and stakeholders.

The review team found the SER report to be an accurate reflection of the ETB's quality assurance processes. It is thorough and demonstrates a critical awareness of the specific areas which need to be addressed across the ETB FET service. The review team recognises the efforts being made by the ETB to communicate its best practice examples and suggests wider cascading of key successes would be useful. It was noted that the SER provides a showcase for the work of Donegal ETB and, going forward, it may be helpful to include wider examples of case studies to provide further richness to the narrative subsequently captured during the site visit. The review team also noted that SER provided limited data and examination of key performance indicators (KPIs) at Donegal ETB. It was also not clear in the SER how Donegal ETB uses data to drive decision-making. The SER did not set out the metrics used to measure performance. Increased presentation of data and metrics and how these supported both decision-making and delivery of strategic objectives would have strengthened the SER.

The review team **recommends** that Donegal ETB make more effective use of data in any self-evaluation and the use of evidence to improve performance by making use of KPIs. The review team further **recommends** benchmarking within Donegal ETB to support quality enhancement to ensure consistency for each and every learner as well as scope for continuous improvement.

The review team **commends** Donegal ETB on the significant effort and energy that it has invested in establishing a new approach to quality assurance, supported by the introduction of an inclusive approach to self-evaluation, which provided a robust and fair analysis of the service and identified key areas of success and improvement. To support its development, and the ambition to continue to grow awareness and ownership of the QA process, the review team **recommends** wider and deeper engagement with both internal and external stakeholders across the ETB community, to ensure that all voices, particularly the learner voice, are able to shape and influence the emerging single QA process.

Section  
**3**

**Quality Assurance &  
Enhancement**

# **Section 3: Quality Assurance & Enhancement**

## **Objective 1: Governance and Management of Quality**

### **ETB Mission & Strategy**

At its formation, Donegal ETB created vision and mission statements with students, staff, and the community, to underpin the work of the organisation. Donegal ETB's quality assurance (QA) is at the core of the fulfilment of these statements:

#### **Our Vision**

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

#### **Our 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 establishment of Donegal ETB brought together a further education service and a training service with two separate QA systems. Consequently, a primary objective of Donegal ETB as a whole, and of the FET service in particular, was the integration of further education and training services and the creation of a single comprehensive, robust and responsive QA system which integrates best practice from both legacy systems. This remains an ambition of Donegal ETB which has not yet been realised. The review team recognises that the value of QA integration is understood by Donegal ETB and that active consideration is now being given to this.

Donegal ETB's Strategy Statement (2017-2021)<sup>5</sup> recognised the impact of the external environment on its approach to business delivery, including political, economic, social and technological factors. The statement also identifies a number of key themes:

- Teaching and learning
- A progressive and accountable organisation
- Working with partners

The importance of implementation, monitoring and review is recognised within the strategy, and that this will be driven via Donegal ETB's Senior Management Team (SMT).

The review team **commends** Donegal ETB on its learner-centred mission, which sits clearly at the heart of all activity.

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

In June 2019, Donegal ETB introduced a formal QA governance and management structure in line with the QQI Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines. The QA governance and management structure incorporates the Quality Council and three sub-committees: the Quality Sub-Committee, the Programme Sub-Committee and the Certification Approval Board (CAB). Part of the structure is the Quality Assurance Support Service (QASS). Its purpose is to offer wide-ranging support to the FET staff and other stakeholders, and this was visible during the main review visit to the review team. It was also clear to the team that staff involved in these structures, including the SMT, have a strong commitment to QA and quality enhancement. The structures which have been put in place are robust and there is a clear separation of different responsibilities. Each sub-committee has clear terms of reference which outline its roles and responsibilities.

The review team observed that there is limited awareness throughout the organisation and amongst external stakeholders of the role and activities of the Quality Council and its sub-committees.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.donegaletb.ie/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Donegal-ETB-Strategy-Statement-2017-2021-Lean-ar-Aghaidh-English.pdf>

Communication, transparency and consultation are recognised by Donegal ETB as areas for improvement going forward. [Full details of the Quality Council's composition and membership are available here](#). To address the benefits of wider external representation, the review team **recommends** wider representation on the QA governance structures. This will strengthen the shaping of Donegal ETB's improvement journey and will ensure the inclusion of a wider diversification of voices within the formal structures. Specifically, the review team **recommends** the inclusion of learners, industry and community sector representatives throughout the QA structures as relevant. The review team further **recommends** systematic wider and deeper engagement with these groups to ensure all voices, particularly the learner voice, are able to shape and influence the emerging single QA process.

During the main review visit, the review team confirmed with Donegal ETB staff their acknowledgement of the value of a comprehensive single quality assurance system to enable the development of a set of metrics by which Donegal ETB can monitor its effectiveness. Recognising work already underway to progress the QA integration project, the review team **recommends** that any further work undertaken include analysis of consistent and wide-reaching qualitative and quantitative data for quality enhancement purposes and ensure regular thematic analysis and benchmarking.

Donegal ETB staff recognise that there is an urgent need for a comprehensive review of all policies, QA structures and systems. The review team is aware of the process of ongoing review of the remits and membership of the sub-committees to ensure full transparency and engagement with the approach to QA, which will include improved engagement with all learners and with external stakeholders across each of the sub-committees to enhance their effectiveness.

One issue of note identified by the review team is the lack of evident assignment of project leadership or management for the delivery of the integration project. The review team notes the lack of a structured planning approach with deliverables at Donegal ETB to progress the integration of the QA systems and suggests a need for the organisation to introduce a clear pathway for the new integrated system of QA which includes short, medium and long-term planning. This integration process should be supported by QASS and it will be important to Donegal ETB that it is adequately resourced to ensure success. The review team **recommends** the development of a programme plan with clear priorities, targets and timelines to take its quality assurance journey to the next level. This should include the development of a route map to QA integration, supported by robust programme management with associated priorities, targets and timelines to drive continuous improvement.

It was clear to the review team that the process of engagement in QA and quality enhancement is well underway at Donegal ETB, as evidenced by the robust self-evaluation report supporting documentation and during the review visit. There is a strong awareness about quality assurance among many staff, supported by clear commitment and engagement to the process of alignment to the QQI core guidelines.

The review team **commends** the introduction of a significant architecture of governance structures and processes and the considerable efforts made to engage with members of the ETB community, both internally and externally, to allow them to shape emerging thinking about quality assurance and enhancement.

The review team **recommends** wider representation on the governance structures to strengthen the shaping of Donegal ETB's improvement journey and to ensure the inclusion of a wider diversification of voices within the formal structures, particularly the learner voice and industry/community sectors. The review team further **recommends** systematic wider and deeper engagement with these groups to ensure all voices, particularly the learner voice, are able to shape and influence the emerging single QA process.

## Documentation of Quality Assurance

There are two sets of QA procedures currently in place at Donegal ETB reflecting legacy processes, including those which oversee delivery by second providers. The team found that the existence of these two systems has led to inconsistencies in relation to QA and evaluation across the FET service, given there is no single approach to data collection and analysis for QA at Donegal ETB.

Whilst Donegal ETB's Strategy Statement (2017-2021) identified the basis for the FET service's new single quality assurance system, it was recognised in the SER that this integrated approach to QA has not yet been achieved. The absence of a single integrated QA approach, supported by systematic and aligned processes, was noted by the review team. Donegal ETB identified in its SER that "given the critical nature of the policies and procedures required to support 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." Donegal ETB therefore, prioritised the resourcing of quality improvement and development based on areas of its [Quality Improvement Plan](#) (QIP), which is supplemented by a QA development planning chart. The QIP and the QA development planning chart identify quality assurance actions based on the strategic plan, policies and procedures, research and stakeholder feedback.

The review team found during the review week that staff at Donegal ETB understand that developing and documenting a single integrated quality assurance system is fundamental to the sustained success of its FET provision. Donegal ETB has acknowledged that this requires a review of existing policies and procedures to assess their relevance and effectiveness. Whilst the review team recognises that some work has been done nationally and locally to progress this (for example the consolidation of the certification approval process through the Certification Approval Board [CAB]), it has, thus far, been limited. The review team **recommends**, therefore, the establishment of a robust programme plan with achievable timelines for the completion of the integrated quality assurance approach. The review team agrees with Donegal ETB that it will be important for this approach to fully reflect the ETB vision and mission statements.

The review team **commends** Donegal ETB on its commitment to supporting the development and implementation of an integrated quality assurance system and a set of integrated processes and approaches and **recommends** that this be progressed as a matter of priority.

## **Staff Recruitment, Management and Development**

In the SER, Donegal ETB describes itself as being committed to fairness, equality, and transparency in respect of all recruitment processes. Procedures exist for the recruitment process and Donegal ETB adheres to statutory requirements for recruitment and selection. In line with national policy, all positions must be sanctioned by the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science and funded by SOLAS. Given the strict regulations which underpin recruitment, the review team heard from Donegal ETB that these mechanisms can adversely affect the ability of the ETB to make timely appointments to meet local needs. The review team considers workforce planning to be an important process to determine future skills needs and notes this impact on the capacity of the ETB to establish organisational-critical roles.

The HR processes remain manual, paper-based and resource intensive and there is a recognition within the HR function of the need to move to automation to improve the employee experience and to facilitate improved HR operations. This matter is under active consideration by an ETB sub-group. The review team notes that it will be important for the new HR system to align with the new QA system when established. The review team believes that Donegal ETB might benefit from exploring a digital solution for HR in order to utilise the current resources more effectively. This would also allow more data to be captured, which would in turn allow for improved reporting and benchmarking and would support the adoption of a more consistent approach across all HR practices.

With regard to staff training, there has been a focus on CPD during COVID-19, with over 40 development opportunities available to staff. It was also noted by staff that one of the positive outputs from the COVID-19 experience was the informal and shared learning that had taken place. It is important that this continues and is further built upon to ensure the active encouragement of best practice sharing and informal learning across the ETB. The review team **commends** Donegal ETB for its swift response to the COVID-19 crisis in ensuring that relevant CPD and support were available to staff to ensure the smooth transition to remote learning. This has been evidenced through feedback from both staff and learners during multiple meetings.

While there has been a focus on training and CPD during the COVID-19 period, the review team noted that there is not currently a structured and consistent approach to staff development and training across Donegal ETB. The ETB has already identified the need for a structured and consistent approach to induction for new staff members. Each programme currently has its own onboarding process which is neither consistent nor assessed for compliance with current HR policies. Finally, whilst there is a record of all CPD undertaken, there is no systematic planning, monitoring or evaluation process in place to ascertain the effectiveness, relevance and impact of the training undertaken.

It is noted that, in line with sectoral norms, Donegal ETB does not currently operate a formal performance management development system. It was not evident to the review team that Donegal ETB sufficiently supports systematic performance management and development consistently across its services. The team views this as a missed opportunity, both to ensure that staff are aligned to the overall strategic goals and to provide a performance feedback mechanism. The review team understands that some areas provide feedback informally and it was made clear during meetings that staff felt a more structured and systematic approach to feedback would be beneficial as an opportunity to celebrate success and to discuss areas for development.

The review team **recommends** that Donegal ETB implement a systematic approach to performance management and development. This should be linked to KPIs and supported by formal methodical collection of data and aligned to the ETB's strategy. This would facilitate the monitoring and management of CPD to ensure that it aligns with the ETB's targets and would support the enhancement of learning and the development of staff. It would also enable managers to link the strategy and performance measures to an individual's work and performance appraisal to allow for a more targeted approach to CPD and training.

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

Since the establishment of Donegal ETB in 2013, no new programmes have been developed under the QQI programme validation process. This is an area for Donegal ETB to consider. It is, however, recognised by the review team that there have been a number of examples of programme developments made under the legacy QA system in the non-formal and non-accredited categories, as well as the provision of new courses under different awarding bodies. This has included, for example, new training opportunities in ICT, social media and infection control; the upskilling of welders in Killybegs and Kilcar; and the introduction of a traineeship in weaving, based on engagement with the Harris Tweed Authority and the Scottish Qualifications Authority. Furthermore, the importance of the Basic Education Service Learning for Living Programme, which provides a number of essential literacy and language programmes incorporating progression to validated skill and competence programmes in other areas, was recognised by the review team.

The review team **commends** the flexible approach adopted by Donegal ETB to the external environment. This flexibility was evident in the rapid response by Donegal ETB to the global pandemic, particularly its responsiveness to changing local and regional needs from both individuals and businesses. While this flexible and responsive approach is important to maintain, it will be equally important to ensure a consistent approach to programme development – systematic, standardised and evidence-based. This will enhance outcomes across the service. The review team, therefore, **recommends** the introduction of a consistent approach to programme development by Donegal ETB.

## **Access, Transfer and Progression**

Donegal ETB highlights its key focus as being a learner-centred service, and this was recognised by the review team throughout the review process. This was particularly visible and impactful during the recent COVID-19 period, when support to students and communities was vital for learning success and for physical and mental wellbeing.

Different access routes for different target groups are available across Donegal ETB, including access, transfer and progression (ATP) routes across and between offerings at relevant NFQ levels (1-6). The approaches to ATP vary across Donegal ETB and are reflective of the diversity of programme offerings within the service, responding to different learner needs and expectations.

Information on access is provided via the formal prospectus; through teaching and administration staff; by Programme Organisers, Facilitators and Coordinators; via digital promotion and at the FET Fair and other national fora. The main review visit confirmed that staff members in central services,

along with tutors and trainers, are in the main approachable and responsive to student queries. Transfer arrangements are generally facilitated through teachers, tutors and instructors as well as through the Guidance Service. Information and support on progression opportunities are also provided by teachers in a classroom setting. Student groups interviewed as part of the review visit reported that, whilst this mix of engagement opportunity is largely positive, it has led to some confusion amongst students in relation to progression opportunities.

Specialist training providers in specific programmes provide additional support to their students; however, this accentuates the differential in student access to information, advice, guidance and support, which can lead to an inequitable student experience.

Policies governing access, transfer and progression remain under the two legacy QA systems and, whilst some efforts have been made to standardise approaches, much work remains to ensure a consistent student experience across FET provision. The review team recognises that Donegal ETB is committed to the development of a single consistent ATP system which is clear and easily understood across the FET service and encourages this ambition.

The review team **commends** Donegal ETB on its leadership in relation to Access, Transfer and Progression and its Recognition of Prior Learning Programme, embedded in Donegal ETB's Skills for Work initiative. This innovative programme has been awarded funding for a collaboration with Limerick and Clare ETB. It focuses on the skills and competencies of care sector employees. Such collaborations are an important way to disseminate best practice nationally. Given the critical importance of both initiatives to ensuring fair and equitable access to learning for all, the review team encourages Donegal ETB to continue to progress its ambitions in this area, to showcase its success, and to continue to collaborate with partners outside of the region on developing and articulating clear progression pathways for learners.

## **Integrity and Approval of Learner Results**

The ETB is committed to ensuring the integrity of assessment and this has been identified by Donegal ETB as a priority for the development of revised integrated policies and procedures in line with the QQI Core Statutory QA Guidelines. Donegal ETB reports that significant progress has been made during the last two years, including the drafting of its integrated Fair and Consistent Assessment of Learners Policy, which will form part of the integrated QA system in due course.

Donegal ETB's new approach to centralised assessment that is consistent across all FET programmes and courses provides evidence of the progress made. The collaborative approach

adopted to secure this is visible in the creation of a bank of assessments, with substantial input and continuous feedback from teachers, tutors and instructors. The review cycle indicates the ETB's awareness of the critical importance of internal and external feedback, with robust internal verification (IV) and centralised external authentication (EA) processes in place, which also allow for the moderation of Donegal ETB results against national award standards. The review team recognises the value of the centralised approach to authentication based on award types and fields of learning.

Oversight of the assessment process is provided via the QA governance and management structure, by the Certification Approval Board (CAB) and the Quality Council (QC). The processes of assessment, authentication, results approval, appeals process and certification are well embedded, with the direct involvement of the QC and CAB. Reports detailing the outcomes from the IV and EA processes are considered at a CAB meeting before the approval of results, which the review team recognises as good practice.

As referred to above, the CAB is an area where ETB has transitioned to a single QA system. In interviews with the review team, it was evident that CAB members are staff with extensive experience of QA systems. One example of the CAB's approach to ensure transparency and consistency across the ETB's FET services is the introduction of a continuous improvement log to track assessment issues raised and the actions taken to address them. The log helps to ensure that all issues are documented and addressed.

In line with best practice, the CAB is currently collating all EA feedback. This helps in the identification of good practice and informs areas for improvement. During the review visit, CAB colleagues demonstrated to the review team that they were aware of the importance of continuous review in the process of enhancing QA to the benefit of all learners. The review team recognises the work which remains outstanding and **recommends** the urgent completion of a revised policy on fair and consistent assessment, which is currently being addressed by the ETB.

The review team **commends** Donegal ETB's commitment to improvement in the important area of assessments through the introduction of the CAB.

## Information and Data Management

The review team found that the Senior Management Team and QASS recognise the importance of collecting and analysing data to both improve its internal QA approach, as well as to better support the student experience. There is, then, a clear and recognised opportunity to further enhance the use of data to inform and improve FET provision across the service, including its approach to quality and standards, measuring progress against KPIs, measuring patterns of student retention, attainment, progression, recruitment, etc. To this end, the FET Systems and Data Reporting Officer was recently appointed, who will give focus and priority to data analytics to support QA and quality enhancement.

Throughout the SER, the ETB recognises that, currently, not all data or information is systematically gathered or utilised within the service; the ETB confirmed this during the review visit. There is a clear ambition within the ETB to develop and implement an overarching policy and set of procedures with respect to the collection and use of data as part of the new integrated QA system. The interviews with the SMT and with student representatives confirmed that the lack of a consistent approach to data is leading to an inconsistent experience for learners and other stakeholders across the ETB.

The review team recognises that progress has been made in the creation and implementation of centralised reporting on FET learners. The Programme Learner Support System (PLSS) was introduced in 2017. The PLSS system is an example of a national integrated management information system (MIS), which also includes the National Course Calendar, the National Programme Database and the PLSS Reports Module. The Course Calendar schedule integrates with the ETB website course finder. Prospective learners can apply for a course online. Data are available for reporting, including statistics on student enrolment and completion as well progression metrics.

The development and use of data across the ETB brings with it further responsibility to protect and manage data and, to support this, Donegal ETB's Data Protection Officer (DPO) has been in place since 2018. Data management policies and processes are in place; Donegal ETB is compliant with GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation) legislation and both management and staff are aware of the GDPR Toolkit. GDPR training is mandatory for new employees and provided upon request for all staff. The establishment of the Data Protection working group could help improve understanding and compliance. The review team notes that all staff will require regular training to keep their knowledge up to date.

Examples of data protection policies and procedures implemented at Donegal ETB include:

- Data Protection Policy
- Data Breach Policy
- Privacy Notices for learners/students, employees, volunteers, board members, etc.
- GDPR Guidelines for Remote Working
- Access to Records Policy
- Data Protection Impact Assessment Guidelines

The review team recognises that work is still required to improve the structured collection, analysis and utilisation of data across the FET service. It will be important to ensure that all staff are involved in, and aware of, the importance of systematic data collection and analysis, to improve both the effectiveness of the QA system as well as the wider deliverables of the ETB. There does not appear to be a systematic mechanism for analysing and using data to support decision-making and strategic planning across Donegal ETB. No such processes were demonstrated to the review team via the SER or during the main review visit.

The review has found that whilst Donegal ETB understands the importance of developing an organisational data set, more time and effort is needed to drive this forward. Donegal ETB recognises that working with data in a consistent manner to support evidence-based strategic and operational decision-making which consistently measures progress against KPIs is fundamental to understanding its effectiveness.

The review team **recommends** that Donegal ETB develop its use of data for performance monitoring. This will enhance both operational and strategic planning and enable the provision of a more consistent FET experience. The development of KPIs and plans which include clear targets and measures will be important for continuous self-evaluation and improvement.

## **Public Information and Communication**

Donegal ETB recognises the importance of addressing the legitimate public interest in the quality and standards of its service provision. In 2017, Donegal ETB established its cross-organisational Communications Advisory Group (CAG) and has appointed a communications officer who is actively involved in communications across the whole ETB. The establishment of this role and the creation of the CAG has resulted in a more coherent and consistent approach to communications across the service, as well as an improved focus on digital communications. However, the CAG does not have a plan or indicators against which it measures and monitors progress. This is a matter which should be addressed. The review team **recommends**, therefore, that the CAG develops annual plans and KPIs which go beyond social media engagement

A significant development for the ETB with regard to information and communication has been the complete redevelopment of the website. The ETB's website provides a wide range of information on courses, news, events, alongside details of the structure and organisation of the service. It is used to communicate information about programmes to learners, prospective learners and employers. In addition to the website, Donegal ETB has also increased the number of platforms that it uses to engage with different audiences. Over the last number of years, the communications officer has been successful in growing audiences on various social media platforms and increasing engagement rates. A partnership with Donegal Daily, an online media outlet, has been established in order to further showcase student success and study opportunities and to support the FET service. The use of the LinkedIn platform over the past two years has also helped with employer engagement, with more and more employers following the ETB and engaging with its posts.

The review team **commends** Donegal ETB for the ongoing development of its presence on multiple digital platforms and continuing to grow engagement on these. Every year Donegal ETB produces a prospectus for the FET service. This is further supported by a FET fair, which aims to showcase the

number of courses offered. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, the fair was unable to go ahead last year, however a video was produced which highlighted the range of options available to school leavers.

While the ETB clearly engages in a number of communication channels, word of mouth and personal recommendations remain an important way in which information about the service is communicated. The review team **recommends** that Donegal ETB explore additional opportunities to develop and strengthen its communications strategy and channels and to consider more ways of utilising digital communications both internally and externally.

The communications officer is currently working with Youthreach and PLCs to progress a rebranding exercise. The review team **recommends** that Donegal ETB explore further opportunities to develop a structured rebranding and communications plan for the service, with defined targets and benchmarking, in order to fully engage with stakeholders and raise awareness of the services and support available.

Even though the establishment of Donegal ETB took place in 2013, there still exists a legacy of old branding (e.g. VEC and FÁS are still regularly mentioned by staff and stakeholders). This is clearly impactful for the ETB as it creates mixed messages and a mixed understanding of the role and function of the ETB for both prospective learners and prospective employers.

During the main review visit, the review team met with a number of stakeholders including representatives from industry. Whilst all were positive about the service and support that they had received from ETB, consistent concerns across a number of meetings were raised around awareness of the entirety of services available. This supports the recommendation outlined above in relation to an improved communications strategy which should lead to improvements here.

The review team recognises the critical importance of internal communications to support staff engagement and awareness. As part of the integrated QA system, it has already been proposed that an intranet portal for staff be developed. This would allow information to be easily accessible and feedback regarding quality assurance policies and procedures to be gathered. This will support monitoring and evaluation, including in relation to the new Public Information and Communications Policy, which is currently in its implementation stage.

## **Objective 2: Teaching, Learning & Assessment**

### **The Learning Environment**

The SER highlights Donegal ETB's commitment to the provision of teaching and learning experiences that are student centred, inclusive and responsive to student needs. Donegal ETB promotes a learning environment where all students feel informed, safe and comfortable in their respective learning environments – this is outlined in the SER and was articulated by staff and students in their direct engagement with the review team during the main review visit.

The review team notes that some programmes issue student handbooks, which provide an overview of Donegal ETB, all relevant policies and procedures and the student supports available. Students are also provided with Donegal ETB's Code of Behaviour and associated policies and procedures – for example, policies and procedures in respect of misconduct, malpractice, disciplinary, plagiarism. The review team notes the value of this approach to onboarding students and encourages Donegal ETB to continue to ensure that these handbooks are up to date and received by every student in the service.

Due to COVID-19 travel restrictions, the review team was unable to view the physical learning environment, however the SER notes that Donegal ETB has invested heavily in the maintenance and development of its 17 FET centres across the county and that the FET Buildings Working Group has recently been established for this purpose. To ensure equity of access, it will be important for Donegal ETB to ensure that provision is made to enable safe and independent access for people with disabilities across all its centres. The review team supports the ETB's plans to standardise support services and facilities at all FET centres and to address the inconsistencies regarding the same facilities (such as access, canteens, etc.).

The SER outlines an interview process for recruitment of teachers and instructors. The SER also identifies that Donegal ETB encourages formative assessment. The review team notes that Donegal ETB has introduced an assessment review cycle, which has promoted the establishment of communities of practice, particularly on higher-level courses. Learning communities were enhanced by new CPD, offerings and collaborations that occurred as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and associated public health restrictions, and the value of this was recognised by the review team.

The review team acknowledges that Donegal ETB's Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL) Mentoring Programme, implemented during COVID-19, afforded staff an opportunity to upskill in technology to improve their lesson delivery and their approach to communications. This training in TEL was offered

to staff members by colleagues. The ETB may wish to consider offering this mentoring opportunity to students who excel in technological application.

The SER notes that there are a number of ways to garner feedback. It also recognises that a number of programmes have associated formal evaluations, which seek feedback directly from students regarding their learning experience and that most of the course evaluations include module evaluation feedback. The SER also notes that teachers and tutors on some FET programmes conduct progress reports and progress meetings with individual students. It is also stated in the SER that classroom delivery is not subject to formal evaluation.

Separately, the SER notes that Donegal ETB encourages CPD through relevant opportunities, such as that which emerged when modifying assessments in response to the move to online provision of teaching and learning and assessment in response to public health restrictions. To do so, teachers and tutors from the same fields of learning came together to create relevant content. The feedback from this shared experience, which facilitated the pooling of resources and experience, was extremely positive and it is hoped that this will lead to the formation of staff groups outside of their specific centres and programmes to share learning and identify improvements. The review team views this as a positive approach and would suggest encouraging the establishment of communities of practice more widely across the staff cohort. It would also be useful to encourage this within the student cohort to provide informal support networks.

In identifying work placement as an area that needs improvement, the SER states that: “*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.*” The review team recognises that there are no formal monitoring procedures in place regarding work placements and is supportive of the ambition to introduce improvement, recognising the importance of monitoring placements to ensure consistency in quality.

The review team notes the critical importance of student engagement and notes the Learner Voice Fora, which were held in 2018 and 2019 in collaboration with AONTAS. The review team further recognises that a standardised and comprehensive FET student survey service is under development. It will be important, therefore, as highlighted elsewhere in this report, for the ETB to introduce a more comprehensive approach to the collection and analysis of information from students and alumni to support the continuous improvement of the quality of teaching and learning.

The review team supports Donegal ETB's conclusions that students would benefit from a systematic approach to evaluations of their learning experiences with the FET service. The review team noted that there is an inconsistent approach to progress reporting across programmes and to the evaluation of teaching and learning across the service. It **recommends** that all programmes be subject to progress reporting and that all teaching and learning be evaluated on a consistent basis to support data gathering and improvement. The review team encourages Donegal ETB to implement a comprehensive suite of integrated QA policies concerning teaching and learning which incorporates work placements. The review team notes the strong commitment to teaching and learning within Donegal ETB but finds that there are inconsistencies with the evaluation of teaching and learning and encourages a service-wide approach to programme reviews.

The review team **recommends** the introduction of a consistent and comprehensive evaluation of programme delivery and the student experience to support the continued improvement of the quality of teaching and learning. The inclusion of learners in the QA governance structures will be helpful in this regard.

## **Assessment of Learners**

Donegal ETB operates under two legacy QA systems in relation to the assessment of learners. As described in the SER and the supporting documentation, both systems have clear and robust policies and procedures, are well understood and implemented by staff. That said, this dual approach does lead to duplication, overlap and burden and does not support the integration of QA within the ETB.

A centralised approach to assessment can be found throughout FET. QASS is prioritising the review and integration of assessment instruments across all programmes and courses. However, the review team notes that there is still significant work to be done to roll out a single integrated QA system in a way that supports and enhances existing good practice. The implementation of a single integrated QA system will ensure a more consistent approach to assessment across the FET service.

As previously noted, an integrated Certification Approval Board (CAB) now reviews and approves all assessment results in line with QQI guidelines, including approval of certification by other awarding bodies. The review team welcomes this development.

During the review team's meetings with teachers/tutors/instructors, team members were impressed by the learner-centred approach at Donegal ETB. Students reported that Donegal ETB staff members are approachable and that there were opportunities to provide feedback in relation to teaching,

learning and assessment informally after classes, or more formally through various surveys and the AONTAS Learner Forum.

The review team recognised the importance of the successful implementation of ATP and Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) – as noted above, these are important in ensuring fair access to learning for all. The ETB has taken a partnership approach in these areas, which is based on integrity and consistency of assessment instruments, methodologies, procedures and records. The review team also recognises the success of Donegal ETB in introducing modified arrangements for teaching, learning and assessment during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Feedback on the learner experience of assessment has been positive in student surveys and via the AONTAS Learner Forum. During the main review visit, the review team noted that learners had a clear understanding of how and why they were being assessed. In the meetings with the review team, learners also demonstrated knowledge of policies and procedures in relation to their assessments. They referred to the student handbooks, noting that these documents provided the information needed to undertake their assessments, including assessment criteria, and that assessment packs for teachers were available on the ETB's QA Portal. That said, it is notable that there has been a very low response rate to student surveys and that few students engage in the feedback process. To ensure the learner voice is adequately heard, it will be important to invest in improved approaches to student engagement to allow genuine feedback mechanisms to be put in place. The review team **recommends** the introduction of a systematic approach to student engagement in course content, delivery and assessment as part of the annual programme review cycle.

The review team noted that there is no centralised procedure or system to collect, record and analyse student feedback and to use this information in a consistent way. Donegal ETB recognises that this is an issue, and the review team encourages it to introduce change and improvement in this area to ensure that all assessment procedures and materials are updated in a systematic, inclusive way across programmes.

## **Supports for Learners**

Donegal ETB's approach to student support is embedded in its student-focused culture. Its FET service offers a range of support services to students enrolled on its programmes, which include guidance counsellors, support workers, instructors, and programme coordinators. However, the biggest challenge, evidenced during the main review week, is that the provision of student support is not consistent across the service and there is an inequality in the level of support within each FET programme. This is particularly evident in the provision of support from guidance counsellors –

qualified staff who can identify potential difficulties or issues that a student may have and then offer a range of support for personal, social, education and employment needs. In some programmes, the review team heard from students that there is an issue with access to the guidance counsellor, as it operates on a strict rotation and appointment-based system. In other programmes, the guidance counsellor was always available and could be easily contacted. The tutors and support staff are also dealing with many students who have presented with mental health issues, which has been exacerbated by COVID-19. Students interviewed during the main review visit suggested that it would be more beneficial to have a Donegal ETB service-wide approach to counselling services rather than just a programme approach.

The review team **recommends** that Donegal ETB review the provision of support across all services and works towards consistent and equitable application across the service and within each FET programme.

The overwhelming feedback from the students is that Donegal ETB is welcoming and accommodating of all student needs. The students interviewed reported a focus on ensuring that the environment is conducive to learning and supporting learner development and knowledge. The review team notes that the additional support provided during the pandemic is commendable. While COVID-19 has brought many challenges, Donegal ETB has adapted swiftly to these by moving to remote learning and utilising various digital platforms to support learning, teaching and engagement. This was complemented with more traditional methods of communication to counteract deficits in Wi-Fi availability, access to devices and digital literacy. There was additional outreach to engage with marginalised groups and numerous additional support services provided such as wellbeing workshops, support for digital literacy and wellbeing packs.

While the additional support provided during the COVID-19 period was welcomed by students, there appeared to be some inconsistency across programmes and instructors. Some instructors provided additional instructional and teaching explanation videos, while others did not. Further, some provided additional support via email, WhatsApp and telephone calls, while others did not. The review team **recommends** that Donegal ETB explore opportunities for developing a structured best practice sharing approach for instructors and teachers to help ensure a greater level of consistency across programme delivery and improve the learner experience.

The Learner Forum and other formal and informal methods to capture the student voice are very positive initiatives to gather feedback from students across the services but unfortunately the response rate is very low. The review team **recommends** that Donegal ETB explore opportunities for increasing learner engagement via student surveys, the Learner Forum and other means to ensure more representative feedback. As mentioned above, it would be beneficial to incorporate a learner representative into the Quality Council to ensure the learner perspective is heard.

## Objective 3: Self-evaluation, Monitoring & Review

### Self-evaluation, Monitoring & Review

Given that this is the inaugural review of Donegal ETB's QA processes, and the first time Donegal ETB has engaged in the associated self-evaluation, the review team welcomed Donegal ETB's commitment to investing effort and energy in supporting a robust approach to self-evaluation. As outlined above under section 2, a steering group was established, a consultative process was introduced to support the content of the SER, and efforts were made to be inclusive, both internally and externally, in relation to the content of the SER. The review team **commends** Donegal ETB for the significant effort & energy invested in the production of a reflective and critical self-evaluation, which sought to engage the wider Donegal ETB community.

The process of review and the completion of the self-evaluation process have been identified by Donegal ETB as an opportunity to reflect on how its approach to self-evaluation, monitoring and review can be further developed. The review team noted Donegal ETB's recognition in the SER of the information gaps identified from the monitoring and review processes; this was supported by feedback during the review visit meetings. The ETB has identified two issues which have impacted on its ability to engage most effectively with the self-evaluation:

1. There is no QA policy or procedure in place for self-evaluation, monitoring and review
2. There is inconsistency in how and when course evaluations take place.

The review team therefore **recommends** that Donegal ETB introduce continuous and systematic self-monitoring and evaluation to support organisational learning. This should be supported by data – standards, targets and indicators – as well as by benchmarking and the systematic collection of feedback from student, staff and stakeholders.

There are good examples provided by Donegal ETB of evaluation engagement, such as the introduction of digital equity surveys, designed specifically to identify best practice during the COVID-19 pandemic and to mitigate against inequity of access to ICT. Further, the appointment of a data reporting officer to support the systematic collection of data will be an important contribution to any effective self-evaluation, monitoring and review process which is compliant with QQI Core Guidelines. The self-evaluation process has enabled Donegal ETB to recognise the importance of prioritising the resourcing of quality improvement. Furthermore, it has shown that additional improvements are needed to communicate QA developments to all stakeholders to ensure the wider Donegal ETB community fully understands the purpose of the approach to quality assurance and to engender confidence in this.

As noted in Section 2 of this report, the review team recognises the introduction by Donegal ETB of a significant architecture of governance structures and processes, and the considerable efforts made to engage with the ETB community, both internally and externally, to allow them to shape emerging thinking about quality assurance and enhancement. This will be important to build on going forward. The review team also **recommends** wider representation on these governance structures to strengthen the shaping of Donegal ETB's improvement journey and ensure the inclusion of a wider diversification of voices within the formal structures, particularly the learner voice and industry/community sectors. The review team is pleased that the SER recognises that there is a requirement to implement a more coherent approach to QA and has separately recommended the development of a route map to QA integration to help drive continuous improvement.

## Programme Monitoring & Review

Donegal ETB's two legacy QA systems (QQI Quality Assurance System and Transition Quality Assurance System [TQAS]) recognise the importance of a systematic approach to monitoring and reviewing programmes to support continuous improvement. The benefits include ensuring fit with labour market needs, improved social cohesion and economic competitiveness locally, regionally and nationally.

Within TQAS, policies and procedures exist for programme monitoring, review and evaluation to ensure training programmes remain valid and current. Knowledge gained from systematic feedback is continuously developed and transferred into practice. Curriculum content and assessment are reviewed for appropriateness, and student feedback is also collated through course evaluations. The data collected is analysed and used to develop an improvement plan. Evidence is obtained from: student, staff and other stakeholder feedback reports; monitoring reports, both internal and from second providers; programme corrective, preventative and improvement actions; TQAS documents and forms.

The SER recognises, however, that TQAS policies and procedures are not yet part of an integrated QA system in operation across the wider FET service. And, while some aspects of these policies may be in line with the QQI Core Statutory QA guidelines, there is a requirement to review them in tandem with the other FET programmes to ensure consistency of practice.

The review team was able to garner some evidence from staff feedback and the review visit meetings of some programme evaluation taking place, but there is no systematic and consistent process of data collection or information sharing with the FET programme coordinators. The review team welcomed the recruitment of a programme development officer to support the QASS and FET service in progressing this. Further efforts to disseminate good practice across learning communities will also be helpful for Donegal ETB on its improvement journey.

The review team was pleased to note in the SER that Donegal ETB is committed to the introduction and implementation of a comprehensive suite of policies and procedures relating to programme evaluation, monitoring and review across the wider FET service. The review team **recommends** the introduction of a robust review framework to help Donegal ETB ensure its programmes are and remain fit for purpose and future-proofed against external environmental changes. It is vital that a systematic quality-assured approach to the collection and analysis of information be implemented across the FET service.

The review team has previously recommended better use of data and evidence to improve performance, including utilisation of KPIs and benchmarking to support quality enhancement within and across the ETB to ensure consistency for each and every learner. Critical to the success of the integrated QA system will be an improvement in both evidence gathering and in the use of the data collected. The enhanced collection and use of quantitative and qualitative data, including for example stakeholder feedback, destination statistics and certification and other organisational performance information, will support an improved understanding of organisational effectiveness and support the enhancement of quality assurance across the ETB.

## **Oversight, Monitoring & Review of Relationships with External Parties**

Donegal ETB develops and maintains commendable and extensive relationships with a wide range of external organisations, institutions, groups, and sectors across the county. This is enhanced by the extensive outreach delivery of basic education, adult guidance, and other community education support.

Where it is appropriate, Donegal ETB has formalised relationships with external stakeholders through memoranda of understanding (MoUs) and service level agreements. The review team recognises the value of this formal engagement with key external partners to clarify expectations in respect of delivery outcomes. Examples of this include the annual event hosted by the Community Education Support Programme; and the number of MoUs in place with strategic partners, including with the North West Strategic Growth Partnership.

The review team acknowledged the importance of the provision of contracted training via second providers in responding to specific, locally identified training needs across the county. Other types of training are provided by, for example, specialised training providers for people with additional support needs. These providers continue to operate under the TQAS QA framework.

The FET service also works closely with a number of external awarding bodies to ensure its training and qualifications offering is current, responsive to local business need and relevant to learners.

The SER recognises the need for a systemised approach to information gathering and analysis to instil confidence about quality assurance. The review team supports this conclusion, as well as the introduction of a customer relationship management system.

# Section 4

Conclusions

## Section 4: Conclusions

This inaugural review, designed to evaluate the effectiveness of quality assurance of FET within all ETBs, aims to encourage a quality culture across all parts of the service and, ultimately, to improve the learner experience and learner outcomes.

In so doing, it also provides an opportunity for each ETB to highlight the successes of the service that they offer across their counties – and the review team has seen much to celebrate across the Donegal ETB service over the course of this exercise. Great examples of innovative student support and success, particularly during the pandemic, and of programme development and learning from other jurisdictions, including in relation to new provision during the pandemic to meet emerging skills needs. However, the review team noted that there was no development of programmes leading to QQI awards during the period.

The review team recognises the critical role played by the ETB, as the largest statutory provider of FET in a geographically diverse county, in supporting the active inclusion of individuals across the county, particularly those who are socially, educationally or economically disadvantaged.

Given the enormous disruption caused by COVID-19 to our workplaces, society and economy, it seems likely that a new focus on learning, reskilling and upskilling will be required as we adapt to a new uncertain world. The review team encourages Donegal ETB to build on its successful approach during lockdown and to carefully consider its role in social and economic recovery post-COVID-19; any changes that might be required in terms of both curriculum offering and types of delivery; and how it can ensure absolute flexibility, agility and equity in all its provision. In recognition of the economic impact of COVID-19, continued close engagement with industry and community providers will help secure best outcomes for the county by ensuring that current and emerging skills needs are met.

The review team was privileged to meet with nearly 200 staff, students and stakeholders in over 30 meetings in the course of the review visit and benefited from the full and frank discussions which we had. This direct engagement built on the significant amount of material separately provided by Donegal ETB to support our considerations. Our conclusions are built on this wealth of engagement and written material.

The review team recognises Donegal ETB's current organisational context, in which the establishment of comprehensive and integrated quality assurance systems is an ongoing process. The primary function of this review was to consider the current and proposed approach to quality and quality assurance and provide recommendations on this. A secondary function of the review was to inform the future development of quality assurance and enhancement activities within Donegal ETB, and a number of recommendations have been identified to support this improvement journey. It is also hoped that this journey of improved quality assurance will, in turn, support increased public confidence in Donegal ETB, as an organisation committed to an open and transparent review process that demonstrates good practice and drives continuous improvement.

The documentation provided to the review team has illustrated a FET system which has a rich breadth of engagement, reach and opportunity for all, alongside some particular areas of strength, such as in the work being progressed in relation to Recognition of Prior Learning, which the review team was pleased to recognise as a successful collaboration with external partners to support the development and articulation of progression pathways for learners.

There has clearly been significant effort and energy invested by Donegal ETB in the production of the self-evaluation report and related documentation. The review team recognises that this is the first time the ETBs have undertaken an evaluation of policies, procedures and practices which support or enhance quality assurance. The review team further noted the approach taken to support student and stakeholder engagement; to curricular development that meets the needs of local businesses; and to work in new ways to continue to offer teaching, learning and student support during a global pandemic.

The review team's considerations focused on the three key themes of:

- Governance and management of quality
- Teaching, learning and assessment, and
- Self-evaluation, monitoring and review.

The review team views this review exercise as an exciting development for Donegal ETB – not only as part of the first review cycle of its kind within the sector, but also as a platform for Donegal ETB to highlight the initiatives and innovations which contribute to the quality of the education and training provided by them, and which make a real difference in the lives of their learners. We are confident

that the review journey itself has provided Donegal ETB with useful learning, through its own preparation for the review, through feedback from a broad range of stakeholders involved in the process and through discussion with the review team itself during the intensive week of engagement.

The review team's key conclusions are outlined below.

## **4.1 Conclusions on Arrangements for Governance & Management of Quality**

The review team was impressed by the significant architecture of governance structures and processes which had been introduced by Donegal ETB, and by the considerable efforts made to engage with members of the ETB community, both internally and externally, to allow them to shape emerging thinking about quality assurance and enhancement. This demonstrated Donegal ETB's commitment to supporting the development and implementation of a single quality assurance system and a set of integrated processes and approaches which should be progressed as a matter of priority.

The review team welcomed the effort and energy invested by Donegal ETB in the production of a reflective and critical self-evaluation report, which was based on engagement with the wider Donegal ETB community. There is recognition of the need to continue to grow awareness and ownership of the QA process and it will be important to ensure wider representation on the governance structures, particularly the learner voice and industry/community sectors. A more systematic approach to engagement with these groups will ensure that all voices, particularly the learner voice, are able to shape and influence the emerging single QA process. This improved engagement will also support enhanced communications to ensure messaging is cascaded consistently across the service and to its partners and will be augmented by the identification of additional opportunities to strengthen its communications strategy and channels.

An important conclusion, which underpinned much of the review findings, is the need for better use of data and evidence to improve performance, including making use of KPIs and benchmarking within Donegal ETB and externally across the wider ETB network. This will support quality enhancement within and across the ETB to ensure consistency for each and every learner as well as strengthen and shape Donegal ETB's own improvement journey.

The development of a specific plan to integrate the two existing QA systems, supported by robust programme management, will be critical to ensure the success of Donegal ETB's QA ambitions. This plan should set out clear priorities, targets and timelines to take its quality assurance journey to the next level and enhance the drive for continuous improvement.

## **4.2 Conclusions on Arrangements for Teaching, Learning & Assessment**

Donegal ETB's approach to learners and commitment to student success is based on an absolute focus on its learner-centred mission. This was demonstrated throughout the review process, including in relation to the ETB's provision of agile support to learners during the COVID-19 pandemic which mitigated the impact of the pandemic on Donegal ETB's learning community. It will be important to build on that agility and responsiveness to support social and economic recovery post-COVID-19. This might include consideration of potential changes in both curriculum offering and types of delivery, as well as continued investment in flexibility, agility and equity in all provision. Such changes would be enhanced by further investment in relationships with industry and community providers to continue the ETB's partnership approach to securing the best outcomes for the county and ensuring that current and emerging skills needs are met.

In relation to students, the review team recommends the introduction of a systematic approach to student engagement in course content, delivery and assessment as part of the annual programme review cycle. And, to ensure a more consistent and equitable experience for learners across the service and within each FET programme, the review team recommends that the ETB review the provision of learner supports across all services.

In relation to staffing, the review team was impressed by Donegal ETB's swift response to the COVID-19 crisis in ensuring that relevant CPD and support were available to staff to enable a smooth transition to remote learning. To ensure consistency of approach and continuous improvement, it will be important to work with national stakeholders to develop a systematic approach to performance management and development, linked to the ETB's strategy and targets. This will be supported by exploring opportunities for developing a structured best practice sharing approach for instructors and teachers to ensure a greater level of consistency across programme delivery and improve the learner experience.

## **4.3 Conclusions on Arrangements for Self-Evaluation, Monitoring & Review**

Significant effort and energy has been invested by Donegal ETB in establishing a new approach to quality assurance, supported by the introduction of an inclusive approach to self-evaluation, which provided a robust and fair analysis of the service and identified key areas of success and improvement. The review team was impressed by the reflective practice which was evident throughout the review process, and by the ongoing learning which has led to an appraisal of existing

structures and recognition of the need to improve communications to ensure consistency of messaging and improved engagement across the service and with partners and stakeholders.

To support continuous improvement, it will be important to secure wider and deeper engagement with both internal and external stakeholders to ensure that all voices, particularly the learner voice, are able to shape and influence the emerging single QA process. The regular systematic collection of student views and the inclusion of a wider diversification of voices within the formal structures, will be fundamental to shaping of Donegal ETB's improvement journey.

As noted above, the introduction of more effective use of data and evidence will improve performance, including KPIs and continuous and systematic self-monitoring, evaluation and benchmarking to support organisational learning. To support this, it will be important for Donegal ETB to develop its organisational capacity for internal reporting to provide enhanced collection and use of statistical information and the monitoring of organisational performance to support an improved understanding of organisational effectiveness and improved strategic planning.

Donegal ETB should undertake a consistent and comprehensive evaluation of programme delivery and of the student experience to support the continued improvement of the quality of teaching and learning. The introduction of a consistent approach to programme development – systematic, standardised and evidence-based – across all providers and in collaboration with QQI, would enhance outcomes across the service. To support this, the introduction of a robust review framework will help Donegal ETB ensure its programmes are and remain fit for purpose and future-proofed against external environmental changes.

## 4.4 **Commendations**

1. The review team **commends** Donegal ETB on its learner-centred mission, which sits clearly at the heart of all activity. This was particularly visible and impactful in the last 14 months of global pandemic, during which support to students and communities was vital to learning success and to physical and mental wellbeing.
2. The review team **commends** the introduction of a significant architecture of governance structures and processes and the considerable efforts made to engage with the ETB community, both internally and externally, to allow them to shape emerging thinking about quality assurance and enhancement.
3. The review team **commends** the reflective practice which has been evident throughout this review process and recognises the introduction of governance structures and processes to

support the management of QA and quality enhancement and the ongoing learning which has led to an appraisal of the existing structures and recognition of the need to improve communications to ensure messaging is cascaded consistently across the service and to the ETB's partners and stakeholders.

4. The review team **commends** Donegal ETB's provision of agile support to learners during the COVID-19 pandemic to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on Donegal ETB's learning community, moving swiftly to remote learning and utilising different digital platforms.
5. The review team **commends** Donegal ETB on its leadership in relation to Access, Transfer and Progression and RPL, both of which are so important in ensuring fair and equitable access to learning for all.
6. The review team **commends** Donegal ETB for the significant investment in establishing a new approach to quality assurance, supported by the introduction of an inclusive approach to self-evaluation to provide a robust and fair analysis of the service and identify key areas of success and improvement. The considerable efforts made to engage with the Donegal ETB community, both internally and externally in the self-evaluation, has allowed them to shape emerging thinking about quality assurance and enhancement.
7. The review team **commends** Donegal ETB on the significant effort and energy that it has invested in establishing a new approach to quality assurance, supported by the introduction of an inclusive approach to self-evaluation, which provided a robust and fair analysis of the service and identified key areas of success and improvement.
8. The review team **commends** Donegal ETB on its commitment to supporting the development and implementation of an integrated quality assurance system and a set of integrated processes and approaches and **recommends** that this be progressed as a matter of priority.
9. The review team **commends** Donegal ETB for its swift response to the COVID-19 crisis in ensuring that relevant CPD and support were available to staff to ensure the smooth transition to remote learning. This has been evidenced through feedback from both staff and learners during multiple meetings.
10. The review team **commends** the flexible approach adopted by Donegal ETB to the external environment.
11. The review team **commends** Donegal ETB's commitment to improvement in the important area of assessments through the introduction of the CAB.
12. The review team **commends** Donegal ETB for the ongoing development of its presence on multiple digital platforms and continuing to grow engagement on these.
13. The review team **commends** Donegal ETB for the significant effort & energy invested in the production of a reflective and critical self-evaluation, which sought to engage the wider Donegal ETB community.

## 4.5 Recommendations

1. The review team **recommends** wider representation of learners within the governance structures to strengthen the learner voice in ongoing self-evaluation at Donegal ETB. The regular systematic collection of student views and ensuring the inclusion of a wider diversification of voices within the formal structures will be fundamental to shaping of Donegal ETB's improvement journey
2. The review team **recommends** the development of a programme plan with clear priorities, targets and timelines to take its quality assurance journey to the next level. This should include the development of a route map to QA integration, supported by robust programme management with associated priorities, targets and timelines to drive continuous improvement.
3. The review team **recommends** that Donegal ETB make more effective use of data in any self-evaluation and the use of evidence to improve performance by making use of KPIs. The review team further **recommends** benchmarking within Donegal ETB to support quality enhancement to ensure consistency for each and every learner as well as scope for continuous improvement.
4. The review team **recommends** that Donegal ETB introduce continuous and systematic self-monitoring and evaluation to support organisational learning. This should be supported by data – standards, targets and indicators – as well as by benchmarking and the systematic collection of feedback from student, staff and stakeholder feedback.
5. The review team **recommends** the introduction of a consistent and comprehensive evaluation of programme delivery and the student experience to support the continued improvement of the quality of teaching and learning.
6. The review team **recommends** wider and deeper engagement with both internal and external stakeholders to ensure that all voices, particularly the learner voice, are able to shape and influence the emerging single QA process.
7. The review team **recommends** that Donegal ETB make every effort to communicate its best practice examples more widely.
8. The review team **recommends** wider representation on the QA governance structures. This will strengthen the shaping of Donegal ETB's improvement journey and will ensure the inclusion of a wider diversification of voices within the formal structures. Specifically the review team **recommends** the inclusion of learners, industry and community sector representatives throughout the QA structures as relevant; and that systematic wider and deeper engagement with these groups to ensure all voices, particularly the learner voice, are able to shape and influence the emerging single QA process.
9. Recognising work already underway to progress the QA integration project, the review team **recommends** that any further work undertaken include analysis of consistent and wide reaching qualitative and quantitative data for quality enhancement purposes and ensure regular thematic analysis and benchmarking.

10. The review team **recommends** the establishment of a robust programme plan with achievable timelines for the completion of the integrated quality assurance approach.
11. The review team **recommends** the introduction of a consistent approach to programme development by Donegal ETB.
12. The review team **recommends** the urgent completion of a revised policy on certification approval, which is currently being addressed by the ETB.
13. The review team **recommends** that Donegal ETB develop its use of data for performance monitoring.
14. The review team **recommends** that the CAG develop annual plans and KPIs which go beyond social media engagement
15. The review team **recommends** that Donegal ETB explore additional opportunities to develop and strengthen its communications strategy and channels and to consider more ways of utilising digital communications both internally and externally.
16. The review team **recommends** that Donegal ETB explore further opportunities to develop a structured rebranding and communications plan for the service, with defined targets and benchmarking, in order to fully engage with stakeholders and raise awareness of the services and support that can be offered.
17. The review team **recommends** that all programmes be subject to progress reporting and that all teaching and learning is evaluated on a consistent basis to support data gathering and improvement.
18. The review team **recommends** the introduction of a systematic approach to student engagement in course content, delivery and assessment as part of the annual programme review cycle.
19. The review team **recommends** that Donegal ETB reviews the provision of support across all services and works towards consistent and equitable application across the service and within each FET programme.
20. The review team **recommends** that Donegal ETB explore opportunities for developing a structured best practice sharing approach for instructors and teachers to help ensure a greater level of consistency across programme delivery and improve the learner experience.
21. The review team **recommends** that Donegal ETB explore opportunities for increasing learner engagement in the Student Surveys and Student Voice to ensure more representative feedback.
22. The review team **recommends** the introduction of a robust review framework to help Donegal ETB ensure its programmes are and remain fit for purpose and future-proofed against external environmental changes.

## **4.6 Statements on Quality Assurance**

### **Overarching Statements About QA**

The review team analysed the SER and supplementary documentation provided by Donegal ETB. It also conducted virtual planning meetings and a virtual site visit which included over 40 meetings, focus group discussions and interviews with over 200 internal and external stakeholders, including staff, students, partners and second providers. This direct engagement supplements the wealth of written material provided by Donegal ETB. Based on this the team was pleased to observe the following:

- (1) *The effectiveness of the quality assurance procedures of Donegal ETB and the extent of their implementation.*

The review team is satisfied that Donegal ETB is implementing its current quality assurance policies and procedures effectively. It notes however that there are two quality assurance systems in place which govern QQI-validated programmes across the ETB. The dual systems transferred from the legacy organisations which merged to form Donegal ETB in 2013. The development and implementation of a single quality assurance system would significantly enhance Donegal ETB's ability to ensure consistency across all aspects of its work.

- (2) *The extent to which the quality assurance procedures adhere to QQI's Quality Assurance Guidelines and policies.*

The review team notes that the existing quality assurance procedures have been approved by QQI and are compliant with Quality Assurance Guidelines and policies. Arising from the virtual visit and review of documentation, the review team has found that there remains a need for Donegal ETB to establish and implement a new single Quality Assurance Governance and Management structure. It noted, however, that Donegal ETB recognises the need to progress this and plans to utilise the review report to support that journey.

- (3) *The extent to which the procedures are in keeping with QQI's Policy Restatement and Criteria for Access, Transfer and Progression in Relation to Learners for Providers of Further and Higher Education and Training*

The review team is satisfied with the procedures for access, transfer and progression in Donegal ETB and note that the ETB has been recognised nationally for its exemplary work in this area. The procedures are in keeping with the QQI's Policy Restatement and Criteria for Access, Transfer and Progression in Relation to Learners for Providers of Further and Higher Education and Training (NQAI 2003, Restated 2015/QP.20 v1.0© QQI).

*(4) The enhancement of quality by/at Donegal ETB*

The review team found evidence that the existing governance policy and procedures at Donegal ETB support an approach to quality enhancement throughout the ETB. A single systematic QA system would significantly strengthen this objective.

# Section 5

**ETB Review Response**

# Section 5: ETB Review Response

## Response to QQI Inaugural Review Report

Donegal ETB welcomes the report of the independent QQI Review Team on the inaugural Quality Review earlier this year of our Further Education & Training service. Notwithstanding the challenges posed by conducting the review online at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, the ETB was pleased with the open and wholehearted efforts by the team during the week to grasp the breadth of its provision and services and to understand the unique and complex environment within which we operate, all in the context of reviewing our quality assurance policies and procedures.

We appreciate the many commendations and also the recommendations in the report which will assist our ongoing pursuit of progress in quality enhancement within the FET service. In common with ETB colleagues elsewhere, Donegal ETB has been involved in an enormous transition over the past number of years with the merging of two organisations. Following this significant change management process, it is particularly important to us that the review team commended us on our learner-centred approach which they found sits at the heart of all our activity, resulting in a FET service which has a rich breadth of engagement, reach and opportunity for all. The team's repeated acknowledgement during the review week of the passion and commitment of our staff and of the value placed on Donegal ETB by its external stakeholders was also affirming and motivating.

We particularly welcome the specific commendations in the report on:

- the focus and demonstration of our learner-centred approach which the team found is driven by Donegal ETB's strategic vision and mission and is embedded within its organisational culture. The team found evidence of rapid, flexible, innovative and impactful support to learners and staff during the pandemic, which mitigated its impact on their learning community; of significant leadership in relation to Access, Transfer and Progression and RPL; and of the critical role played by the ETB in supporting the active inclusion of individuals across the county, particularly those who are socially, educationally or economically disadvantaged, and reflecting the fundamental ethos of the service in relation to learner empowerment.
- the significant investment in establishing a new approach to quality assurance, supported by a reflective and critical approach to self-evaluation; this is based on considerable engagement with staff, students and the wider community, allowing them to shape emerging thinking on quality assurance and enhancement. The team commended a fair and robust analysis of the FET service which identified key areas of success and improvement. Furthermore, the team highlighted the ongoing reflective practice in the service which it found evidence of throughout the review

process; it recognises the introduction of a significant architecture of governance structures and processes to support quality enhancement (including centralised assessment) and commends Donegal ETB's commitment to the development of one integrated quality assurance system for FET.

- the flexible approach adopted by Donegal ETB to its external environment and our responsiveness to the changing local and regional needs of individuals and businesses. The team notes that we develop and maintain an extensive network of positive relationships with a wide range of organisations, institutions, groups and sectors, enhanced by significant outreach provision and community education support. The team commended the ETB on the establishment of its Communications Advisory Group and the appointment of its Communications Officer; on the complete redevelopment of its website; and on its increasing engagement of different audiences (including employers) on multiple digital platforms. The report also recognises the development of new programmes and progression pathways at various NFQ levels and under different awarding bodies, aimed at meeting emerging skill needs.

The review team notes repeatedly the critical and reflective nature of the self-evaluation carried out by Donegal ETB in preparation for the review. We are reassured that the team has confirmed our identification of the main priorities for improvement which are outlined in the self-evaluation report, including:

- strengthening the student voice and the introduction of consistent student supports across programmes. Donegal ETB welcomes the recommendations that wider representation of students (and other stakeholders) be included in the governance structures and that in on-going self-evaluation, student feedback is gathered and used systematically to inform course planning, content, delivery and assessment, and to shape the wider emerging single QA system. The FET Student Forum (2020) and the findings of our comprehensive research (2020) confirm the variation in application of student supports and give direction on how to address the inconsistencies. Specific measures will be outlined in the Action Plan.
- the development of a clear plan for moving quality assurance to the next level, including the full integration of both quality assurance legacy systems. Donegal ETB recognises the merit in the review team's recommendation that the plan incorporate specific priorities, targets and timelines for implementation, supported by analysis of qualitative and quantitative data, and underpinned by robust project leadership. A project to develop a detailed 5-year plan is already underway.
- more effective use of data to support planning, monitoring, evaluation and review. This recommendation underpinned many of review team's findings and subsequent advice, including use of KPIs and benchmarking. The ongoing evolution of the national FET data management system (PLSS) and the recent appointment of a Systems & Data Reporting Officer will support the

implementation of these recommendations, as will the next iteration of the SOLAS-ETB Strategic Performance Agreements which outline performance targets over a three-year period.

The QA review process has provided Donegal ETB's FET service with a valuable opportunity to step back and reflect on our work; to work collectively with all our stakeholders, internal and external; and to learn from each other and from the review team's observations and recommendations. Donegal ETB would like to sincerely thank the review team for its commitment to compiling a report that will help to inform and guide us on its path to improvement in the coming years. Donegal ETB would also like to thank Quality and Qualifications Ireland for its support throughout this process.

Anne McHugh (Chief Executive Donegal ETB Education and Training Board)

October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2021



## Appendices

# **Appendix A: Review Terms of Reference**

## **Terms of Reference for the Inaugural Review of Quality Assurance in Education & Training Boards**

### **1 Background and Context for the Review**

1.1 QQI established Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for all providers in April 2016, and Sector Specific Quality Assurance Guidelines for Education and Training Boards (ETBs) in May 2017<sup>6</sup>. These guidelines collectively address the quality assurance responsibilities of ETBs as 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.

1.2 The Education and Training Boards (ETBs) were established under the Education and Training Boards Act (2013). They are statutory providers with responsibility for education and training, youth work and other statutory functions, and operate and manage a range of centres administering and providing adult and further education and training (FET). ETBs also administer secondary and primary education through schools and engage in a range of non-accredited provision. These areas are not subject to quality assurance regulation by QQI.

1.3 In 2018, all sixteen ETBs completed re-engagement with QQI. Following this process each ETB established its quality assurance (QA) policy and procedures in accordance with section 30 of the Quality and Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 2012. QQI recognises that those policies and procedures are reflective of the evolving and developmental nature of quality assurance within the ETB sector as it continues to integrate the legacy body processes.

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<sup>6</sup> Policy for the Inaugural Review of Quality Assurance in Education and Training Boards (QQI, 2019)

1.4 As outlined in QQI's Core QA Guidelines, quality and its assurance are the responsibility of the provider, i.e. an ETB, and review and self-evaluation of quality is a fundamental element of an ETB's quality assurance system.

1.5 A provider's external quality assurance obligations include a statutory review of quality assurance by QQI. QQI review functions are set out in various sections of the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act (2012) as amended (henceforth 'the 2012 Act'). The reviews relate to QQI's obligation under Section 27(b) of the 2012 Act (to establish procedures for the review by QQI of the effectiveness and implementation of a provider's quality assurance procedures) and to section 34 of the 2012 Act (the external review by QQI of a provider's quality assurance procedures).

1.6 An external review of quality assurance has not been previously undertaken for the ETBs, neither through QQI nor former legacy awarding body processes. QQI is cognisant of the ETBs' current organisational context in which the establishment of comprehensive and integrated quality assurance systems is an ongoing process. A primary function of the reviews will thus be to inform the future development of quality assurance and enhancement activities within the organisations. Following the completion of the sixteen review reports, a sectoral report will also be produced identifying systemic observations and findings.

1.7 The 2012 Act states that QQI shall consult with SOLAS (the state organisation responsible for funding, co-ordinating and monitoring further education and training in Ireland) in carrying out a review of education and training boards. This will take the form of consultation with SOLAS on the Terms of Reference for the review and the provision of contextual briefing by SOLAS to review teams.

## **2 Purposes**

2.1 QQI has specific multi-dimensional purposes for its quality assurance reviews. The Policy for the Inaugural Review of Quality Assurance in Education and Training Boards outlines six purposes for this review process. Those purposes, and the ways in which they will be achieved and measured, are as follows:

Purpose	Achieved and Measured Through
<b>1. To encourage a quality culture and the enhancement of the learning environment and experience within ETBs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emphasising the learner and the learning experience in reviews.</li> <li>• Constructively and meaningfully involving staff at all levels of the organisation in the self-evaluation and external evaluation phases of the review.</li> <li>• Providing a source of evidence of areas for improvement and areas for revision of policy and change and basing follow-up upon them.</li> <li>• Exploring innovative and effective practices and procedures.</li> <li>• Providing evidence of quality assurance and quality enhancement within the ETB.</li> </ul>
<b>2. To provide feedback to ETBs about organisation-wide quality and the impact of mission, strategy, governance and management on quality and the overall effectiveness of their quality assurance.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emphasising the ownership, governance and management of quality assurance at the corporate ETB-level, i.e. how the ETB exercises oversight of quality assurance.</li> <li>• Pitching the review at a comprehensive ETB-wide level.</li> <li>• Evaluating compliance with legislation, policy and standards.</li> <li>• Evaluating the impact and effectiveness of quality assurance procedures.</li> </ul>
<b>3. To improve public confidence in the quality of ETB provision by promoting transparency and public awareness.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adhering to purposes, criteria and outcomes that are clear and transparent.</li> <li>• Publication of clear timescales and terms of reference for review.</li> <li>• Evaluating, as part of the review, ETB reporting on quality assurance, to ensure that it is transparent and accessible.</li> <li>• Publication of the individual ETB reports and outcomes of reviews in accessible locations and formats for different audiences.</li> <li>• Publication of sectoral findings and observations.</li> </ul>
<b>4. To support system-level improvement of the quality of further education and training in the ETBs.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Publishing a sectoral report, with system-level observations and findings.</li> <li>• The identification and dissemination of effective practice to facilitate shared learning.</li> </ul>
<b>5. To encourage quality by using evidence-based, objective methods and advice.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Using the expertise of international, national, learner, industry and other stakeholder peer reviewers who are independent of the ETB.</li> <li>• Ensuring that findings are based on stated evidence.</li> <li>• Facilitating ETBs to identify measures for quality relevant to their own mission and context.</li> <li>• Promoting the identification and dissemination of examples of good practice and innovation</li> </ul>

<p><b>6. To provide an opportunity for ETBs to articulate their stage of development, mission and objectives and demonstrate the quality assurance of their provision, both individually and as a sector.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Publication of self-evaluation reports, conducted with input from ETB learners and wider stakeholder groups.</li> <li>• Publication of the reports and outcomes of reviews in accessible locations and formats for different audiences.</li> </ul>
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### 3 Objectives and Criteria for Review

3.1 The core objective of the external review is **to evaluate the implementation and effectiveness of an ETB's quality assurance procedures**. As this is the inaugural review, it will have a particular emphasis on the arrangements established to date to support the operation of the quality assurance system. Recognising that the development and implementation of an ETB-wide quality assurance system and procedural framework is an ongoing process, the review will also have a forward-looking dimension and will explore the ETB's plans and infrastructure to support the ongoing development of these systems. The review will thus examine the following:

#### **Objective 1: Governance and Management of Quality:**

Evaluate the comprehensive oversight arrangements and transparent decision-making structures for the ETB's education and training and related activities within and across all service provision (for example FE colleges, training centres, community-based education services, contracted providers, collaborative partnerships/arrangements).

The governance and quality management systems would be expected to address:

#### **Indicative Matters to be Explored**

##### **a) The ETB's mission and strategy**

- How/do the ETB's quality assurance arrangements contribute to the fulfilment of these?
- Is the learner experience consistent with this mission?

##### **b) Structures and terms of reference for the governance and management of quality assurance**

- Are the arrangements sufficiently comprehensive and robust to ensure strong governance and management of operations (e.g. separation of responsibilities, externality, stakeholder input)?

- Is governance visible and transparent?
- Where multi-level arrangements exist (i.e. where responsibilities are invested in centre managers), is there sufficient clarity, co-ordination, corporate oversight of, and accountability for, these arrangements?

**c) The documentation of quality assurance policy and procedures**

- How effective are the arrangements for the development and approval of policies and procedures?
- Are policies and procedures coherent and comprehensive (do they incorporate all service types and awarding bodies?), robust and fit for purpose?
- Are policies and procedures systematically evaluated?

**d) Staff recruitment, management and development**

- How does the ETB assure itself as to the competence of its staff?
- How are professional standards maintained and enhanced?
- How are staff informed of developments impacting the organisation and how can they input to decision-making?

**e) Programme development, approval and submission for validation**

- What arrangements are in place to ensure alignment of programme development activity with strategic goals and regional needs?
- Are the arrangements for the approval and management of programme development robust, objective and transparent?
- What arrangements are in place to facilitate and oversee a comprehensive programme development process in advance of submission for validation (e.g. the conduct of research, inclusion of external expertise, writing learning outcomes, curricula etc.)?
- Are there structures in place to support collaborative programme development with other ETBs/providers?

**f) Access, transfer and progression**

- How does the ETB quality assure access, transfer and progression systematically across all programmes and services?
- Are there flexible learning pathways, respecting and attending to the diversity of learners?
- Are admissions, progression and recognition policies and processes clear and transparent for learners and implemented on a consistent basis?

**g) Integrity and approval of learner results, including the operation and outcome of internal verification and external authentication processes**

- What governance and oversight processes are in place to ensure the integrity of learner assessment and results?
- How does the ETB ensure that these arrangements provide for consistent decision-making and standards across services and centres?

**h) Information and data management;**

- What arrangements are in place to ensure that data are reliable and secure?
- How are data utilised as part of the quality assurance system?
- What arrangements are in place to ensure the integrity of learner records (including, where relevant, the sharing of learner data with other providers on national apprenticeships)?
- How is compliance with data legislation ensured?

i) **Public information and communications;**

- Is information on the quality assurance system, procedures and activities publicly available and regularly updated?
- What arrangements are in place to ensure that published information in relation to all provision (including by centres) is clear, accurate, up to date and easily accessible?

**Objective 2: Teaching, Learning and Assessment**

Evaluate the arrangements to ensure the quality of teaching, learning and assessment within the ETB and a high-quality learning experience for all learners. These will include:

**Indicative Matters to be Explored**

a) **The learning environment**

- How/is the quality of the learning experience monitored?
- How/are modes of delivery and pedagogical methods evaluated to ensure that they meet the needs of learners?
- How is the quality of the learning experience of learners on work placements ensured?
- Is there evidence of enhancement in teaching and learning?

b) **Assessment of learners**

- How is the integrity, consistency and security of assessment instruments, methodologies, procedures and records ensured – including in respect of recognition of prior learning?
- How is the standard of assessment of learners on work placements ensured – particularly where these are undertaken by non-ETB staff?
- Do learners in all settings have a clear understanding of how and why they are assessed and are they given feedback on assessment?

c) **Supports for learners**

- How are support services planned and monitored to ensure that they meet the needs of learners?
- How does the ETB ensure consistency in the availability of appropriate supports to learners across different settings/regions?
- Are learners aware of the existence of supports?

**Objective 3: Self-Evaluation, Monitoring & Review**

Evaluate the arrangements for the monitoring, review and evaluation of, and reporting on, the ETB's education, training and related services (including through third-party arrangements) and the quality assurance system and procedures underpinning them. It will also reflect on how these processes are utilised to complete the quality cycle through the identification and promotion of effective practice and by addressing areas for improvement. This will include:

## **Indicative Matters to be Explored**

### **a) Self-evaluation, monitoring and review (including programme and quality review)**

- What are the processes for quality assurance planning, monitoring and reporting?
- Are the processes for self-evaluation, monitoring and review (including the self-evaluation report undertaken for the inaugural review) comprehensive, inclusive and evidence-based?
- Is there evidence of strategic analysis and follow-up of the outcome of internal quality assurance reviews and monitoring (e.g. review reports, external authenticator reports, learner feedback reports etc.)?
- How is quality promoted and enhanced?

### **b) Programme monitoring and review**

- How are programme delivery and outcomes monitored across multiple centres (including collection of feedback from learners/stakeholders)?
- Are mechanisms for periodic review of programmes comprehensive, inclusive and robust?
- Is there evidence that the outcome of programme monitoring and review informs programme modification and enhancement?
- Are the outputs of programme monitoring and review considered on a strategic basis by the ETB's governance bodies to inform decision-making?

### **c) Oversight, monitoring and review of relationships with external/third parties (in particular, with contracted training providers, community training providers, and other collaborative provision).**

- How does the ETB ensure the suitability of the external parties with which it engages?
- Is the nature of the arrangements with each external party published?
- Is the effectiveness of these arrangements monitored and reviewed through ETB governance?
- Does the ETB assess its impact within the region and local communities?

### **3.2 In respect of each dimension, the review will:**

- evaluate the effectiveness of ETB's quality assurance procedures for the purposes of establishing, ascertaining, maintaining and improving the quality of further education, training, and related services; and
- identify perceived gaps in the internal quality assurance mechanisms and the appropriateness, sufficiency, prioritisation and timeliness of planned measures to address them in the context of the ETB's current stage of development; and
- explore achievements and innovations in quality assurance and in the enhancement of teaching and learning.

3.3 Following consideration of the matters above, the review will:

- Provide a qualitative statement about the effectiveness of the quality assurance procedures of the ETB and the extent of their implementation;
- Provide a statement about the extent to which existing quality assurance procedures adhere to QQI's Quality Assurance Guidelines and policies (as listed at 3.4), to include an explicit qualitative statement on the extent to which the procedures are in keeping with QQI's Policy Restatement and Criteria for Access, Transfer and Progression in Relation to Learners for Providers of Further and Higher Education and Training;<sup>2F</sup><sup>7</sup>
- Provide a qualitative statement on the enhancement of quality; and
- Identify effective practice and recommendations for further improvement.

3.4 The implementation and effectiveness of QQI's Core Quality Assurance Guidelines will be considered in the context of the following criteria:

- The ETB's mission and objectives for quality assurance;
- QQI's Sector-Specific Quality Assurance Guidelines for Education and Training Boards
- QQI's Topic-Specific Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Statutory Apprenticeship Programmes;
- QQI's Topic-Specific Quality Assurance Guidelines for Blended Learning;
- QQI's Policy Restatement and Criteria for Access, Transfer and Progression in Relation to Learners for Providers of Further and Higher Education and Training;
- QQI's Policies and Criteria for the Validation of Programmes of Education and Training; and
- Relevant European guidelines and practice on quality and quality assurance

## 4 The Review Team

4.1 QQI will appoint a review team to conduct the review. Review teams are composed of peer reviewers who are learners; leaders and staff from comparable providers; and external representatives including employer and civic representatives. The size of the team will depend on the size and complexity of the ETB but in general will comprise five or six persons. A reviewer may participate in more than one ETB review.

4.2 QQI will identify an appropriate team of reviewers for each review who are independent of the ETB with the appropriate skills and experience required to perform their tasks. This will include

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.qqi.ie/Downloads/ATP%20Policy%20Restatement%20FINAL%202018.pdf>

experts with knowledge and experience of further education and training, quality assurance, teaching and learning, and external review. It will include international representatives and QQI will seek to ensure diversity within the team. The ETB will have an opportunity to comment on the proposed composition of their review team to ensure there are no conflicts of interest. The roles and responsibilities of the review team members are as follows<sup>8</sup>:

### Chairperson

4.3. The chairperson is a full member of the team. Their role is to provide tactical leadership and to ensure that the work of the team is conducted in a professional, impartial and fair manner, and in compliance with the Terms of Reference. The chairperson's functions include:

- Leading the conduct of the review and ensuring that proceedings remain focused.
- Coordinating the work of reviewers.
- Fostering open and respectful exchanges of opinion and ensuring that the views of all participants are valued and considered.
- Facilitating the emergence of evidence-based team decisions (ideally based on consensus).
- Contributing to, and overseeing the production of, the review report within the timeline agreed with QQI, approving amendments or convening additional meetings if required.

### Co-ordinating Reviewer

4.4 The co-ordinating reviewer is a full member of the team. Their role is to capture the team's deliberations and decisions during the proceedings and ensure that they are expressed clearly and accurately in the team report. It is vital that the co-ordinating reviewer ensures that sufficient evidence is provided in the report to support the team's recommendations. The role of the co-ordinating reviewer includes:

- Acting as the liaison between the review team and QQI; and, during the main review visit, between the review team and the ETB review co-ordinator.
- Maintaining records of discussions during the planning and main review visits.
- Co-ordinating the drafting of the review report in consultation with the team members and under the direction of the chairperson within the timeline agreed with QQI.

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<sup>8</sup> Further detail on the conduct of reviewers is outlined in QQI's Code of Conduct for Reviewers and Evaluators.

## All Review Team Members

4.5 The role of all review team members includes:

- Preparing for the review by reading and critically evaluating all written material;
- Investigating and testing claims made in the self-evaluation report and other ETB documents during the main review visit by speaking to a range of staff, learners and stakeholders.
- Contributing to the production of the review report, ensuring that their particular perspective and voice (i.e. learner, industry, stakeholder, international etc.) forms an integral part of the review.
- Following the individual ETB reviews, providing observations to inform the development of the sectoral report.

## 5 The Review Process and Timeline

5.1 The key steps in the review process with indicative timelines are outlined below. Specific dates for each ETB review will be outlined by QQI in accordance with the published review schedule.

Step	Action	Timeframe
<b>Preparation</b>	Preparation of a provider profile by each ETB (e.g. outlining mission; strategic objectives; local context; data on staff profiles; recent developments; key challenges).	6-9 months before first main review visit
	Provision of ETB data by SOLAS (e.g. data on learner profiles; local context; strategic direction).	
	Establishment of review teams and identification of ETBs for review by each review team, selected in accordance with the ETB provider profiles and data and in consultation with ETBs on potential conflicts of interest.	
<b>Self-Evaluation Report (SER)</b>	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.	11 weeks before main review visit

<b>Step</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>
<b>Desk Review</b>	Desk review of the self-evaluation reports by the review teams.	Before initial meeting
<b>Initial Meeting</b>	An initial meeting of the review team, including reviewer training, briefing from SOLAS, discussion of preliminary impressions and identification of any additional documentation required.	5 weeks after submission of self-evaluation report 6 weeks before main review visit
<b>Planning Visit</b>	A visit to the ETB by the chair and co-ordinating reviewer of the review team to receive information about the self-evaluation process, discuss the schedule for the main review visit and discuss any additional information requests.	5 weeks after SER 6 weeks before main review visit
<b>Main Review Visit</b>	A visit to the ETB by the review team to receive and consider evidence from ETB staff, learners and stakeholders in respect of the objectives and criteria set out in the Terms of Reference.	11 weeks following receipt of self-evaluation report
<b>Individual ETB Reports</b>	Preparation of draft ETB review report by review team.	6-8 weeks after main review visit
	Draft report sent to ETB by QQI for a check of factual accuracy.	1 week following receipt by QQI
	ETB responds with any factual accuracy corrections	1 week following receipt
	Final report sent to ETB.	1 week following receipt of any factual accuracy corrections
	Response to review submitted by ETB.	2 weeks after receipt of final report

<b>Step</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>
<b>Outcomes</b>	QQI considers findings of individual ETB review reports and organisational responses through governance processes.	Next available meeting of QQI Approvals and Reviews Committee
	ETB review reports are published with organisational response.	
<b>Follow-Up</b>	Preparation of an action plan by ETB.	1 month after QQI decision
	QQI seeks feedback from ETB on experience of review.	6 weeks after decision
	One-year follow-up report by ETB to QQI. This (and any subsequent follow-up) may be integrated into annual reports to QQI.	1 year after main review visit
	Continuous reporting and dialogue on follow-up through annual reporting and dialogue processes.	Continuous

# Appendix B: Main Review Visit Schedule

Date:24/05/21				
Theme: Governance & Management/ Self-evaluation, Monitoring & Review (Day 1)				
Time (GMT)	Group	Participants	Role	Purpose
09.00-09.30	ETB Review Coordinator/FET Director	Crona Gallagher (Director of FET Donegal ETB)/ Joe Whitelock (QA Coordinator)		Meeting with ETB Review Coordinator
09.30-10.00	Private Review Team Meeting			
10.00-11.00	1. ETB Chief Executive & Senior Management Team	Anne McHugh	Chief Executive	Discussion of mission, strategic plan, roles and responsibilities for quality assurance and enhancement
	A short video (3-4 minutes) will be presented to the review team to give them an oversight of the Donegal ETB FET service and the geographical spread of the provision.	Crona Gallagher	Director of FET	
		Martina Needham	Adult Education Officer	

		Charlie Gorney	Adult Education Officer	
		Vinny McGroary	Area Training Manager	
		Mairead Carlin	Asst. Training Centre Manager	
11.00-11.30	2. SER Steering Group			
		Con Ferry	(Instructor)	
		Deidre McColgan	(Co-ordinator (A) & Guidance Counsellor)	
		Lorraine Murray	(Senior Training Advisor)	
		Bridin McMahon	(Administration/Staff Officer)	
		Tina O'Donnell	(Assistant Training Standards Officer)	
11.30-11.45	Review Team Break			
11:45-12:30	3. Quality Council	Cróna Gallagher	Director of FET, Donegal ETB (Chair),	Discussion of the approach to, and mechanisms for, quality assurance and enhancement
		Joanne Donaghy	Youthreach Resource Person, Donegal ETB (Staff Rep and elected staff rep on ETB Board)	
		Siobhan Magee	External Rep.—Further Education and Support Service, FESS	

		Paddy Hannigan	External Rep.—Department of Electronic and Mechanical Engineering, Letterkenny Institute of Technology, LYIT	
		Joe Whitelock	QA Coordinator, Donegal ETB (Secretary)	
<b>12.30-1.00</b>	<b>Panel Review Team Meeting</b>			
1.00-2.00	Review Team Lunch/Break			
2.00-2.45	Parallel sessions with learners, including learners (max 3 groups)			Discussion of learner experience
	4. Parallel session 1 (Non-Accredited & L1-4 learners)	Ciaran McGlynn	Lifford Youthreach L4	
		Yousra Ali	L3 ESOL and commencing L3 Communications in September	
		Derek Long	Essential Skills and Communications L3	
		Catherine McLaughlin	Intercultural Awareness L3	
		Michael Noonan	Essential IT L2	
		Josilene Gomes	L3 Communications (ESOL) & L4 Customer Service	
2.00-2.45	5. Parallel session 2 (L4-6 learners)	Patricia McBride	(VTOS Year 1)	

		Susan Carey	VTOS Early Childhood Care and Education (Childcare) with Special Needs & Community Services L5	
		Natasha Hynes	BTEI Health Service Skills L5	
		Aisling Davis	PLC Business Administration level 5	
		Shona Mc Clay	VTOS, Leaving Certificate	
		Roisín McLaughlin	Community Ed Business Administration L5	
	6. Parallel session 3 (Traineeship, Apprenticeship & other WBL learners)	Sean Quinn,	Certificate in Leadership and Management - Skills to Advance (Online) - R2 ILM Level 4	
		John McColgan	Mathematics for the Workplace Non accredited course	
		Catriona Doherty	Digital Sales & Marketing Traineeship	
		Kate Bonar	Skills to Advance Multimedia	
		Peggy Ann O'Keeffe	Beauty Therapy Traineeship	
2.45-3.15	Private Review Team Meeting			
3.15-3.30	Review Team Break			

3.30-4.15	Parallel sessions with academic staff (cross-section of services and programmes)			Discussion of staff involvement in quality assurance and enhancement
	7. Parallel session 1 (L1-4 Teachers/Instructors/Tutors)	Thomas Bonner	Literacy Programme delivering in 4 Centres – ESOL and Refugee Resettlement) ESOL and Intercultural Studies	
		Kelley Proctor	Literacy Programme Letterkenny and Buncrana – Retail Skills	
		Georgie Thompson	Adult Literacy Organiser/Tutor	
		Marianne O'Donnell	Youthreach, Gortahork - Food and Nutrition and Comms Level 4	
		Priya Mendes	Youthreach Letterkenny – IT) , Gareth Austin (Letterkenny Training Center, Horticulture	
		Tommy Delaney	Youthreach, Buncrana to Lifford – Woodwork Levels 3 & 4	
	8. Parallel session 2 (L4-6 Teachers/Instructors/Tutors)	Angela McElhinney	Business and Communications Teacher and TEL mentor, Stranorlar Centre , BTEI	
		Veronica Curran	ICT Teacher City & Guilds, ICDL and Microsoft , Letterkenny Centre (VTOS)	

		Jacqui Barrett	Healthcare and Childcare Teacher (PLC)	
		Gareth Austin	L5 Horticulture	
		Bernard McEleney	(Bus and Heavy Goods Vehicle Tutor) Contracted Training Countywide,	
		Greg Gillespie	(IT Instructor) Letterkenny Training Centre	
3.30-4.15	9. Parallel session 3 (Traineeship & other WBL instructors)	Aiden Coll	Instructor Gaoth Dobhair Electrical Apprenticeship	
		Mary Feeney	Instructor Digital Sales and Marketing	
		Mary Ferry	Instructor Beauty Therapy	
		Marguerite McGee	Instructor Account Tech	
		John Conroy	Healthcare	
		Gabby Gray	Tutor ILM Leadership and Management	
4.15-4.45	Private Review Team Meeting			
4.45-5.30	Parallel sessions with Community Providers and Collaborative Partners and Employer and Regional Skills Bodies			

	<b>10. Parallel session 1 (Community Providers &amp; Collaborative Partners)</b>	Shauna McClenaghan	Joint CEO, Inishowen Development Partnership (IDP); Community and Voluntary Sector	Discussion of ETB engagement with community groups and collaborative partners
		Kathleen McHugh,	Manager , Family Resource Centre, Donegal Town;	
		Declan Doherty	Department of Social Protection	
		Margaret Larkin	Community Development Manager - Donegal Local Development Company	
4.45-5.30	<b>11. Parallel session 2 (Employer and regional skills bodies)</b>	Hilary McPartland	North West Regional Skills Manager	Discussion of the ETB's approach to, and experience of, employer engagement in responding to local skills needs and quality assuring provision
		Toni Forrester-	CEO, Letterkenny Chamber of Commerce, Irish Pressings,	
		Shane Rooney-	Training Governance Supervisor, Optum,	
		Eve Ann Mc Carron	Local Enterprise Office	
		Leona Barron	Pretty Baby Hair Accessories	
		Greg Mullen	Head of Planning and Design, KN Circet	
5.30-6.00	Private Review Team Meeting			

25/05/21				
<b>Theme: Teaching, Learning &amp; Assessment &amp; the Learner Experience (Day 2)</b>				
Time (GMT)	Group	People	Role	Purpose
09.00-09.30	ETB Review Coordinator	Joe Whitelock (QA Coordinator)		Meeting with ETB Review Coordinator
9.30-10.00	Private Review Team Meeting			
10.00-10.45	12. Parallel session 1. Guidance Counsellors/ Recruitment Staff/ Programme Managers	Tara McGuire	Recruitment Coordinator	Discussion of arrangements for learner recruitment, access, transfer and progression
		Deirdre McColgan	Guidance Counsellor	
		Emilia Niewulska	Adult Literacy Organiser	
		Gillian Kennedy	Youthreach Coordinator	
		Aidan McCloskey	Basic Education Coordinator	
		Lochlainn McCool	Careers Advisor	
10.00-10.45	13. Parallel session 2. Recognition of Prior Learning	Martina Needham	Adult Education Office	Discussion of arrangements for the recognition of prior learning
		Siobhan Murray	RPL Mentor / Coordinators	

		Teresa Kealy	RPL Administrator	
		Elena Gill	Guidance Counsellor	
		Diane Greer	Facilitator / Mentor	
		Sylvia Doherty	RPL Facilitator	
10.45-11.15	Private Review Team Meeting			
11.15-11.30	Review Team Break			
11.30-12.15	Parallel sessions with Quality Council Sub-groups (max 3 groups)			
	14. Parallel session 1 (Group) QA Sub Committee	Charlie Gorney	Adult Education Officer/Chair	Discussion of role of committee in quality assurance of Donegal ETB
		Lorraine Murray	Senior Training Advisor	
		Aidan McCloskey	Basic Education Coordinator	
		Caroline Gillespie	VTOS Coordinator	
		Tara McGuire	Recruitment Coordinator	
	15. Parallel session 2 (Group) Programme Sub Committee - Programme Sub Committee Representatives	Mairead Carlin	Asst. Training Centre Manager Chair	Discussion of role of committee in quality assurance of Donegal ETB
		Antoinette O Keeney	QA Resource Worker	

		Bridgita Kelly	Programme Development Officer	
		Dara Devine	Contracted Training Officer	
		Michelle O'Reilly	PLC Coordinator	
		Siobhan Coughlan	BTEI Support	
11.30-12.15	16. Parallel session 3 (Group) Certification Approval Board (CAB)	Martina Needham	Adult Education Officer	Discussion of role of committee in quality assurance of Donegal ETB
		Elaine Russell	Training Standards Officer	
		Corinna Orsi	Training Standards Officer	
		Margery Quinn	Assistant Training Standards Officer	
		Tina O'Donnell	Assistant Training Standards Officer	
12.15-12.45	Private Review Team Meeting			
12.45-1.45	Review Team Lunch/Break			
1.45-2.15	Private Review Team Meeting			
2.15-3.00	16. Session on Community Based Provision	Martina Needham	Adult Education Officer	Discussion of staff involvement in quality assurance and enhancement of the Community Based Provision
		Siobhan Coughlan	BTEI Support	
		Catherine Friel	Community Education Facilitator	

		Charlie Gorney	Adult Education Officer	
		Trisha McGuinness	Community Education Support Programme Administrator	
		Caroline McCabe	Community Education Based Provision	
3.00-3.30	Private Review Team Meeting			
3.30-4.15	17. Learner support services staff			Discussion of staff involvement in quality assurance and enhancement of support services to learners
		Georgina Thompson	Adult Literacy Organiser	
		Eileen Patton	Guidance Counsellor	
		Caitriona Cullen	Youthreach Coordinator	
		Danielle McGee	Centre Manager	
		Pernille Burns	Tutor Literacy & Communications	
		Paul Herron	Instructor IT	
4.15-4.45	Contingency session			

26/05/21				
<b>Theme: Governance &amp; Management/ Self-evaluation, Monitoring &amp; Review (Day 3)</b>				
Time (GMT)	Group	People	Role	Purpose
09.00-09.30	ETB Review Coordinator	Joe Whitelock (QA Coordinator)		Meeting with ETB Review Coordinator
9.30-10.00	Private Review Team Meeting			
10.00-10.45	19. QASS	Joe Whitelock	QA Coordinator	<b>Discussion of the operation of the ETB's quality system, including arrangements for monitoring and review of quality</b>
		Elaine Russell	TSO	
		Corinna Orsi	TSO	
		Bridgita Kelly	FET Programme Development Officer	
		Anne Barron	FET Systems and Data Reporting Officer	
		Antoinette O'Keeney	QA Resource Worker	
10.45-11.15	Private Review Team Meeting			
11.15-11.30	Review Team Break			

11.30-12.15	20. Heads of Centres (All services represented)	Paula Burns	FET Centre Ballyshannon	Discussion of QA arrangements, responsibilities and implementation
		Jayne O'Donnell	Youthreach Buncrana	
		Vivienne Doherty	FET Centre Stranorlar	
		Michelle O'Reilly	Errigal College PLC	
		Aine McLaughlin	FET Centre Letterkenny	
		Mairead Carlin	Asst. Training Centre Manager/Letterkenny Training Center	
12.15-12.45	Private Review Team Meeting			
12.45-1.45	Review Team Lunch/Break			
1.45-2.30	21. Parallel Session Second providers	Mura Herron	Contracted Training Manager	Discussion of arrangements for quality assurance and enhancement of education and training delivered by second providers
		Aileen Fitzpatrick	Specialist Training Provider Manager	
		Sylvia Moriarty	Contracted Training Manager	
		Karl Sweeney	Contracted Training Manager	
		Norma Nolan	Programme Development Officer NLN	

		Tommy Boyle	(TACA HSE)	
	22. Parallel Session with OSD (Finance, HR, Facilities and IT)	Andy McGovern	Director of Organisation Support and Development	Discussion of the relationship between the ETB's quality assurance system and its Finance, HR, Facilities and ICT function
		Eileen Doherty	Head of HR	
		Ciaran Cunningham	Head of IT	
		Brenda Boyle	Head of Corporate Services	
		Sharon McColgan	Head of Finance	
2.30-3.00	Private Review Team Meeting			
3-3.45	23. Programme Approval/Review governance committees and working groups	Mairead Carlin	Asst. Training Centre Manager	Discussion of role of committee in quality assurance of programme development and approval
		Bridgita Kelly	FET Programme Development Officer	
	CANCELLED	Anne Barron	FET Systems and Data Reporting Officer	
		Vinny McGroary	Area Training Manager	
		Joe Whitelock	QA Coordinator	
3.45-4.15	Private Review Team Meeting			

4.15 - 4.30	Review Team Break			
4.30-5.30	24. Parallel session 1 Further and Higher Education Collaborations	Anne McHugh	Chief Executive	Discussion of collaboration and engagement with HEIs, including consideration of ATP
		Professor Malachy O'Neill	Provost of University of Ulster	
		Paul Hannigan	President of Letterkenny Institute of Technology	
		Leo Murphy	Principal/CEO North West Regional College	
5.30-6.00	Private Review Team Meeting			

<b>Date: 27/05/21</b>				
<b>Theme: Programme Development, Monitoring &amp; Review (Day 4)</b>				
Time (GMT)	Group	People	Role	Purpose
09.00-09.30	ETB Review Coordinator	Joe Whitelock	QA Coordinator	Meeting with ETB Review Coordinator
9.30-10.00	Private Review Team Meeting			
10.00-10.45	24. Contingency Session			To be used by team if required
10.45-11.15	Private Review Team Meeting			
11.15-11.30	Review Team Break			
11.30-12.15	25. Parallel session 1 Technology Enhanced Learning	Treasa McGinley,	TEL Coordinator	Discussion of mechanisms for TEL processes
		Ciaran Cunningham	Head of IT	
		Adele Mc Elhinney	ALO/TEL Mentor	
		Jennifer Delaney	Youthreach tutor/TEL Mentor	
		Cornelius Sweeney	Instructor motor mechanics/TEL mentor	
		Robbie Matthews	Youthreach Advocate for the Gortahork and Ballyshannon centres	

11.30-12.15	26. Parallel session 2 Communications	Charlie Gorney	Adult Education Officer	Discussion of mechanisms for communication processes
		Sandra Buchanan,		
		Deirdre McColgan,		
		Tara McGuire	Recruitment Coordinator	
		Joe Whitelock	QA Coordinator	
		Dearbhla Kelly	Guidance Counsellor	
12.15-12.45	Private Review Team Meeting			
12.45-1.45	Review Team Lunch/Break			
1.45-2.45	27. ETB Employer Engagement function	Vinny McGroary	Area Training Manager	Discussion of the engagement of employers and regional skills bodies in strategic planning of programme delivery and quality assurance and enhancement activities
		Paddy Kelly	Enterprise Engagement Coordinator	
		Dearbhla Kelly	Enterprise Engagement Officer	
		Donna Mc Dade	Skills for Work Coordinator	
		Claire Lernihan	Senior Training Advisor	
2.45-3.15	Private Review Team Meeting			
3.15-3.30	Review Team Break			

3.30-4.15	Private Review Team Meeting			
4.15-5.00	Contingency session			

<b>Date: 28/05/21</b>			
<b>Theme: Wrap-up (Day 5)</b>			
Time (GMT)	Group	People	Purpose
9.30-11.30	Private Review Team Meeting		Review team agrees key findings for briefing of ETB; QQI to join at 11
11.30-12.00	Review Team Break		
12.00-12.30	QQI & ETB Review Coordinator/FET Director	Crona Gallagher (FET Director) Joe Whitelock (QA Coordinator)	QQI gathers feedback on the review process - Review team does not attend
12.30 -1.00	28. ETB Chief Executive, SMT, Self-evaluation Steering Group, Group of Learners	Anne McHugh, Crona Gallagher, Martina Needham, Charlie Gorney, Vinny McGroarty, Mairead Carlin, Con Ferry, Deirdre McColgan, Lorraine Murray, Bridin McMahon, Dr Sandra Buchanan, Tina O'Donnell, Joe Whitelock, Brenda Boyle, Ciaran Cunningham, Eileen Doherty, Sharon McDaid  <b>Students -</b> Aisling Davis, Catherine McLaughlin, Kate Bonar, Susan Carey.	Oral feedback on initial review findings
1.00-5.45	Private Review Team Meeting (to be agreed by review team members if needed)		

# Glossary of Terms

## QQI glossary of terms and abbreviations from this report

Term	Definition/Explanation
<b>2012 Act</b>	Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012
<b>AONTAS</b>	Ireland's National Adult Learning Organisation
<b>ATP</b>	Access, Transfer and Progression
<b>BTEI</b>	Back to Education Initiative
<b>CAO</b>	Central Applications Office
<b>CEDEFOP</b>	European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training
<b>CEO</b>	Chief Executive Officer
<b>Core</b>	Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines, developed by QQI for use by all Providers
<b>ECVET</b>	European credit system for vocational education and training
<b>EQAVET</b>	European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training
<b>Erasmus+</b>	European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students
<b>ETB</b>	Education and Training Board
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>Fáilte Ireland</b>	Ireland's National Tourism Development Authority
<b>FET</b>	Further Education and Training
<b>HR</b>	Human Resources
<b>IT</b>	Information Technology
<b>Moodle</b>	A free, open-source online learning management system (LMS) that supports learning and training needs

<b>NFQ</b>	National Framework of Qualifications
<b>PLC</b>	Post Leaving Certificate
<b>QA</b>	Quality Assurance
<b>QQI</b>	Quality and Qualifications Ireland
<b>SOLAS (formerly FÁS)</b>	The National Further Education and Training Authority (responsible for funding, co-ordinating and monitoring FET in Ireland)
<b>SPA</b>	Strategic Performance Agreement (between the ETB & Solas)
<b>TEL</b>	Technology-Enhanced Learning
<b>Youthreach</b>	Service providing early school leavers without formal qualifications with opportunities for basic education, personal development, vocational training and work experience
<b>VECs</b>	Vocational and Education Committees (later became ETBs)