

Memorandum of Understanding
between the **Further Education**
and **Training Authority (SOLAS)**
and **Quality and Qualifications**
Ireland (QQI)

2024-2027



Dearbhú Cáilíochta
agus Cáilíochtaí Éireann
Quality and
Qualifications Ireland

www.qqi.ie

SOLAS
learning works

www.solas.ie

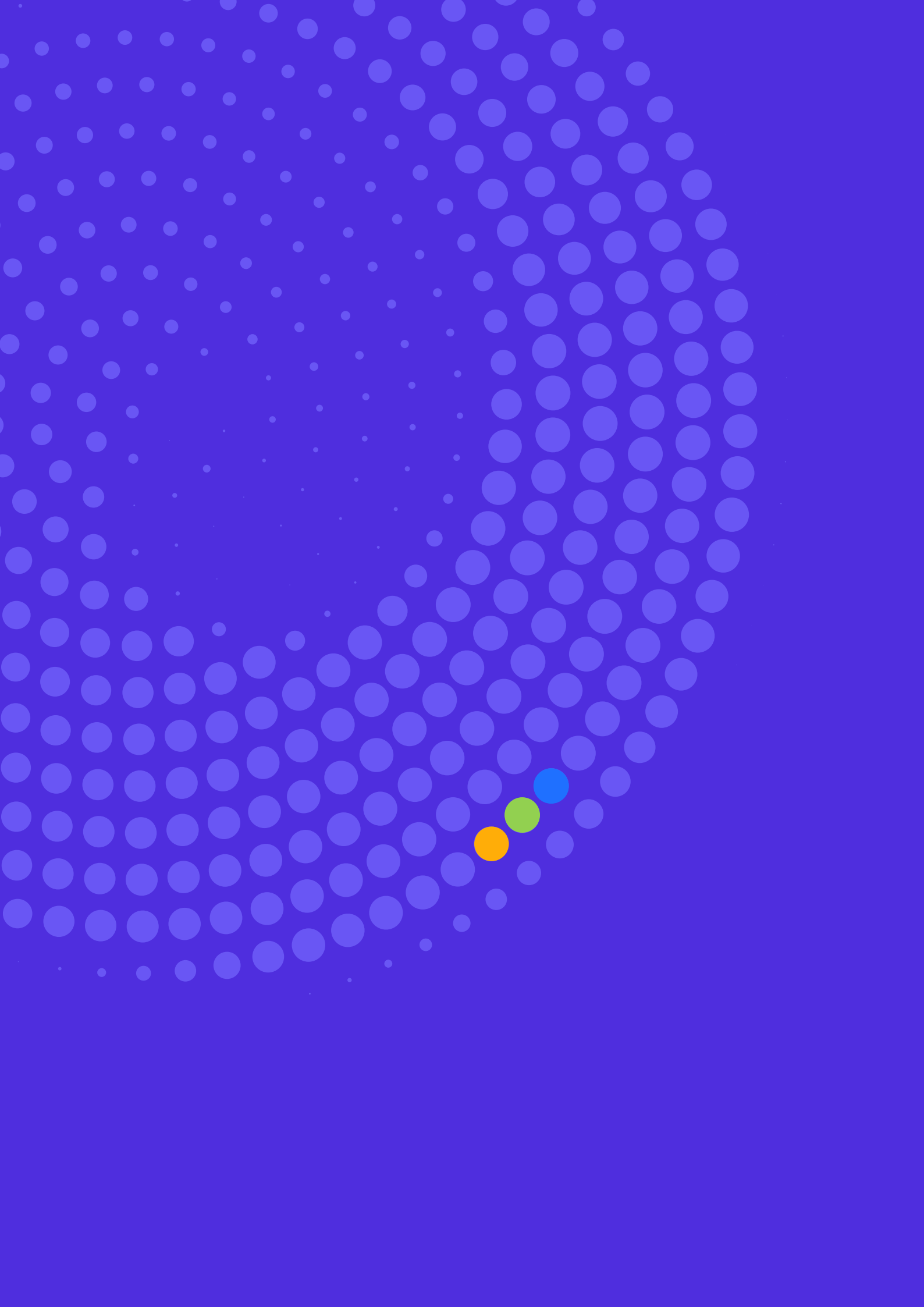


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NOTE

This third Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between SOLAS and QQI sets out our joint commitment to work together to support the FET sector in delivering high quality, relevant, accessible education and training to learners.

INTRODUCTION

This MoU recognises the benefits of QQI and SOLAS collaborating to benefit the FET sector. This is based on a clear understanding of our different roles as set out in legislation and our commitment to supporting and strengthening the FET sector. We intend to develop a shared vision for the future of FET qualifications and associated provision in line with *Future FET: Transforming Learning* - The Further Education and Training (FET) Strategy (2020-2024) and its successor strategy.

INFLUENCES ON THIS MOU

This MoU is based on the statutory responsibilities of QQI and SOLAS as they refer to FET as set out in legislation (summarised in this document and its appendices). The key influences identified below:

- QQI and SOLAS's respective strategic plans.
- DFHERIS Statement of Strategy 2023-2025.
- The respective management framework agreement/performance Delivery Agreements which SOLAS and QQI have with the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science.
- The responsibilities assigned to both organisations under the *Future FET: Transforming Learning* - The Further Education and Training (FET) Strategy (2020-2024) and its successor.

- DFHERIS-led work on a more unified tertiary education system and the development of a tertiary education strategy (as set out in the Higher Education Authority Act 2022), including the establishment of the National Tertiary Office.
- The Action plan for Apprenticeships, 2021-2025.
- The OECD Skills Strategy Ireland
- Adult Literacy for Life: a 10-year literacy strategy
- Climate Action Plans 2021 and 2023
- The European Skills Agenda
- The Irish Presidency of the European Union, 2026
- Construction Safety Licensing Bill 2023

ROLES

SOLAS'S ROLE – www.solas.ie

The functions of SOLAS ('An tSeirbhís') are to:

- prepare and submit to the Minister a strategy in respect of the provision of further education and training,
- promote an appreciation of the value of further education and training,
- consult with the Minister for Social Protection, the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment and employers from time to time for the purpose of determining which, or which classes of, further education and training programmes should be the subject of advances by An tSeirbhís,
- advance moneys to education and training boards and other bodies engaged in the provision of further education and training programmes,
- provide, or arrange for, the provision of training and retraining for employment and to assist in and coordinate the provision

of such training by persons other than An tSeirbhís,

- assess whether or not education and training boards, and other bodies engaged in the provision of further education and training programmes, to whom moneys have been advanced, perform their functions in an economic, efficient and effective manner,
- promote, encourage and facilitate the placement of persons belonging to such class or classes of person as may be specified by the Minister for Social Protection after consultation with the Minister in further education and training programmes that are funded, in whole or in part, out of public moneys,
- promote cooperation between education and training boards and other bodies involved in the provision of further education programmes,
- promote equality of opportunity in relation to the provision of further education and training,
- develop, and facilitate the development of, new and existing further education and training programmes including the establishment of systems designed to monitor the quality of the education and training concerned for the purpose of ensuring that those programmes serve their purpose,
- provide or assist in the provision of training to persons charged with the delivery of further education and training programmes in respect of which moneys have been advanced by An tSeirbhís,
- conduct, or arrange for the conduct of, research as respects any matters relating to the functions of An tSeirbhís, and
- advise the Minister in relation to any matter connected with the functions of An tSeirbhís.
- Act as coordinating provider for 25 craft apprenticeships pending full implementation of the *Action*

Plan for Apprenticeship 2021-2025 and reassignment by SOLAS of the coordinating provider role to education and training providers.

- Maintain and further develop the National Apprenticeship Office as a joint oversight entity for apprenticeship nationally in partnership with the Higher Education Authority
- Through the National Apprenticeship Office, fulfill the statutory functions for apprenticeship as set out in the 1967 Industrial Training Act, including formal approval of apprenticeship employers, maintenance of a national Register of apprentices.
- Support implementation of the *Action Plan for Apprenticeship 2021-2025* through the National Apprenticeship Office, including development of new national apprenticeships and achievement of national apprenticeship targets.

QQI'S ROLE – www.qqi.ie

QQI is an independent State agency responsible for promoting quality and accountability in education and training services in Ireland. It has a wide range of functions including, with respect to FET,

- to promote, maintain and develop the Irish National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ), a 10-level framework for the development, recognition and awarding of qualifications in Ireland.
- To develop and maintain awards standards and certify learners who successfully complete programmes of education and training that lead to QQI awards.
- Management of the National Academic Recognition Information Centre NARIC Ireland which provides advice on the recognition of Irish and of foreign qualifications.
- To approve (validate), monitor and review programmes offered by further and higher

education and training providers that lead to QQI awards.

- To include the awards of Listed Awarding Bodies in the NFQ.
- To provide information to learners and the public on recognised programmes and qualifications in Qualifax and in the Irish Register of Qualifications (IRQ).
- To provide external quality assurance of further and higher education institutions through periodic institutional reviews of the effectiveness of providers'1 quality assurance procedures; monitoring; reporting activities and the development of guidance and guidelines to support the development and delivery of education and training programmes in the tertiary sector.
- To provide insight and analysis of the outputs of its work in particular with respect to quality assurance, certification and qualifications.
- To support academic integrity.
- To develop and maintain the International Education Mark for higher education and for English Language Education.

INTERSECTION OF SOLAS AND QQI PRIORITIES

The roles of SOLAS and QQI are complementary. SOLAS and QQI share a common aim to enhance the relevance, quality, coherence, and performance of the FET sector so that it delivers on its intended outcomes for learners, enterprise and communities. SOLAS and QQI, in their individual work with, and joint approaches to, ETBs, will contribute to achieving the objectives of the three-year FET strategies.

PRIORITY AREAS FOR COOPERATION:

SOLAS and QQI have identified priority areas for co-operation for the period of this MoU. The list below is not exhaustive and other priority areas may be identified throughout the lifetime of this MoU. Priority areas include:

- further development of Microcredentials or micro qualifications as part of wider FET provision
- maintaining and further developing of the NFQ as the system for the recognition of education and training qualifications in the State and a key instrument for facilitating the development diverse quality-assured pathways to qualifications for learners
- Ensuring a coordinated approach to strengthening the quality of FET and apprenticeship provision and qualifications through supporting capacity-building to develop and review curricula, standards and qualifications in a timeframe which allows for agile response to changing requirements.
- Co-operating on data to support the measurement, evaluation and enhancement of quality in the ETBs and quality indicators to measure the impact of interventions on the quality of provision.
- Supporting action to strengthen academic integrity in FET.
- Enabling the development and implementation of quality and educational programme development roadmap across ETBs to ensure agile skills responses to rapidly evolving economic and societal needs.
- Supporting the development of tertiary education programmes within the existing qualifications framework which respects the role of both HE and FET providers in the process.

1 Provider refers to any college or institution offering programmes leading to awards included in the NFQ

- Co-operation on systems and system development to streamline data transfers and integrations where appropriate.
- Facilitating the move out of the coordinating provider role for craft apprenticeship by SOLAS to a devolved system where ETBs and HEIs take on this role.

COMMITMENTS AND ASSOCIATED ACTIONS

SOLAS and QQI have reflected on areas of common interest between the organisations. Under three key commitments which have been agreed for the period [to 31st December 2027]. These are set out below:

1. COMMITMENT TO COHERENCE OF APPROACH

Coherence of approach refers to how the organisations will inform and engage with each other at an early stage on matters of mutual concern. This includes planned evaluations of providers, provision, funding educational programmes, data strategies and major initiatives.

A list of indicative actions under this commitment is identified below.

Associated actions which refer to annual routine actions:

1. QQI and SOLAS will share corporate plans with each other.
2. QQI and SOLAS will agree and include their corporate plans, any collaborative actions required to further the priority areas identified above.
3. A copy of any system level communication by either organisation will be forwarded to the Chief Executive of the other organisation and to the appointed liaison person for dissemination (see below).
4. SOLAS will keep QQI informed of the development and on-going implementation of the new FET funding model and streams

5. A liaison person from each organisation will be identified to ensure that communication and information is exchanged on a timely basis between the organisations.
6. The Chief Executive of each organisation will be invited to meet with the Board of the other on an annual basis.
7. The senior management teams of the organisations will meet twice per year to update each other on developments.
8. The organisations will actively seek to identify where information and communication should be extended to other parties in the interests of national coherence and consistency.

2. COMMITMENT TO CO-OPERATE ON ACTIVITIES

SOLAS and QQI will co-operate on operational actions where appropriate to enhance policy development, data functions, and improve learner access, learning pathways and progression within the Tertiary Education system.

Further details of how we co-operate on the associated actions are below.

Associated actions:

1. Tertiary Education Programmes:

The two organisations will consult with each other in relation to the establishment and provision of quality assurance arrangements for new tertiary education programmes.

2. Data sharing - provider, award and other data:

Where available and appropriate, QQI and SOLAS will share provider and award data and collaborate on protocols for data collection- defining courses, completion rates and collaborative data analysis in areas of mutual interest. SOLAS will include QQI in the list of organisations with which data is shared under the terms and conditions for data-collection from further education and training providers. The organisations will also exchange information, as appropriate, in the event that either party has cause to undertake an investigation of a provider or its activities.

3. Policy, referencing and other infrastructure:

The organisations will consult with one another in the development of policy and of mechanisms and infrastructure to support policy-implementation. Both organisations will consult and agree text on references to the other in published form which are actionable or which entail interpretations of each other's policy positions.

4. Access, Transfer and Progression, learning Pathways and other supporting policies:

QQI will consult SOLAS when developing policy relating to access, transfer and progression and learning pathways. SOLAS will actively promote and encourage all SOLAS funded further education and training providers to facilitate **lifelong learning** by developing appropriate access, transfer and progression procedures, in accordance with QQI policy.

5. Qualifications and Recognition:

QQI (NARIC Ireland) and SOLAS will cooperate around the academic recognition and comparability of international qualifications. Both organisations will also seek to advance the interests of learners in Ireland by making good use of EU initiatives in the area of lifelong learning, skills and qualifications. In the context of the digital labour market, we will collaborate, where appropriate, on the implementation of European initiatives, for example, the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), Europass and the European, Skills, Competencies and Occupations (ESCO).

6. Listed Awarding Bodies (LABs):

In the context of legislative changes that will enable a wider range of awarding bodies to access the NFQ, QQI and SOLAS will work to identify awarding bodies and qualifications that meet the interests of learners in the public FET system. QQI and SOLAS will work together in the approval of these awarding bodies and the inclusion of their associated awards in the NFQ. Both organisations will work to align activities and responsibilities set out in relevant sections of the 2019 Qualifications and Quality Assurance (amendment) Act.

7. Research Projects:

The organisations will collaborate in the production or commissioning of research that addresses questions of mutual interest. Examples of collaborative projects might include but are not limited to:

- A number of data sharing projects to provide a more holistic view of the state of FET, which could be informed by quality assurance outputs and the increasing availability of learner and graduate tracking data.

8. FET Qualifications:

The organisations will collaborate to develop a draft statement of intent and carry out actions identified within it.

3. COMMITMENT TO PARTNERSHIPS FOR ENHANCEMENT

SOLAS and QQI are committed to working in partnership with further education and training providers and other parties. SOLAS and QQI will collaborate closely with relevant stakeholders, aligning quality improvement activities with sectoral developments, national requirements and international practice including those of the NFQ and European Qualifications Framework (EQF). SOLAS and QQI are also committed to increasing efforts to share their learning from engagements at a European and international level.

Some specified actions to support the third commitment of partnerships for enhancement are indicated below.

Associated actions:

1. Quality improvement/enhancement objectives:

The organisations will collaborate with the ETBs and other parties referenced above in the identification and implementation of ongoing quality improvement and capacity building objectives including; progressing relevant recommendations from the sectoral report of the inaugural review of ETBs, undertaking collaborative actions to stimulate development and progress activities in qualifications and quality assurance in the

ETBs, and enhancing capacity for ETBs to progress recommendations from their individual review reports.

2. Joint engagement initiatives:

SOLAS and QQI will discuss how best periodic joint engagement with the ETBs could be achieved in order to support continuous engagement on developments aimed at strengthening the sector, e.g. quality assurance enhancements and developments in ETBs.

3. Sharing best practice:

QQI and SOLAS will seek to establish means through which international experiences and learning can be shared with each other and with stakeholders across the FET sector.

4. Interpreting and utilising outputs:

The organisations will work collaboratively together and with the ETBs to establish how to effectively interpret and utilise outputs, including data, produced at a provider and sector level in order to inform quality and quality enhancement activities with a focus on impact analysis.

5. Survey contributions.

QQI will continue to partner with SOLAS and the Higher Education Authority (HEA) in the survey of employers and other joint surveys as appropriate.

6. International delegations:

QQI and SOLAS will individually and collaboratively share Irish further education and training policy and practice with international delegations and visitors and continue to support each other in this regard.

SIGN-OFF AND REVIEW

This MoU is jointly signed by the Chief Executive Officer of SOLAS and the Chief Executive Officer of QQI, and it takes effect from the date on which it is agreed and signed by the two parties.

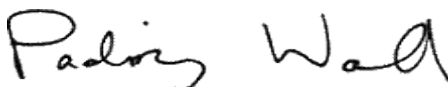
This MoU is intended to stand for the period 1 January 2024 – 31 December 2026. In the intervening period its currency will be kept under review. Any amendments required to ensure that it remains fit-for-purpose, and that it reflects the emerging priorities, roles and circumstances of the organisations, will be published by mutual written agreement.

Signed on behalf of the Further Education and Training Authority (SOLAS):



Andrew Brownlee,
Chief Executive
Date: 23 / 09 / 2024

Signed on behalf of Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI):



Pdraig Walsh,
Chief Executive
Date: 23 / 09 / 2024



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