Interim Quality Report

Longford and Westmeath Education and

Training Board Date: February 2025

PREFACE

The inaugural review by QQI of the quality assurance in the 16 Education and Training Boards (ETBs) took place between March 2021 and May 2022. Following the review, each ETB provided an **action plan** and **follow-up report** in response to the recommendations made in the individual review report. QQI's role is to monitor and review the QA of providers, and the effectiveness of provider's internal QA system. Systematic quality reporting by providers is an integral part of this process. The development of an integrated and systematic annual quality reporting model for ETBs has commenced; for this quality reporting period, ETBs are submitting an interim quality report. This interim quality report records progress, developments and impacts in furtherance of recommendations arising from each ETB's review report, as well as other QA enhancements and initiatives.

In addition, the interim quality report requires each ETB to include updated links to its published quality assurance policies and procedures.

This is the Interim report for Longford and Westmeath Education & Training Board

It is to be submitted by February 28th, 2025

The interim quality has been approved by Antonine Healy, Director of Further Education & Training and is submitted by Rayon Farrell, QA Coordinator.

CONTENTS

Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI

GUIDELINES ON COMPLETING THE REPORT

This **interim quality report** provides a progress update to the ETB's inaugural review follow-up report, in addition to information regarding quality plans and initiatives in the ETB. Whereas details regarding all inaugural review recommendations were included in the follow-up report, please note that information relating to completed actions in response to recommendations, if any, are not required in this interim quality report.

Links to the published quality assurance policies and procedures of the ETB must be included in this interim quality report. Each ETB should ensure before submission that all links within the report are <u>correct and functional</u>, and that the policies and procedures referred to are the most up-to-date versions available.

The ETB is asked to give particular attention to specific impacts arising from QA actions/initiatives, this includes:

- the key areas of focus prioritised for action and any specific changes arising as well as links to any associated outputs (e.g., procedures, reports etc.)
- reflections on the Follow-up reporting **process** and any barriers or challenges arising in implementation of the review recommendations.

The ETB is also asked to include additional **reflections** in the commentary.

The ETB is invited to provide up to 3 short case studies, 1-2 pages, demonstrating QA enhancements and their impacts.

There is a short survey on the follow-up process in Section 6. The results of this will be used to inform QQI and will not be published as part of this report.

1.0 Interim Quality Report

1.01 ETB Mission and Strategy

Recommendation 1	Update - Note progress/changes made to P&P, timeline.
1.The review team recommends that LWETB establish a clear plan and timeline to integrate their QA systems. The plan needs to include clear and robust goals and objectives, which can be communicated to the wider ETB community to ensure that all stakeholders are aware of the planned integrated QA system, and the progression being made	• **The Quality System Index (QSI)** The Quality System Index has been trimmed back to ensure it can be managed efficiently. It is a documented approach to QA that now acts as a tracking system for the new QA system which is being implemented through LWETB. It is managed by the Training & Development Dept. It is reviewed & updated monthly by the Training & Development Dept. It is linked to all Policies & Procedures, resources, templates etc. for ease of accessibility In October 2023 QGG conducted a review of all procedures/QA templates being used by providers. Work is ongoing in relation to procedures to ensure that they are fit for purpose. QA is consistently improving and evolving. • **FET Intranet:** The FET website www.lwetbfet.ie went live in Q3. Not only does this website cater for our potential learners but it also acts as a source of information for our staff **(Staff Hub)** and external stakeholders. It is a perfect opportunity to showcase our re-brand, College of Further Education and Training. The FET website clearly establishes who we are and what services we provide. The aim of the FET website is to act as a learner communication platform to support, contribute and disseminate learner, employee and public information. On the Home Page alone we create awareness of our campus locations, courses, news and events. This web-based platform will help us to communicate more with our learners. For instance, during the winter season if there are weather warnings, we will be able to post closure notices and updates to keep learners and staff informed. Our FET website is SEO optimised and therefore when potential learners are searching for education courses in Longford or Westmeath we will appear in the results. In terms of measuring the website performance, we use certain **key performance indicators** ie. sessions, users, pageviews, device, browser, operating system, pages, entry page, exit page and so on. We use Mouseflow to record our analytics, for instance over a three-month period, we've had 7,469 users to the website. *(Supporting Evidence 3: Website Analytics)* The FET Website Working Group has now transitioned to the Marketing Working Group, who meet once a month to focus on the promotion of LWETB courses to our wider audience. ***LWETB Intranet:*** <u>Progress to Date</u> • **Data Migration:** Action Taken: Servers in schools and centres were turned off, and data was migrated primarily to individuals' OneDrive accounts. Challenges Identified: It was found that many users moved data to their OneDrive instead of SharePoint, indicating a gap in understanding the new system. • **Stakeholder Engagement:** Consultation: Stakeholders were consulted to understand their challenges with the SharePoint environment, revealing that the platform was not

intuitive for many staff.

Response: Training programs are being rolled out to ensure staff are comfortable with SharePoint.

- **IT Support for Data Transfer:**
Action Taken: The newly formed IT section is actively assisting staff in transferring data from OneDrive or classic SharePoint sites to properly structured SharePoint sites.
Current Status: Ongoing, with a focus on improving organizational file structures and usability.

- **Backup Solution:**
Funding Secured: The senior management team approved funding for a Barracuda backup solution to ensure the security of the online tenant.

Timeline: Implementation is planned for Q1 2025

- **File Structure and Data Governance:**
Collaboration: In consultation with the Data Protection Officer, file structures are being created per site to simplify data access and support better data retention and access reviews.

- **Standardizing Browsers and Enhancing Communication:**
Planned Change: Google Chrome will be removed from all devices in 2025, and Microsoft Edge will become the default browser with SharePoint site set as the homepage.
Future Use: This will enable the communications team to use SharePoint as a central hub for organizational news and updates.

- *Communications:* LWETB Communications Officer identified in August 2023. Elaine McEvoy, Communications Officer, sits under the remit of Corporate Services. She has a responsibility for developing effective communications with internal and external stakeholders. She is supported by Winnie Padian, Assistant Staff Officer, who was appointed to the Communications team in January 2024.

  Elaine completed a Certificate course that focused on enhancing her communication skills. The Certificate in Strategic ETB Communications, ran by ETBI and the Public Relations Institute of Ireland (PRII), began in September 2023 and finished in March 2024. Winnie Padian enrolled on the recent cohort and is due to complete the program in March 2025.

  Elaine and Winnie also joined the ETBI Communications Network and attend regular meetings both in person and over MS Teams. This affords them the opportunity to network with fellow peers and build on their knowledge and skills in this area.

  A Three-Year Communications plan was developed and approved in February 2024. The plan outlines the commitment by LWETB to improve on brand awareness from 2024 – 2026 which leads to increase engagement with our services.

  A Communications toolkit was developed in February 2024, which includes documents such as LWETB Corporate Branding Usage Guidelines, LWETB Event Protocol and Checklist, LWETB Protocol for dealing with the Press or Media, LWETB Consent Form, LWETB Style Guide and LWETB Visual Guidelines. This toolkit is live and is updated regularly.

  A dedicated Communications MS Team was created in September 2023 comprising of staff in schools and centres with responsibility for various aspects of communications such as content creation, event organisation and so on.

  A dedicated Communications SharePoint site was created in September 2024 within the LWETB hub. This acts as a central repository for the LWETB Communications Strategy and Toolkit, and also includes and template documents, such as headed paper and email signature templates for use by the organisation.

  The engagement across our social media platforms is increasing and is tracked on a weekly basis.

  The LWETB Communications Policy was updated and approved in September 2024.

Commentary and Reflections

LWETB continues to work strategically and innovatively to address recommendations in a multifaceted capacity and through varying methods to ensure full stakeholder engagement. This is an ongoing process, particularly in documenting our approach to communications to increase and enhance engagement with key stakeholders.

Link to Published Policies and Procedures

1.02 Structures & Terms of Reference for Governance of QA

Recommendation 2 and 3	Update - Note progress/changes made to P&P, timeline.
2.The review team recommends more diverse representation in LWETB's QA and wider governance structures, particularly in terms of including learner voice and that of employers. This will strengthen the development of LWETB's plans to improve. Furthermore, the ETB needs to ensure that representation is valued and used effectively with a clear strategic direction. 12. The review team recommends that LWETB use the experience gained through developing the SER to continue to strengthen its engagement with external stakeholders. This will further enhance its capacity to identify emerging needs and develop services to address them.	• **Employer Representation:** The Enterprise Engagement Coordinator continues to link in with industry and has facilitated the arrangement of numerous courses such as Customer Service, Health Care, Care Skills, Care of the older person to meet the needs of industry and the feedback being gathered in relation to industry skill requirements. Several events took place, such as an Artificial Intelligence Skills Workshop hosted in the Sheraton Hotel in May 2024. A Business Breakfast with local employer reps and stakeholders took place in April 24. This allowed us to showcase the Skills to Advance suite of Green Skills training courses. Expert speakers were invited. A business event in collaboration with Athlone Chamber of Commerce and various other local enterprises was held in Garrycastle Campus on the 30th of May 24. Our Enterprise Engagement Coordinator is also undertaking training to engage with companies to implement training needs analysis. This will identify current and future skill needs. Senior Leaders also attended the Advanced Manufacturing Ireland facility in Mullingar to explore how they could collaborate going forward. Employer Feedback is gathered directly from employers and employer representation groups. This is used by the FET Management team to plan upcoming training and report to SOLAS as part of their national roll-out of enterprise engagement. • **LWETB external & internal** working groups, committees and board meetings database has been completed. A request to update this database will be issued by email at the beginning of each year to Senior and FET Managers. • *Learner Voice:* LWETB has developed a Working Group within the Programme Governance Group (PGG) to capture the learner voice. ***Please see PGG Case Study*** • *Learner Voice:* LWETB created their own learner forum in 2024. This was a pilot project. A more focused approach was taken to create a robust report that concentrated on LWETB provisions and learners. It allowed feedback to be targeted and relayed to provision Coordinators/Centre Managers. This pilot involved liaising with provisions to allocate and organise specific timeframes to meet with learners and capture their feedback. The outcome of this was the development of the Learners Voice Report. Please see case study and evidence for further information. • **SEED**: In planning phase

3.The review team recommends that a clear communication strategy be developed. This needs to identify a clear communication loop between the SMT, governance and management structures and feedback from and to stakeholders, particularly the learner voice. It is important for LWETB to develop a communication strategy that informs stakeholders of its aims, of any progress being made towards those aims, and of how feedback is received and the impact it has on the strategic planning and enhancement of quality assurance.	• **_Data Driven:_** PLSS continues to be an essential tool to utilise in relation to data mining enrolment, certification, gap analysis and target V outcomes etc. _see 1.08 Information Management_ • **_QA Culture_**: QA has continued to evolve and improve**.** Consistent learning and networking with provisions has led to the development of supports such as the LWETB Assessment Toolkit which was recently finalized and launched at the FET Management Meeting that took place on the 12th of December 24. This Toolkit was devised by Educators across FET as a "dip in and out" concept to educators who are new to Localised assessment. It was developed from an Assessment Toolkit Workshop that took place on the 7th of December 2023. Educators from PLC, BTEI, NLN, etc. all attended this event. This workshop was facilitated by FETQS & an SME. The recent reconfiguration of the FETQS departments permits a more streamlined approach to Operations, Training & Development and Programming. FETQS Training/Supports/Briefings have been scheduled to take place online throughout the months of October 24, December 24, Feb 25 and March 25 focusing on areas such as Internal Verification, FETQS Authentication Process & FETQS Localised Assessment Process. Two of these briefings (**_FETQS Authentication Process & FETQS Localised Assessment Process)_** support the induction of new educators/coordinators to LWETB. There have been a number of onsite sessions throughout the year. Educators/Coordinators can also avail of one-to-one support from FETQS and an SME where required, a number of educators have utilised this support. Several voiceover supports have been developed. These are posted to relevant MS TEAMS to assist provisions. A monthly drop-in clinic has been set up by the Training & Development Dept and also the Programming dept for all educators/coordinators to attend to ask questions/seek clarification in relation to anything quality related. Policies and Procedures were reviewed in October 2023 by QGG representatives, a focused review took place and feedback from this review was collated and taken onboard. FETQS going forward will work with provisions in a pilot format to ensure that Policies& Procedures are being trialed and tested before full implementation • **_Networking:_** LWETB external & internal working groups, committees and board meetings database has been completed. A request to update this database will be issued by email at the beginning of each year to Senior and FET Managers. • **_Interdepartmental Information Sessions:_** During 2024 several meetings took place between the Procurement Group which consists of the Director of FET, Senior Managers, Buildings Officer & OSD. These meetings focus on purchasing and tendering. This group meets every 6 weeks. The Human Resources Dept conducted briefings with Provision Managers giving HR updates for FET. FET would have engaged with HR regularly in 2024 particularly around Adult Educator Contract Conversions • **_Interdepartmental Information_**: Corporate Services, through its new communication team, has amalgamated our multiple social media accounts and reimagined our communication styles and methodologies and now publish quality content with strong engagement and participation. MetaCompliance has been implemented by Corporate Services as this allows us not only to implement online training across the organisation but also allows for better governance as we distribute our policies through this system. We also use metacompliance for the distribution of the LWETB Safety Statement.

We are in the process of rolling out a privacy engine this will allow us to distribute our policies and procedure throughout the organisation.

The LWETB intranet has been developed, and our policies are also available there. The intranet will also be useful for the distribution of uptodate staff information as it will be the central hub for all data in the organisation going forward.

All new staff are inducted in LWETB. All staff are given firm grounding in our legislative obligations, our role in the community and the polices we rely on to implement our key goals.

A staff handbook is being developed to further ingrain our key goals and core values

In and throughout 2025 the same H&S staff induction will take place upon the commencement of a role within LWETB, this also includes GDPR and inductions in LWETB's values, mission and visions.

- **QMP** - has been embedded into the new LWETB FET Website. All staff have access to the Staff hub which holds all FETQS QA information/documentation, Policies & Procedures & access to the Programming Validation Teams. Professional Learning and Development resources and other useful links can also be found within this hub.

- *AMS:* Pilot was conducted with Contractors. It was decided that the system was cumbersome for users and a fit for purpose system was set up utilizing a structure that was currently being used by all LWETB Providers which was MS TEAMS.

- **The Marketing Group** is still ongoing and increasing in numbers, we have a total of 20 members. *(Supporting Evidence 1: Marketing Meeting Agenda Slides)* We were meeting fortnightly up until the summer break, now we meet once a month. The marketing group consists of the FET Director, Adult Education Officers, Area Training Managers and FET Co-ordinators (including Evening Courses, Enterprise Engagement, ESOL, BTEI, Adult Literacy, Apprenticeships, Quality Assurance) Staff engagement is excellent overall. Staff feel comfortable in the marketing group to voice their opinions, provide feedback and discuss topics in depth. The marketing group tested the FET website for bugs and to verify its usability, functionality, compatibility and performance before going live. We shared a Microsoft form that staff could complete with their website feedback, we received 45 responses. *(Supporting Evidence 2: Website Feedback Form)*

- **The FET website** www.lwetbfet.ie went live in Q3. It is very important to have an online presence; our potential learners possibly visit our website before making contact or signing up for a course. It is a perfect opportunity to showcase our re-brand, College of Further Education and Training. The FET website clearly establishes who we are and what services we provide for the people of Longford and Westmeath. The aim of the FET website is to act as a learner communication platform to support, contribute and disseminate learner and public information. On the Home Page alone we create awareness of our campus locations, courses, news and events. This web-based platform will help us to communicate more with our learners. For instance, during the winter season if there are weather warnings, we will be able to post closure notices and updates to keep learners and staff informed.

Our FET website is SEO optimised and therefore when potential learners are searching for education courses in Longford or Westmeath that we will appear in the results. In terms of measuring the website performance, we use certain key performance indicators ie. sessions, users, pageviews, device, browser, operating system, pages, entry page, exit page and so on. We use Mouseflow to record our analytics, for instance over a three-month period, we've had 7,469 users to the website. *(Supporting Evidence 3: Website Analytics)*

The launch of the FET website aligns with the FET social media plan with a dedicated focus of promoting Further Education and Training across Longford and Westmeath. For instance, when posting about the services or the programmes available within LWETB, we link back to the relevant page on the FET website. *(Supporting Evidence 4: Social Media Links)* In the supporting evidence you will notice 'link clicks', proof that users are clicking the link back to the FET website. By doing this, we are driving traffic back to the FET website for more information.

The FET social media accounts have continued to grow organically, we have created posters for each of the campuses to inform learners and staff

	about the FET website and social media platforms. *(Supporting Evidence 5: Social Media Poster)* We have reached over 1,400 followers on Facebook and over 1,000 followers on Instagram. See the supporting evidence for more in depth social media analytics. *(Supporting Evidence 6: Facebook Insights) (Supporting Evidence 7: Instagram Insights)* As part of the marketing group, we decided to streamline public consumption information when advertising. Our focus is to mention all locations and provisions when advertising.

Commentary and Reflections

Recommendation 2 and Recommendation 12 were merged to combine planned actions to address representation of all stakeholders, stakeholder engagement and the continuation of strengthening external stakeholder engagement, voice, and participation to identify emerging needs and requirements

LWETB FET continues to enhance engagement with external stakeholders which ensures that all voices are given the opportunity to influence quality assurance enhancements. FETQS continues to evolve and improve engagement with coordinators and educators regularly to embed new systems and collaborate on policies/procedures and supports/resources. FET Website now acts as one point of access for coordinators and staff in relation to all QA documentation, PD/TEL etc.

Link to Published Policies and Procedures

Policies & Procedures are all available to staff through accessing LWETB FET Website Staff Hub

1.04 Staff Recruitment, Management & Development

Recommendation 4 and 5	Update - Note progress/changes made to P&P, timeline.
4. The review team recommends that LWETB develop means of sharing best practice through the establishment of communities of practice (CoP) and staff integration across FET. This should include teaching and support staff (including contracted training) and will be critical to a 'one ETB' approach. 5. The review team recommends that LWETB develop ways of measuring the impact of CPD on driving quality and develop this to determine how CPD opportunities are prioritised.	• ***Communities of Practice** Phase 1 completed – Educator* Database was created (phase 2 yet to be completed but no actions took place on this yet, raised at PGG and senior Management informal meetings*. **IN ACTION** CoPs initiated and ran for 2 years, in Sept 2024, they were paused for QTR four due to several issues, available resources, and upcoming availability of a larger pool of staff in Jan 2025 due to new adult educator contracts. We have been gathering some case studies. A Meeting was held with Co-ordinators in Nov 24 to discuss the plan moving forward with the Edtech and UDL CoP. A similar focus group was held with current members of CoPs also. • **CoP: on P2P System** organically developed around supporting new and existing staff using the finance system and share learning and collaboration. This is continuing and has been handed over to a member of the admin team. • ***PL&D:*** Continue to deliver and advertise CPD & training opportunities through the PL&D TEL Wakelet, MS Teams, monthly email was sent to staff after consultation with them. This has since been transformed into the UDL Newsletter (Oct 24) called Feile FET which has a UDL format & includes PLD opportunities we wish to highlight from the calendar with staff. Staff briefings at in-house staff meetings give valuable data on the impact of systems. A TNA (Training Needs Analysis) was carried out with LWETB in May 2024. This will inform the PLD Work Plan for 2025, nothing that appeared on this data was a surprise it was expected and in early planning stages. Measuring the impact of PLD: Whilst there isn't the resourcing currently to put major systems in place to do this, we prioritise the areas we put most resources into to gather feedback e.g. this year we are carrying out a piece of research on our SETU Certificate in Adult Literacy which we funded. This involves focus groups with all stakeholders and will result in a research paper, which will be published in two journals and made early 2025. • ***Networking:*** Continuing membership of this network, attending Erasmus in Jan to Slovenia to look at best practice in EU, we will investigate systems they use. ETBI hold notes, Calendar appointments on teams is evidence. • ***Engagement:*** Rebrand the PLD Approvals committee to incorporate a more holistic approach to evaluating and planning for PL&D – QTR 2 – 2024 • Workplans continue to be developed in line with national and local strategy which will now encompass ALL (Adult Literacy Life) strategy in QTR 2 – 2024, through the PL&D Network, PL&D Applications Framework updated application form to link to both local and national strategies. • **Appointment of AEO for Longford Campus –** Sept 2024 • **Regional ALO** was appointed on the 6th of February 2023. ***Please see Case Study***

ESOL Coordinators

Three ESOL Coordinators appointed in 2024. Provisions have been assigned their own QQI centre roll numbers. Collaboration between the ESOL Coordinators has taken place in relation to the areas outlined below:

- Developing the ESOL service and managing the day-to-day delivery of the service
- Liaising with relevant voluntary, statutory and community bodies to promote and develop the service.
- Standardised English language level definitions aligned to CEFR across our services
- Introduction of the new ESOL modules at Level 1 & Level 2
- Developed a guide for DSP when making ESOL Referrals
- Developing paper-based placement test drawing on resources from SOLAS and SQA
- Researching online placement test options
- Starting a standardised registration process using Fetch instead of paper-based forms. Our goal is to be 100% paperless by the end of 2025.
- Created an add-on module to course developed by TEL department on teaching online courses, targeted to ESOL tutors teaching blended classes using Teams
- Liaising with the marketing team within LWETB, we've created a presence on the lwetbfet.ie website with contact details, how to apply, placement test information and FQA section.
- Providing and maintaining English classes in outreach centres.
- Utilizing Microsoft Teams to foster the development of Communities of Practice (including our Coordinator's group and those for Educators) while facilitating the distribution of information and resources.
- Developing and implementing standardised assessment & registration process i.e. language level assessment prior to starting the course; registration clinics.
- Engaged in Internal Verification process and associated reporting including attendance at Results Approval Panel (RAP) meetings.
- Reviewed attendance registers and developed a new learner attendance document to encourage regular attendance and engagement in designated class.
- Standardised the number of ESOL hours students receive (where possible), ensuring consistency and fairness across all locations.
- ESOL coordinators participated in various training including, Project Management in Practice and Moving into Management.
- Networking with other ESOL coordinators throughout the country, sharing information and exploring best practices.

Commentary and Reflections

FETQS developed a CoP for communication educators at levels 4, 5 and 6. An outcome of this CoP was the desire to commence the development of a hybrid model module descriptor. Seven educators worked together to review the level 4 communications including the development of exemplar assessments, marking schemes and UDL exemplars. This hybrid Educator Pack was consulted upon by stakeholders and approved by the Programme Governance Group in Q2 2023 and is currently being piloted by the seven educators who took part in this project. Upon completion of this pilot, the PGG will conduct a review and where applicable, release the Communication 4N0690 Educator Pack to all educators for usage within all LWETB centres

This Hybrid module descriptor for Communications 4N0690 is currently being used within several provisions. All modules are being worked on nationally, a working group stemming from the Quality Network Group has facilitated the 16 ETBs collaborating with each other through a buddy system which aims to update module descriptors. Once these module descriptors are completed this will supersede the current module descriptors within all ETBs.

Link to Published Policies and Procedures
Policies & Procedures are all available to staff through accessing LWETB FET Website Staff Hub

1.05 Programme Development, Approval & Submission

Recommendation 6	Update - Note progress/changes made to P&P, timeline.
6.The review team recommends that LWETB prioritise the development of a Programme Delivery, Development and Validation Policy and subsequent procedures to ensure a strategic focus in line with QQI Guidelines.	• Digital Learning Policy completed & approved QTR3, now accessible on our FET Website. • Blended Learning Procedure is being developed for national roll-out by CMETB January 2025. This will be Localised to LWETB requirements • **FETQS/TEL&P&D** Blended Learning Working Group under PGG not yet established brought to PGG but the decision was made not to proceed at that time QTR1. Reviewing the process in QTR4. Currently awaiting National roll-out of Blended Procedure to finalize this approach/procedure, currently being devised by CMETB. In the interim an MS Form has been created for provisions to apply for blended learning and this is included in the agenda of the PGG for discussion/approval Educator Course – Teaching online in FET- Fully online, has been piloted at live training sessions with ESOL staff to check content and relevance so ready to proceed available January 2025. TEL courses will be offered continually as much as funding allows. In-house webinars and general digital learning workshops will run throughout 2025 resource dependent. Sitting on national steering group for Digital learning with SOLAS, ETBI, AONTAS, Ahead, PDST, HEANET, Microsoft. Informal TEL CoP has now been transformed into a SOLAS National Network for Digital Learning co-ordinators. I am a member of this, and we meet 6 times per year. • *Module Enhancement:* The enhancement of module descriptors are now being worked on nationally as part of the Quality Network Group, a sub-group has been created from the Quality Network to focus on this enhancement. The pilot is currently in operation. A buddy system has now been finalized. LWETB is buddying with MSLETB to work on level 5 & 6 Payroll and Level 5 Business Admin. Curriculum Writers have been nominated within LWETB and currently working with the designated Subject Matter Expert to review and redevise chosen modules as above. A consultation process was conducted by LWETB with several ETBs to gather feedback in relation to the Level 5 & 6 Payroll and level 5 Business Admin modules. This feedback was collected, collated and distributed to our SME who in turn is reviewing and including all recommendations outlined. • LWETB is currently collaborating with SOLAS as the lead ETB for Reporting in Sustainability Level 6 Micro-Credential. QQI Application for Validation will be submitted in November 2024. LWETB have made several differential validations for several micro-credentials such as

Building Digital Skills, Business Innovation & Market Development, Lean for Sustainable Business, Resource Efficiency, Utilising Robotics in Advanced Manufacturing etc.

- LWETB has reviewed new programmes from other ETBs that were approved and sought differential validation for several principal programmes such as Tourism & Visitor Care, ESOL, Door Security etc.

Commentary and Reflections

FETQS has prioritised a needs analysis of centres based on supports and resources required. Throughout 2023, the FETQS Unit delivered specific, effective, and in-depth workshops and face-to-face sessions on: Assessment of Learners, Conducting Learner Feedback, Standards & Integrity, QQI Grading Criteria, Devising Marking Schemes etc. These sessions have received positive feedback from both internal and external educators from NFQ levels 1-6. Outputs of these sessions have also included in FETQS devising supporting Toolkits and Guidelines to support teaching, learning and assessment (TLA) at centre level and FETQS have developed a 2024 plan which includes but is not limited to: Integration Workshops – Fusion and Cross-Curricular, The LWETB Assessment Toolkit and Programme Development. These inclusions to the supports and resources available to both internal and external educators have been instrumental in enhancing the teaching, learning and assessment for both new and existing staff and educator feedback on these sessions reflect a deeper embedding of a quality culture within our services.

FETQS continue to work with provisions to devise/develop supports & resources to assist them in their daily functioning. Several training/support sessions both online and in-person were scheduled from Oct 24 until March 25.

The programming team have developed an LWETB Validated Programme Hub that can be accessed by all FET provisions. This hub holds all QQI Module Descriptors but also permits provisions to identify what programmes/modules they are validated to run within their provisions. It also acts as a form of communication to keep provisions informed in relation to programming matters.

Link to Published Policies and Procedures

Policies & Procedures are all available to staff through accessing LWETB FET Website Staff Hub

1.06 Access, Transfer and Progression

Recommendation 7	Update - Note progress/changes made to P&P, timeline.
7.The review team recommends that LWETB develop a mechanism for monitoring its guidance service. This will include who is accessing the service, and crucially who is not, so that it can ensure that the service is consistently available across the ETB, including to harder to reach groups. This monitoring will also allow for the measurement of the service's quality and impact.	• As per the Guidance ETBI database in 2024, (19th November) we met with 6309 beneficiaries which comprises of the following categories - carers, disadvantaged people, early school leavers, ESOL, Ukrainian refugees, other refugees, international protection applicants, lone parents, unemployed, employed people • (including Skills to Advance learners), people with disabilities, people working with basic skills and members of the Traveller and Roma community. The categories reflect an inclusive guidance service for all, as per FET Strategy, with careful prioritisation and management of resources. While this is a small decrease in numbers from 2023, it is still an increase of 37% on 2022 figures and would have been expected as part of working with harder to reach groups. It also reflects the decrease in the numbers of Ukrainian refugees accessing our service and smaller class sizes. • With the appointment of new ESOL Co-Ordinators, the referral and bridging work that the Guidance Team were providing in connecting Ukrainian refugees with English language supports has now become more efficient and seamless. We have recently established a strong working relationship with the Local Area Integration Teams (LAIT) in both counties and attend regular Information Clinics in various locations, supporting the integration of new communities. This has resulted in reaching larger numbers of International Protection Applicants in particular. In 2025 we will continue this new collaboration and explore ways to strengthen it effectively within guidance resources. • It is interesting to note that the Guidance Service met with and assisted participants of 243 different groups so far in 2024 which includes internal LWETB groups and external groups in the categories named above. Aside from meeting groups, networking with agencies, attending open events and hosting information clinics and workshops in the community, we continue to maintain multiple methods of accessibility to our service through an on-line booking form, offering virtual guidance meetings, drop-in sessions and broadening our outreach provision to include the libraries, community centres and liaising with the local partnership companies. In Q4 2024, we will review accessibility methods to ensure usability for everyone using UDL. • From analysis of the database we identified in 2023 that there was a small cohort of minority target groups, members of the Traveller and Roma community, that we committed to focus on. We commenced this work with visits to Community Houses and CV workshops in collaboration with local development partnerships and staff attended Romani Cultural Awareness Training. Following a request from the Local Community Development Company for support with their Roma group the Guidance Service along with the Employment Support Worker organised a CV workshop and follow up supports with meeting employers. This work also led to individual appointments being requested for guidance on LWETB courses that would help them to develop their skills for employment. • The Guidance Service organised an information morning on apprenticeships for Travellers that was held in LCRL (Longford Community Resources) and facilitated by the apprenticeship team in LWETB Garrycastle campus. The Irish Traveller Movement was also present and made a request for a visit to the training centre. This was arranged by the Guidance Service and they accompanied a group of 13 young travellers to the training centre and TUS Athlone to learn about the Access to Apprenticeship course. The relationship with the Irish Traveller Movement has strengthened since this and meetings are due to take place late November for 2025 planning.

- We will continue this work in 2025 in collaboration with Community Education, Family Learning and the Regional Literacy Co-Ordinator but also with our continued connections with DSP, Youth Services, Community Employment Scheme Supervisors, HSE, Home School Liaison personnel and College Connect.

- A strong working relationship with Intreo is ongoing throughout the two counties. The FET Guidance Service attends weekly Group Information Sessions to present to newly unemployed people. Employment Personal Advisors in Intreo directly refer their customers to the FET Guidance Service using PLSS. 429 clients have been referred in this manner and had support from the Guidance Service so far in 2024 which is an increase of 32% on 2023 referrals.

- The FET Guidance Service provides an Educational Guidance Service to NALA learners nationally, therefore reaching and supporting people who are studying QQI Level 3 and below who need support with literacy, numeracy, ESOL and digital skills. We also participated in the evaluation of applications for funding for the Regional Literacy Collaboration and Innovation Fund.

- We work closely with agencies that support people with disabilities. In 2024 the Guidance Service worked closely with learners on the Latch On programme for people with Down Syndrome, Ar Aghaidh Linn which provides rehabilitative training to people with physical and sensory challenges, Vision Ireland, Chime, Walk Peer which supports transitions from Special Education Schools to FET and employment and National Learning Network learners. In 2025, we will work closely with the new LWETB Learner Support Unit to further support learners with disabilities and additional needs to access LWETB programmes and the guidance service.

- We continued our Guidance and Information Webinars throughout 2024 with excellent attendance and will continue to offer up to date and relevant information webinars to learners in 2025. In 2024 we offered Wellbeing events to learners culminating in a very successful in person Wellbeing Day in June 2024 with over 150 people in attendance. The Wellbeing Day will be organised again in 2025 by the FET Guidance Team.

- We reviewed our Guidance Service Client Feedback Forms in 2024 and have sent the forms to our clients from Quarter 4. We will continue to send the form each quarter as part of measuring our work with clients. This form is valuable for us as a team to plan our work and acknowledge the impact we have on individuals.

- Bi-annual reviews were held in Q1 (January 2024) and Q3 (September 2024). Continuous updates and feedback are provided to senior management. Bi-annual reviews will be held in Q1 and Q3 of 2025 along with regular team meetings and updates to management.

1. **Accessing the service** – FET Guidance Service is accessible to all as evidenced in the ETBI Guidance Database.
2. **Review existing data and critically analyse** This database is under review at national level. The categories used on this database have not been updated in many years and does not always accurately reflect the full spectrum of categories of clients we work with. We continuously review our work as a team to review if we are meeting the hard to reach, using multiple methods.
3. **Continue to use feedback surveys and develop reports with actions plans** to ensure the service remains current – Using Client feedback survey.
4. **Review our work** on a bi-annual basis to ensure that we are proactively meeting the changing needs of the community of learners both internally and externally – Review will be done by the guidance team and led by the co-ordinator which can be relayed to AEO and FET director. Our work in 2025 will be informed by the new 2025 FET Strategy and the National Guidance Framework 2024 - 2030.

Commentary and Reflections

Lifelong guidance for people in employment will necessitate an increase in resources to meet this demand. CPD will be essential for staff to meet this work. The move to a FET Guidance, Information and Recruitment Support Service (GIRSS) will impact how we work internally with staff and how the work will be delivered.

2024 seen a small decrease in numbers from 2023, it is still an increase of 37% on 2022 figures and would have been expected as part of working with harder to reach groups. It also reflects the decrease in the numbers of Ukrainian refugees accessing our service and smaller class sizes. With the appointment of new ESOL Co-Ordinators, the referral and bridging work that the Guidance Team were providing in connecting Ukrainian refugees with English language supports has now become more efficient and seamless. Guidance have recently established a strong working relationship with the Local Area Integration Teams (LAIT) in both counties and attend regular Information Clinics in various locations, supporting the integration of new communities. This has resulted in reaching larger numbers of International Protection Applicants in particular. In 2025 they will continue this new collaboration and explore ways to strengthen it effectively within guidance resources.

Link to Published Policies and Procedures

1.08 Information and Data Management

Recommendation 8	Update - Note progress/changes made to P&P, timeline.
8.The review team recommends that LWETB develop mechanisms for the systematic collection of data and its use. Data can be used effectively to review and evaluate provision and for performance management. This will enhance both operational and strategic planning and enable the provision of a more consistent FET experience. Furthermore, the development of KPIs and plans which include clear targets and measures will be important for continuous self-evaluation and enhancements.	SOLAS issues PLSS MIS reporting on or around the 5th business day of each month. This MIS data is shared via two platforms: - MIS Report - Excel - SPA Targets 2023 - Tableau Each report is reviewed by the FET Management team. In conjunction with the above MIS reports, the PLSS Advisor issues the following monthly Excel reports to FET Managers and FET Coordinators as applicable: • **Unterminated Learners Report** This report focuses on courses with a past status that have successfully retained learners in an 'on-course' status. These learners will be terminated, and their outcomes will be accurately recorded. • **Waiting for Certification Report** This report outlines learners who were terminated, yet their certification outcomes were not recorded at the time of termination. It is essential that these learners have their certification outcomes officially documented. • **Course Activity Report** This report outlines courses over a 3-year period for example 2023 (past), 2024 (current) and 2025 (future). The report is utilised by the FET Management Team, FET Coordinators, FET Marketing and FETQS to actively track course start and end dates and current status with learner figures. ○ • **Skills to Advance Report** This report outlines only Skills to Advance learners detailing monthly activity year to date. • **Cancelled Courses with Learner's on-course** This report outlines the number of cancelled courses detailing learner applications that were not progressed or moved an alternative course. • **Commenced Courses with zero learners on course** This report presents an overview of courses that effectively incorporate zero-learner applications.

- **Unprocessed Referrals Report**
  This report outlines unprocessed referrals across courses that have commenced, closed or cancelled.

- **Early Finishers Report**
  This report provides a comprehensive overview of learners who exited the course without completing it or the associated assessments.

  FET Coordinators and Garrycastle Campus Recruitment team utilise the PLSS SMS system to communicate with students.

Commentary and Reflections

Work continues on building and strengthening the links between the required parties; recruitment departments, centres, line management and the PLSS Advisor. Through this engagement process gap analysis and MIS reports. LWETB depts such as Guidance & Recruitment utilise the PLSS system to engage with learners in the texting service to participate and engage in learner surveys to support centralising the learner voice in a more learner friendly and participatory process that aligns to where the learner is most engaged. FETQS will collate this qualitative data and utilise within governance structures and address enhancing supports and resources for and on behalf of learners.

Link to Published Policies and Procedures

2.0 Teaching, Learning & Assessment

2.02 Assessment of Learners

Recommendation 9	Update - Note progress/changes made to P&P, timeline.
9.The review team recommends that LWETB develop a learner induction process and learner handbook that is FET-wide and consistent, so that every LWETB FET service user receives the same information and is aware of the supports available and how to access them.	• *Learner Handbook & Learner Induction:* – Is being used throughout LWETB, can be adapted to provision requirements. Review 2025. • *QA Internal and External Training*: Training/supports for new and existing educators is ongoing, number of resources have been created over the last three years. Assessment Toolkit for Localised assessment has been launched, this was developed by educators across FET and facilitated by FETQS. Academic Integrity Course for educators. The aim of this online course is to provide training to educators around the evolving trends, technologies and best practices related to academic integrity in FET. This training was developed by the TEL Department. • FETQS & TEL collaborated to devise AI guidance for educator & P3 Academic Integrity Policy. Continuous creation of voiceover supports, one to one session, briefing sessions, SME support session etc.

Commentary and Reflections

Ensuring both staff and learners at centre level have access to sufficient, adequate and robust resources that is both easy to access when they need them and fit-for-purpose is paramount to FETQS. LWETB have worked alongside the FET Marketing department to streamline accessibility for both learners and staff to the FET website. Within the FET website is here the learner section will allow learners to access not only the Learner Handbook and FETQS policies, procedures and application forms but all information needed to support them through their learner journey, regardless of NFQ level or accredited or non-accredited courses. The information website will be easily accessible for learners and simple to navigate and will serve as a one-stop-shop hub for all needs, requirements and information seeking. Staff in turn on the FET website will have a log-in section where all departments, supports and resources will be available to them. FETQS will have 5 sections within this hub to support staff: 1: FETQS Coordinator Supports & Resources, 2: Educator Assessment Supports * CoPs, 3: FETQS Policies, Procedures & Documentation, 4: Module Descriptors & Educator Packs and 5: FETQS News.

The FET website www.lwetbfet.ie went live in Q3. It is very important to have an online presence; our potential learners possibly visit our website before making contact or signing up for a course. It is a perfect opportunity to showcase our re-brand, College of Further Education and Training. The FET website clearly establishes who we are and what services we provide for the people of Longford and Westmeath. The aim of the FET website is to act as a learner communication platform to support, contribute and disseminate learner and public information. On the Home Page alone we create awareness of our campus locations, courses, news and events. This web-based platform will help us to communicate more with our learners. For instance, during the winter season if there are weather warnings, we will be able to post closure notices and updates to keep learners and staff informed. The website embeds a staff hub which staff can access where all departments, supports and resources will be available to them. FETQS have a designated tab within this website that holds policies & procedures and directs provision coordinators & educators to various supports/resources.

Link to Published Policies and Procedures	
Policies & Procedures are all available to staff through accessing LWETB FET Website Staff Hub	

2.03 Supports for Learners

Recommendation 10	Update - Note progress/changes made to P&P, timeline.
10.The review team recommends that LWETB develop mechanisms for embedding the learner voice across all relevant activities and governance. Furthermore, a clear process needs to be developed to ensure the feedback informs strategy and accountability. This needs to be supported by a robust procedure and a more coherent and consistent feedback loop so that learners know their voice is being heard.	• The **Management Information System** was incorporated into the FET Website. All Policies & Procedures are available to all staff members and are located within the staff hub area of the FET Website • *Learner Engagement & Voice:* LWETB has developed a Working Group within the Programme Governance Group (PGG) to capture the learner voice. *Please see PGG Case Study* • **SPECTRUM** was launched for learners in 2024. Spectrum's 1:1 counselling service provides LWETB learners with a confidential and supportive space to discuss personal, academic, or emotional challenges. This professional guidance helps learners manage stress, build resilience, and develop coping strategies that enhance their overall well-being. By addressing issues such as anxiety, motivation, and self-confidence, counselling empowers learners to stay engaged in their studies and achieve their goals. This service ensures that every learner has access to the support they need to thrive, fostering a positive and inclusive learning environment. The Spectrum Digital Wellness App provides learners with resources on mindfulness, stress management, and healthy digital habits, fostering a more balanced approach to technology use in both study and daily life. By embedding digital wellness into the learning experience, LWETB equips learners with the skills to manage online distractions, improve focus, and enhance overall well-being. FET Coordinators were consulted & given the opportunity test the app & submit feedback to the Learner Support Depart before the official launch to learners. This proactive initiative was demonstrates LWETB's dedication to holistic learner support, ensuring that learners thrive academically while maintaining positive mental health. • **ITEMIT DATABASE -** During the COVID-19 pandemic, many learners faced significant barriers to accessing education due to a lack of personal computers or reliable internet. To address this, our ETB (Education and Training Board) provided laptops to learners, allowing them to continue their studies and engage in online teaching and learning. This rapid shift underscored the importance of technology in education and highlighted the specific needs of learners for reliable digital access. The practice of loaning laptops to learners has continued post-pandemic, requiring each learner to sign a loan agreement within their specific educational provision. This year, the Learner Support Department implemented an Asset Management System (ITEMIT) as a centralised database to streamline the process of tracking and managing these laptop loans. The system has proven instrumental in enhancing the educational experience for learners, ensuring they have access to essential resources from the start of their programs, without concerns over the financial burden of acquiring a device. • **Learner Wellbeing Day –** In 2024 the FET Guidance Team offered Wellbeing events to learners culminating in a very successful in person Wellbeing Day in June 2024 with over 150 people in attendance. The Wellbeing Day will be organised again in 2025 by the FET Guidance Team.

- **Employer and Stakeholder Engagement:** Refer to recommendation 2.

- **ACSS- Apprenticeship Client Services System** – Is a SOLAS system that records employer & Apprentice details for life cycle of the apprentice. STB collect feedback from Apprentices and Employers annually. This is used to improve apprenticeship delivery. Apprentices are assigned a Training Advisor who links in with them regularly.

Commentary and Reflections

Through the PGG, FETQS conducted several in-person sessions across FET to capture the Learner Voice. Please see case study no. 1 pg. 54. This is a practice that LWETB will continue in the future.

Link to Published Policies and Procedures

3.0 Self-Evaluation, Monitoring & Review

3.01 Self-Evaluation Monitoring & Review

Recommendation 11	Update - Note progress/changes made to P&P, timeline.
11.The review team recommends that LWETB 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	• **Annual Service Plan**: The QQI review, action plan and report has supported and aided the development, progression, and pathway for a stronger, more cohesive and aligned annual service plan that supports our progression towards a unified LWETB and quality system that supports all. • **SER**: The FETQS unit have taken all areas of future focus and under development plans that were identified as outcomes of the SER. These identifiers support our enhancement plans and support centres and staff in actively engaging in development plans and actions. • **Policy Development**: FETQS collaborated with TEL/P&D in relation to two policies in 2024. P3 Academic Integrity & P4 Digital Learning. • **System Management**: Power BI is currently being used to present Contracted and Apprenticeship certification outcomes. It is presented to the QOG for the Ratification of Results.

Commentary and Reflections

LWETB have the Strategic Performance Agreements in place and our KPIs as set by SOLAS are reviewed in tableau monthly with oversight from FET Management and our MIS department. Monthly budget analysis and reviews are held at department and FET management level with reports distributed at centre level with year-on-year comparatives conducted based on FARR projections versus actuals including FAR4 financial budget bids.

Link to Published Policies and Procedures
Policies & Procedures are all available to staff through accessing LWETB FET Website Staff Hub

3.03 Oversight, monitoring & review of relationships with external parties

Recommendation 12	Update - Note progress/changes made to P&P, timeline.
12.The review team recommends that LWETB use the experience gained through developing the SER to continue to strengthen its engagement with external stakeholders. This will further enhance its capacity to identify emerging needs and develop services to address them.	• **See 1.02 Structures & Terms of Reference for Governance QA** • FETQS meeting existing and potential future second providers and providing informational sessions on QA engagement. 2024 no. of onsite sessions with second providers, introduction on new QA system, onsite support, briefings etc • A Monitoring Procedure with supporting documentation/templates has been drafted and is awaiting consultation by the QGG. • **Interdepartmental Information Sessions:** During 2024 several meetings took place between the Procurement Group which consists of the Director of FET, Senior Managers, Buildings Officer & OSD. These meetings focus on purchasing and tendering. This group meets every 6 weeks. The Human Resources Dept conducted briefings with Provision Managers giving HR updates for FET. FET would have engaged with HR regularly in 2024 particularly around Adult Educator Contract Conversions.
Commentary and Reflections FETQS have developed PR25 Monitoring QA Procedure with supporting documentation. This procedure is in draft form and has yet to be brought to the QGG for consultation.	
Link to Published Policies and Procedures **Policies & Procedures are all available to staff through accessing LWETB FET Website Staff Hub**	

4.0 Quality Developments and Enhancements

No.	QA Objectives These should relate to objectives not already discussed in the progress report.	Update on Status Provide brief update on status, whether completed or in progress.	2024 Updates
1.	**Policy Development**	- FETQS Department and TEL PL&D Department have worked collaboratively on an Academic Integrity Policy – Q1 2024 **COMPLETED** - FETQS Programme Development and Approval Policy – Q1 2024 - Blended Learning Policy Q1 2024 (renamed to P4 Digital Learning Policy) **COMPLETED** - FETQS Self-Evaluation, Monitoring and Review Policy – Q3 2024 **(DRAFTED)** - OSD Policy review and Development 2023	P3 Academic Integrity Policy PDF.pdf P4 Digital Learning Policy PDF.pdf www.lwetbfet.ie **Above** *Policies are all available to staff through accessing LWETB FET Website Staff Hub* Monitoring Procedure (draft) & reporting documentation (Not published, in draft)
2.	**Access, Transfer and Progression**	- MoU (memorandum of understanding) signed into agreement: TUS (Technological University of the Shannon) Memorandum of Understanding - MoU signed into agreement: Department of Social Welfare (DSP) - MoU signed into agreement: Meeting with TUS, Head of Department Dr D. Cawley for Nursing and Healthcare to widen the diversity of learners entering Nursing Programmes from FET. Confirmation was granted from our QQI Level 5 Nursing programme with the extension of 5 learner candidate availability to 50 learner candidate availability. - Joint Tertiary Agreement for Bachelor (BA) in Business – 4 Year level 8 Honours Degree: Joint tertiary degree proposal with year 1 located in LWETB and subsequent 3 years in TUS Athlone Campus - MoU in Progress: TUS Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure and LWETB	MoU (memorandum of understanding), agreement signed in 2023, since then there has been four meetings in 2024 and one meeting as already took place within 2025 *Nessa Griffin-Heslin* Head of Nursing and Healthcare Department LWETB – met with Dr. Des Cawley - Head of the Nursing Department Anne Cooney - Clinical Allocations Manager Dr. Owen Ross - Head of Transitions and Student Success Dr. Aoife Lane - Head of Department of Sport and Health Sciences Dr. Claire McDermott - Lecturer in Physical Activity and Health Sciences on the 16th of Jan 2025. Nessa update is as follows: • There are now more places on the Nursing Courses for QQI learners. This means our learners have better opportunities to gain a place in TUS, Athlone. • The Department are keen to have QQI/FET learners join their courses as they are seeing the benefit and advantages of these students.

			• The Nursing Department would like to strengthen the links with the 4 ETBs present yesterday.
			• They would welcome visits from students and staff.
			• The piloted National Tertiary Programme for Nursing in ATU is soon to be evaluated. TUS, Athlone will wait for the evaluation report prior to committing to a programme.
			Joint Tertiary Agreement for Bachelor (BA) in Business – 4 Year level 8 Honours Degree – LWETB have engaged with TUS but for operational reasons within TUS this has been delayed
			MoU in Progress: TUS Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure and LWETB
			Strategic Performance Agreement Update
			Progression within FET (Pathways) LWETB hit all targets and exceeded same by 139% in based on November 2024 figures. Data from 30th of November 2024 identifies target of 1270, LWETB achieved 1762 learners progressing within FET
			Currently there has been no update from SOLAS in relation to FET progression to HE – LWETBs target was 1225 for 2024 and are awaiting release of stats from SOLAS to review target performance.
			MoU in Progress: TUS Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure and LWETB Mullingar CTC intend to revisit this MoU as soon as internal staffing is confirmed. They have continued to create and develop their relationship with TUS and have had a number of learners progress to TUS through direct access (level 6), the changemakers mentoring programme, CAO (level 7) and springboard (level 6).
3.	**National Programme Development**	- Working with and actively participate in ELC (Early Learning and Care) National Programme Development through the Quality Network and DDLETB	Currently lead ETB in Corporate Sustainability Reporting micro credentials in conjunction with SOLAS

		- Collaboration of working with SOLAS on QQI micro-credentials and green programme initiatives	
4.	**Training and Support**	- Integration and UDL: Provision based in-house practical workshop for integration within the module as well as integration across modules.	FETQS took part in an integration training on the 10th of Sept 2024 which was facilitated by Trudi Barnett. This training demonstrated to the FETQS team how to conduct integration workshops within provisions throughout LWETB. FETQS plan to develop integration workshops/sessions in Q2 2025 to focus on integration within and across modules.
5.	**Programme Development**	- Programme Development: Workshop based sessions to enhance opportunity to programme development for both new and existing programmes - LWETB is working with LCETB in support of the development of a non-CAS programme – QQI level 5 Dementia Care and Support - LWETB is working on a QQI validation of 5N1752 All-Terrain Vehicle Operations to meet new governing regulations in the use of ATV/quad biking for all workplaces/farm in possession of same and similar industry sectors that came into effect Q4 2023 - FETQS will see the commencement of a dedicated staff member in the Programming sector to promote and meet Programme Development Plans or new programmes and existing by Q2 2024 - Development and approval of Health Services Supervisory Management 6M4978 - Development and approval of Maintenance Skills Technology 6M5154	Programming have scheduled monthly drop-in clinics for provisions to discuss new programming opportunities. This also allows the programming team to keep provisions updated on new validations and possible new programmes. All-Terrain Vehicle Operations – investigated QQI Validation as an option, currently looking at alternatives. LCETB are currently seeking approval from PAEC in relation to the non-CAS programme – QQI level 5 Dementia Care and Support. Once approved LWETB will make an application for differential validation. Updated by CDETB Health Services Supervisory Management 6M4978 – application was made by LWETB under the historical national awards currently being offered by Templemichael PLC Maintenance Skills Technology 6M5154 – application was made by LWETB with information shared by LMETB – Athlone Training centre validated.

5.0 Additional Themes and Case Studies

Case Study 1. Capturing the Learner Voice

Case Study Introduction:

In recent efforts to gather feedback across various Further Education and Training (FET) provisions—including Back to Education Initiative (BTEI), Adult Literacy, Apprenticeships, Youthreach, Contracted Training and Incentre programs—challenges were identified in accurately capturing the experiences and needs of both learners and staff. Previous attempts, which included digital surveys via MS Forms and initial pilot projects, fell short of providing a comprehensive view. The feedback gathered through these methods often lacked depth and context, which limited our ability to fully understand the unique challenges within each provision.

This was the first time such in-person focus groups were used to gather direct feedback from learners, marking a shift from the initial plan to collect insights via a Microsoft Forms survey. The decision to hold face-to-face sessions was made to foster a more engaging and open dialogue, allowing for richer insights and a deeper understanding of learners' experiences and needs.

Section A)
Description of area/issue

It was noted that previous ways of collecting learner feedback such as the MS Forms submitted to each learner at the end of their programme was not sufficient. Digital surveys, conducted through MS Forms, often yield brief or surface-level responses. Learners may not fully elaborate on their experiences or concerns, especially if they feel restricted by standardized questions or limited response options.

Many learners may view surveys as impersonal, which can reduce their willingness to participate. Additionally, learners who may not feel confident in their literacy or digital skills may be reluctant to complete forms, leading to underrepresentation of certain voices.

Digital surveys offer no way to immediately follow up on interesting or ambiguous responses, which means that important details can be lost. As a result, the richness of qualitative feedback is often compromised.

The Learner Voice was embedded into the agenda of the PGG. It was decided that a more holistic approach be taken when gathering the Learner Voice. Onsite visits were scheduled across FET to capture this.

Action

These in-person interactions offered distinct advantages over previous methods by allowing for real-time discussions, active observation, and a deeper exploration of stakeholder experiences.

By engaging directly with learners, educators and support staff in their respective environments, we were able to obtain a more complete and authentic understanding of the specific needs, challenges, and successes across each provision. This approach not only ensured that all voices were heard but also fosters trust and openness, setting the stage for meaningful improvements tailored to each provision's context.

The in-person visits offered a chance to directly observe and engage with staff and learners. During on-site visits, focus on structured discussions, including group conversations, interviews, and observational feedback. This approach most certainly appeared to yield richer qualitative insights into each provision's unique context and challenges.

Switching to in-person visits provides a valuable opportunity for more meaningful engagement. With direct interaction, it's possible to gather more information than digital forms.

Our objective was to create a Learner Voice Report that could be presented to all FET leaders in a**n** efficient and Plain English format so that they could gain the knowledge required to improve, sustain and more importantly learn.

What we did to gather the Learner Voice

- Devised a list of questions/areas for discussion that could be adapted to all provision types
- We gathered and analysed the information collected, identifying recurring themes or unique challenges within each provision.
- Held small group discussions, ensuring everyone had a chance to voice their experiences and suggestions.
- Offered private interviews with learners who felt more comfortable sharing feedback in a one-on-one setting**.**
- Shared summarized feedback with stakeholders to validate findings and demonstrate that their learners input was valued.

Key Findings/Outcomes/Impact

Face to Face Focus groups were scheduled throughout FET. This allowed us time to prepare by identifying a diverse group of learners from each provision to ensure a range of perspectives.

It also allowed us to prepare a list of guiding questions and themes based on known challenges, focusing on areas like engagement, resource access, delivery consistency, and learner outcomes, and to be able to tailor our questions to the specific context of each provision (e.g., Youthreach vs. Adult Literacy) to make the sessions more relevant and engaging.

In-person visits not only helped in identifying specific issues but also fostered trust among learners and staff, showing them that their experiences matter. Structured

discussions and observations uncovered deeper insights into each provision's specific needs, leading to more informed decisions and tailored solutions.

A Learner Voice Report was devised and presented to all provisions on the 20th of June 24 at the FET Leaders Meeting. It was presented by the AEO Nicola Galvin and distributed to all provision leaders the following week.

Key Learnings

During this process our key learnings were as identified below:

- It was our first attempt at putting this style of report together and there was great learning throughout for all involved. An initial draft was produced and reviewed by middle management, feedback was given and taken onboard to produce the finalised piece.

- Going forward an online feedback portal may work well where each provision can access their own individual feedback which will give an insight specific to their provision.

- Creating a feedback portal would not only streamline access to provision-specific insights but also foster a sense of ownership and continuous improvement within each team, making it easier for them to respond to and address feedback proactively.

- Offering learners the option to meet in private rather than in a group setting could be highly beneficial. For some learners, particularly those who may feel uncomfortable speaking in front of others or who have personal or sensitive feedback, a one-on-one setting can provide a safe space for honest expression. Providing this option, alongside group settings, would ensure that all learners have an environment suited to their communication preferences, thereby enriching the quality and inclusivity of the feedback collected.

Case Study 2. Learner Support – ITEMIT System

Case Study Introduction:

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many learners faced significant barriers to accessing education due to a lack of personal computers or reliable internet. To address this, our ETB (Education and Training Board) provided laptops to learners, allowing them to continue their studies and engage in online teaching and learning. This rapid shift underscored the importance of technology in education and highlighted the specific needs of learners for reliable digital access.

The practice of loaning laptops to learners has continued post-pandemic, requiring each learner to sign a loan agreement within their specific educational provision. This year, the Learner Support Department implemented an Asset Management System (ITEMIT) as a centralised database to streamline the process of tracking and managing these laptop loans. The system has proven instrumental in enhancing the educational experience for learners, ensuring they have access to essential resources from the start of their programs, without concerns over the financial burden of acquiring a device.

The LWETB Asset Management System (ITEMIT) supports equitable learning opportunities by ensuring all learners, regardless of socioeconomic status, have the technological tools they need to succeed. Additionally, the system aids in auditing and oversight, promoting efficient resource management for the ETB. This case study explores how this asset management system has improved learner support and contributed to a more inclusive educational environment.

Section A)

Description of area/issue

The primary objective was to improve technology accessibility for learners by addressing insights gained during COVID-19 and feedback gathered through learner voice initiatives. Equipping learners with the necessary digital tools was essential for their success in Education and Training Board (ETB) programs.

Challenges Faced:
While laptop loans significantly enhanced learners' ability to meet the digital demands of their courses, several challenges emerged, particularly in asset management:

- Inefficient Distribution: The distribution of laptops was managed locally and tracked through spreadsheet-based records, creating inconsistencies in the recording process.
- Inconsistent Record-Keeping: Record-keeping methods varied from location to location, resulting in inconsistent data about the loaned laptops.

- Varied Loan Processes: Each location used different processes for laptop loans, leading to variations in the types and quality of information recorded.
- Lack of Reporting Functionality: The previous system lacked reporting capabilities to assess and improve efficiency.
- Limited Stock Oversight: Without real-time stock tracking, it was difficult to assess usage and reallocate laptops to centres with the greatest need.
- No Central Oversight for Compliance: The absence of a centralized system limited our ability to conduct internal compliance reviews.
- Difficulty in Tracking Specialist Equipment: There was no system for monitoring the availability of specialized support devices, which impacted learner access to essential equipment.

Action

To resolve these challenges and enhance accessibility, we undertook the following steps:

1. We conducted a review of various asset management solutions to identify a tool that would effectively meet our needs. Including a pilot and gained feedback from some current end users.
2. Considered the storage of all information to ensure we met GDPR standards
3. Implementation of a centralised asset management system: All existing loaned technology was registered within the selected asset management tool, allowing us to create a comprehensive and easily accessible database.
4. Trained all staff and created an escalation point for support requests.
5. Built a scalable solution which can evolve with new technologies and support demands
6. Improved resource allocation by utilising real time data to plan to streamline asset allocation
7. Optimise accessibility to all resources, creating a more inclusive and supportive environment for learners

By improving our asset management processes, we aimed to not only increase technology accessibility for learners but also to boost staff confidence in issuing and managing essential digital equipment. This case study explores how these steps enhanced our service and ensured that learners could access the resources they need to succeed in their educational journeys.

Key Findings/Outcomes/Impact

This asset management tool enables a tailored approach for supporting all learners without easy access to a laptop by efficiently tracking and managing specialised equipment, including adaptive technology, assistive devices, and customized learning materials. This centralised system ensures that necessary resources are available, functional, and aligned with each learner's unique needs, supporting a more personalised learning experience.

Detailed records of assets allow educators to customise learning plans based on individual requirements, ensuring that each student receives the right tools for their educational journey.

Effective asset management has optimised resource accessibility, allowing us to allocate equipment where and when it's needed, reducing downtime, and enhancing accessibility for students. Regular tracking and maintenance, facilitated by the asset management system, ensure that all resources remain in optimal condition. This is

especially crucial for assistive technologies that require consistent performance and updates to support learners effectively.

In addition, this asset management tool supports compliance with accessibility regulations and provides necessary reporting for funding or audit purposes related to disability services. By fostering streamlined communication between staff, caregivers, and educators, the system ensures a coordinated approach to addressing learner needs. Furthermore, this asset management approach is scalable, enabling LWETB to adapt as learner needs evolve or as new technologies emerge, thus creating an inclusive, supportive, and adaptable learning environment for all students.

Key Learnings

Implementing this new asset management tool for supporting learners with disabilities brings valuable insights, starting with a deeper understanding of user needs. Engaging directly with learners, educators, and caregivers allows LWETB to identify specific requirements and preferences, enabling a more tailored and effective tool.

Additionally, training is critical; thorough guidance for both staff and users ensures that they understand how to navigate the tool, access essential resources, and leverage its full capabilities to support learning outcomes.

A continuous feedback loop is essential for adapting the tool to evolving needs. Establishing regular channels for feedback helps identify areas for improvement and keeps the system aligned with user demands. Moreover, learning to interpret and utilise the data collected by the tool allows for more strategic decision-making regarding resource allocation, helping to enhance its overall effectiveness.

Addressing integration challenges with existing systems and processes is also crucial, as it helps smooth future implementations and ensures a cohesive experience for all involved.

Other key learnings include the need for flexibility and adaptability to accommodate changing educational methods and emerging technologies. Encouraging collaboration and open communication among staff, caregivers, and learners fosters a supportive environment, while the tool facilitates this collaboration.

Additionally, understanding resource management, maintenance requirements, and the financial aspects tied to assistive resources informs better budgeting and funding strategies. Together, these insights promote an inclusive learning atmosphere, raising awareness among staff and stakeholders about the diverse needs of learners with disabilities and driving continuous improvements to support educational inclusivity and success.

Case Study 3. Regional Adult Literacy Organiser

Case Study Introduction:

Adult Literacy for Life Strategy (ALL)

The Adult Literacy for Life (ALL) Strategy sets a ten-year roadmap to improve adult literacy, numeracy, and digital skills across the country. It aims to ensure that everyone has access to these essential skills, empowering individuals and communities while reducing social inequalities.

The ALL Strategy is led by SOLAS and the Further Education and Training Boards. The strategy focuses on creating a more inclusive, empowered society by addressing the foundational skills gaps that impact many adults.

The strategy specifically focuses on potentially vulnerable cohorts for targeted funding such as Older Adults, Members of the Travelling Community, Persons with Disabilities, Low paid Workers, Carers, One-parent households, Incarcerated Persons & Ex-offenders, Persons recovering from addiction, Long-term unemployed, Migrants, International Protection Applicants and People with language needs.

The National Adult Literacy for Life Strategy Programme Office operates as a central, coordinating body across Government departments & other relevant stakeholders. The National Programme office, with SOLAS acts as a driver of collaboration & overall strategy implementation through the national network of Regional Literacy Coordinators.

Section A)
Description of area/issue
Regional Adult Literacy Coordinator was not appointed in 2023 as identified in the QQI Inaugural Review. This appointment has now been filled since Feb 2024. The role of the Regional Literacy coordinator focuses on working with stakeholders at a local level, as well as colleagues across the education, health, community development & local government supports & services to embed the required systems-based approach to addressing unmet literacy needs.
Action
Objectives/aims since appointment to role:

1. Set up the Regional Adult Literacy Coalition - currently the LWETB Coalition is composed of the following: Regional Literacy Coordinator, LWETB Education and Training Board (LWETB), Longford Community Resources CLG, Granard Family Resource Centre, Longford and Westmeath Libraries, Home school and Community Liaison representative, MABS, HSE and DSP representatives from both counties as well as County Council personal from Longford and Westmeath including the Integration team and Healthy Ireland. The Coalition is responsible for developing the annual literacy action plans to address regional and local literacy numeracy & digital inclusion needs. These plans are submitted to the National Programme office.
2. Identify Initiatives that align with the strategies goals, promoting collaborative & innovative solutions to expand & improve literacy services across the country

Key Findings/Outcomes/Impact

- LWETB Coalition was developed as above
- Number of Collaboration and Innovative Projects ran in 2024 as below:

Men of Steel
This is a 10-week practical skills course in Metalwork. It is a combination of literacy, digital and numeracy themed learning with a focus on new skill and improving basic skills. The aim is to engage older men from the community. This cohort have been identified as a group at risk of social exclusion. Athlone FRC in collaboration with LWETB delivered this project in Athlone & surrounding environs. Participants were recruited through the Social Prescriber in the area. For this reason, this project was submitted into the Aontas STAR Award competition.

SOS – Save Our Seeds - Seeds Library – A Collaboration between Westmeath County Council and LWETB
The SOS project aims to facilitate planting, harvesting and re-distribution of organic open-pollinated seeds. Numerical literacy, digital literacy and literacy needs being met through a series of educational workshops aimed at coaching participants in planting, growing and harvesting skills. Information leaflets and books were also purchased to support participants learning.
The seed library initiative was learner- centred. With hands on learning participants engaged directly with seeds, planting, and nurturing them. This fosters experiential learning and a deeper understanding of plant biology and ecology. By allowing individuals to select seeds that interest them, the initiative empowers learners to explore what resonates with their personal gardening goals and local environments. Workshops and events were organised around seed saving and planting to encourage collaboration and knowledge sharing among community members, which enhances social learning and community engagement.
This project has also been entered for an Aontas STAR award as promoting biodiversity, enhancing food security, reducing environmental impact, fostering community engagement, and providing educational opportunities, seed libraries strengthen local ecosystems and empower individuals who will in turn pass on knowledge and skills to future generations.

READ, WRITE & THRIVE Literacy/Numeracy and Digital Skills for All
Introducing 'Read, Write, and Thrive': an innovative adult literacy initiative jointly developed by two Family Resource Centres in Co Longford. It aims to bolster literacy, digital, and numeracy skills to complement formal education provided by LWETB. This project engaged participants from refugee communities such as Syria and Ukrainian as well as Roma families. Through interactive sessions featuring drama, role plays, and storytelling, participants enhanced conversational English. Additionally, activities such as form filling, health visit simulations, and numeracy games and digital skills were incorporated to bridge literacy gaps.
The initiative created supportive networks to ensure learners could access career progression opportunities and life enhancing methods

Well-Westmeath
Well Westmeath is a Health Literacy project run by Westmeath Libraries, Age Friendly Council- Westmeath and Sláintecare Healthy Communities Programme. It is delivered in plain English to empower participants to become more confident when discussing their health and health history. It aims to empower participants when accessing information, asking for clarification, understanding diagnosis, understanding medications and dosages and understanding instructions. The training addresses literacy, numerical literacy and digital literacy challenges amongst the target groups. It gives the participants the tools and the confidence to voice their concerns and

reduce any misunderstandings they may have when interacting with healthcare professionals.

Learning Together
The aim of this project was to support the English language literacy skills of disadvantaged communities in Longford in a fun, supportive environment. The project was delivered as series of workshops through English to encourage participants to practice their English conversational skills. Numeracy and Digital literacy were also supported. Workshops included Cookery & IT; Bike Repair; Art and Well-being; Weaving; Music and Dance. These workshops were led by a range of experienced tutors, supported by LCRL and EDI over seven weeks in July /August 2024.

Empower our Vote
This project was a collaboration between St Christopher's Service CLG and Longford Women's Link to empower individuals with intellectual disabilities to actively participate in society and exercise their fundamental right to vote.
This project used visual aids and easy-to-understand formats tailored to the needs of the participants. This initiative created learning opportunities to inform the participants about the significance of voting, their rights as citizens, and the process of effecting positive change through active participation in the electoral process.

By fostering an understanding of civic responsibility and imparting essential skills for voting, the project aimed to equip the group with the confidence and ability to engage meaningfully in the democratic process, thereby promoting inclusivity and empowerment within the community.

Empower55 - Literacy Digital Skills & Money Management for Women 55+
Empower55 aims to create a supportive and inclusive learning environment where women aged 55 and over can thrive, gain confidence, and unlock new opportunities for personal and professional development.
The program is being delivered in SWEETS Training Rooms in Kilbeggan Co. Westmeath with a capacity for 15 learners over a six week period. The programme follows a workshop style, combining interactive presentations, hands-on activities, group discussions, and one-on-one support. Sessions are led by experienced facilitator with expertise in literacy support, digital skills training, and money management. Participants receive personalized attention and guidance to ensure their individual needs are addressed.

Digital Support Hubs
This service was available through the library network in Longford and Westmeath for adults in the area. People who needed help, advice, or assistance on their device made an appointment with a tutor and called to the library at the appointed time. The tutor assisted them with their query maybe downloading an app, printing a bank statement, setting up email, showing them how to text, WhatsApp, using Facetime or video calls, etc.. This was a bespoke service for the client. This service was promoted via the library service, LWETB, PPN, OPC, Community Safety Network, Healthy Homes, and Sports Partnership to reach as many people as possible.

Participants also received information on follow-on services that might interest them. A progression work-shop assisting people with online FETCH registration in all libraries across Longford and Westmeath is also organised to take place in mid – November. The workshop is an additional component of the digital support hub project and provides follow-up assistance in accessing further LWETB digital up-skilling courses.

From a learner's point of view the Collaboration and Innovation and ALL additional fund projects have provided new learning opportunities offering participants a sense of self- belief thus building confidence. The social and supportive learning environment provided an increase in social engagement and an opportunity to create new friendships.

A key theme throughout many of the Collaboration and Innovation and ALL additional fund projects is that of digital Literacy. This is in line with the ALL-Strategy's focus on digital skills, the need for an emphasis on digital literacy in assisting adults gain the skills needed to engage with technology in work, community, and everyday life. Much of this work ensured digital literacy programs were accessible, especially in areas with lower internet access or technological infrastructure

Learning about other opportunities inside and outside of the ETB allowed participants pathways to continue their learning journey if they wish to do so.

Key Learnings

Central to the role of Regional Literacy Coordinator (RLC) is assessing literacy needs in their specific region. This work provides an opportunity to highlight existing literacy provision within the ETB whilst also identifying areas with the highest demand for services. These assessments with the support of Adult Literacy for Life funding help develop or tailor literacy programs to meet the unique demands of each community, ensuring culturally relevant, inclusive, and accessible learning opportunities.

The role, the Regional Adult Literacy Coalition and the associated funding to support the Adult Literacy for Life Strategy projects has provided an effective and efficient platform to foster collaboration among service providers, such as local Education and Training Boards (ETBs), libraries, community organizations, and employers, to ensure that literacy services are accessible and cohesive.

This work has also assisted in developing a multi-agency network where various local and national stakeholders—such as health services, libraries, social services, and employer groups—collaborate to support literacy.

Case Study 4. Professional Learning & Development Database

Case Study Introduction: Professional Learning & Development Database

Effective professional learning and development (PL&D) systems are critical in fostering continuous improvement among Further Education and Training (FET) staff. This case study explores the development and implementation of a centralised database to record and manage staff PL&D activities. It highlights the challenges, actions taken, outcomes, and key learnings from the initiative.

Section A)

Description of area/issue

Historically, no formal system was in place to record the PL&D activities attended by FET staff. This lack of record-keeping presented challenges in tracking participation, evaluating the impact of training programs, and ensuring equitable opportunities for professional growth across Further Education and Training (FET) in LWETB.

Action

To begin to address this gap, the TEL.PL&D team developed a PL&D database. It included key steps as follows:

1. Design and Deployment:
   – A database was created to record essential details, including the name and role of the staff member, the type of training undertaken, and their line manager's details.
2. Implementation of Data Collection Protocols:
   – Quarterly templates were distributed to FET Coordinators, who facilitated data entry among staff. This ensured a standardised approach to data submission.
3. Engagement and Communication:
   – Regular reminders and updates were provided to stress the importance of maintaining accurate PL&D records.
   – Support services within FET were engaged to share training records from their respective departments.

Key Findings/Outcomes/Impact

The implementation of the Professional Learning & Development (PL&D) database has provided critical insights into both its successes and ongoing challenges. Below is a detailed exploration of the key findings:

Progress in PL&D Record-Keeping

Before the initiative, there was no centralised mechanism for tracking professional learning and development activities among FET staff. The introduction of the database has addressed this gap to a significant extent, achieving a 60% compliance rate. This improvement reflects a positive step toward structured data management and has increased the visibility of staff engagement in training activities.

Highlights:
- Standardised templates and reporting protocols have brought a level of consistency to PL&D data collection.
- FET coordinators now play an active role in encouraging and overseeing staff participation in the process.

Persistent Data Accuracy Challenges
While progress has been made, issues with data accuracy and completeness remain a significant challenge. Missing, incomplete, or incorrect entries require frequent follow-ups, consuming time and administrative resources.

Common Issues Identified:

- Missing critical details such as training dates, session descriptions, or staff identifiers.
- Duplicate entries due to inconsistent data submission practices.
- Misaligned data when records are transferred from other departments or systems.

Dependence on Key Individuals
The success of the PL&D database is highly dependent on two primary factors:

- FET Coordinators' Leadership:
Coordinators play a crucial role in stressing the importance of record-keeping to staff and ensuring compliance.

- Individual Staff Responsibility:
The initiative's success hinges on staff members' commitment to logging their PL&D activities accurately and on time.
This dependence highlights the variability in compliance rates, which can fluctuate based on individual motivation and the prioritisation of PL&D record-keeping by coordinators.

Challenges with Centralised Data Management
The decentralised nature of FET operations and the lack of a unified system for managing PL&D records make it challenging to maintain a centralised and complete database. While some data consolidation has been achieved, gaps still exist in capturing the full spectrum of training activities across departments.

Key Observations:
- Records from certain support services or training departments are inconsistently reported.
- Manual data collection processes contribute to delays and errors.

Incremental Progress Compared to Peers

Despite challenges, this initiative has progressed further than similar efforts in other ETBs. The database represents a pioneering effort that has the potential to set a benchmark for the sector.

Comparative Insights:
- Many ETBs face similar issues with PL&D tracking, but few have implemented a system as structured as this database.
- This highlights both the achievements and the need for continued advocacy for a national-level solution.

Importance of Continuous Engagement

The compliance rate of 60%, while an improvement, indicates that a significant proportion of staff are still not consistently engaging with the database. This highlights the need for ongoing efforts to embed PL&D tracking into the organisational culture.

Factors Affecting Engagement:
- Competing priorities for staff and coordinators reduce the focus on maintaining accurate records.
- Limited awareness or understanding of how the data contributes to broader organisational goals.

Potential for Data-Driven Insights
Although the current focus is on compliance and accuracy, the database has the potential to provide valuable insights into professional development trends, such as:

- Identifying high-demand training areas.
- **Spotting gaps in staff development opportunities.**

Administrative Resources
We have identified a need for dedicated administrative support to manage the database effectively. The absence of allocated resources has led to challenges in maintaining data integrity and ensuring timely follow-ups.

Impacts of Limited Resources:
- Reliance on coordinators and staff adds variability to the process.
- Significant time is needed to enter the data
- Significant time is spent on manual data validation and error correction.

Record Submission from Support Services

Not all FET support services or departments consistently share training records, leading to incomplete datasets. This lack of alignment creates gaps in the overall picture of staff engagement in professional learning activities.

Examples of Gaps:
- Records of external training sessions are sometimes missed or delayed.
- Internal department-led training initiatives are not uniformly logged in the system.

Key Learnings

The development and implementation of the Professional Learning & Development (PL&D) database provided critical insights into the complexities of managing training records across a diverse FET workforce. Below is an in-depth exploration of the key learnings from this initiative:

1. Sector-Wide Challenge
   - The absence of a unified system for tracking PL&D records is not unique to LWETB. It reflects a broader, national issue across Education and Training Boards (ETBs). While some progress has been made locally, the challenge underscores the need for a strategic, national-level approach to standardise PL&D tracking, ensuring consistency and comparability across regions and institutions.
   - Potential Solutions:
     - Advocacy for a centralised, ETBI or SOLAS-supported PL&D platform.
     - Collaborative workshops across ETBs to share best practices and develop joint solutions.

2. Administrative Support
   - A significant finding was the need for dedicated administrative resources to support the database's functionality and usability. Ensuring timely data entry, monitoring, and validation requires continuous oversight, which cannot be solely dependent on existing staff responsibilities.

Key Insights:
   - The lack of dedicated administrative hours leads to delays in follow-ups and inaccuracies in the data.
   - Administrative support can serve as a central point of accountability to ensure compliance and address staff queries.
   - Recommendations:
     - Allocate resources for administrative time to dedicated to managing PL&D records.
     - Train administrative staff to use database tools effectively and efficiently.

3. Emphasising Communication and Awareness
   - Despite the availability of the database and templates, staff compliance is only at 60%, partly due to inconsistent communication and prioritisation of PL&D record-keeping. Clear and consistent messaging about the importance of accurate records is vital.

Approaches for Improvement:
- Deliver regular briefings, both in-person and virtual, to underscore the significance of PL&D tracking for personal and organisational development.
- Incorporate reminders into routine staff communications, such as emails, mailshots, at training events and during team meetings.
- Cultural Shift: Embed a culture across FET where PL&D is viewed not just as a compliance activity but as an integral part of professional growth and accountability.

4. Collaboration Enhances Data Accuracy
- Effective collaboration with support services and departments within FET is vital for ensuring comprehensive data collection. Training records often exist across multiple channels, and streamlined coordination is required to centralise these records.

Strategies for Collaboration:
- Establish clear workflows for sharing training records between departments.
- Use shared digital platforms like MS Teams for real-time updates and communication.
- Create a reporting calendar to align all departments on submission deadlines.

5. Data Integrity
- Incomplete or inaccurate records continue to hinder the effectiveness of the PL&D database. Issues such as missing data fields, incorrect dates, or duplicate entries require significant time and effort to address.

Proposed Solutions:
- Implement mandatory data validation steps in the submission process to reduce errors.
- Automate the detection of incomplete or inaccurate entries, with prompts for correction before submission.
- Provide training sessions for staff on how to fill out PL&D templates accurately.

6. Digital Transformation Opportunities
- The initiative highlighted the need for more advanced tools and systems to manage PL&D records. A more robust digital solution could improve efficiency and accuracy while reducing administrative burden.

Future Directions:
- Explore the adoption of cloud-based PL&D management systems with features such as automated reminders, analytics dashboards, and integration with HR systems.

Investigate mobile-friendly applications that allow staff to log training activities in real-time.

7. Long-Term Strategic Value
Beyond compliance, the database offers strategic benefits, such as identifying skills gaps, tracking training trends, and informing resource allocation for future PL&D

programs. However, these benefits can only be realised if the system is consistently maintained and utilised.

Embedding Strategic Value:
- Link PL&D records to performance reviews and career development plans.
- Use aggregated data to highlight successes and advocate for additional funding for professional development initiatives.

8. National Advocacy and Benchmarking

This initiative has progressed further than most other ETBs, positioning it as a potential leader in the sector. Sharing learnings and outcomes could inspire similar efforts elsewhere.

Action Steps:

Present findings and recommendations at national ETB forums.
- Advocate for benchmarking tools to measure progress against other ETBs and identify areas for collective improvement.
- It will take a national approach to Cultural Shift where PL&D is viewed not just as a compliance activity but as an integral part of professional growth and accountability.

By applying these learnings, the organisation can build a more robust and sustainable framework for tracking and enhancing professional learning and development, setting a benchmark for other ETBs to follow.

6.0 Follow-Up Report Survey

(This section will not be published)

Please complete a short survey in relation to the Follow Up Reporting **process** using this link.