December 2025

QQI Thematic Analysis of the Interim Quality Reports (2025) of the Education and Training Boards (ETBs)

QQI INSIGHTS.

Dearbhú Cáilíochta agus Cáilíochtaí Éireann
Quality and Qualifications Ireland

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FOREWORD

The publication of "QQI Thematic Analysis of the Interim Quality Reports (2025) of the Education and Training Boards (ETBs)" provides an overview of developments in quality assurance within Ireland's further education and training sector. The report synthesises sector-wide challenges and innovations, outlining approaches adopted by ETBs in response to reported priorities.

The analysis includes instances of revision of governance, integration of learner feedback, and investment in staff development and digital innovation. The 2025 interim quality reports describe developments in aligning quality assurance with strategic planning, developing policies, and addressing emerging challenges such as digital transformation, academic integrity in the context of artificial intelligence, and promoting equality, diversity, and inclusion. Collaboration within and beyond the ETB network is reported in relation to shared learning.

The sector continues to report challenges, including resource constraints, data management complexities, and the need for further harmonisation. QQI provides support to providers through guidance, collaboration, and ongoing development of quality frameworks.

Acknowledgement is extended to all contributors to the interim quality reports. Quality reporting plays a key role in monitoring standards and informing the provision of accessible and responsive learning opportunities.

Reports note ongoing collaboration and a focus on quality and innovation in efforts to enhance learner experiences, support staff, and respond to evolving societal needs.

Chief Executive
Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This thematic analysis provides an overview of the current quality assurance (QA) landscape, challenges, and strategic developments within Ireland's Education and Training Boards (ETBs). Drawing on the 2025 Interim Quality Reports, the analysis identifies key themes and documents areas of development in the ETBs. The synthesis is designed to inform policy, practice, and continuous improvement across the ETB sector.

QQI's inaugural review of quality assurance in the 16 ETBs (March 2021–May 2022) established a framework for continuous improvement. Each ETB responded to its review report with an action plan and follow-up report, making systematic quality reporting a sector standard. In 2025, ETBs submitted interim reports outlining the effects of recommendations arising from the review and new quality initiatives, as well as case studies highlighting practices[1].

This analysis synthesises the findings from the sixteen interim quality reports submitted in February 2025. It describes the main themes, initiatives and challenges that have emerged across the sector. The analysis reveals activities to align governance structures, widespread curricular undertakings, and the emergence of some locally responsive practices. These developments indicate a reported focus on shared learning and continuous improvement.

Reports describe activities aimed at improving QA governance, strategic alignment, and adapting to address evolving learner needs. The integration of learner voice, investment in staff development, and the adoption of digital platforms and innovative practices are noted objectives. At the same time, the sector continues to experience challenges related to resource allocation, data management, and the harmonisation of policies and practices.

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1   An accompanying collection of case studies is published on QQI's website.

INTRODUCTION

The ETBs are:

Cavan and Monaghan ETB
City of Dublin ETB
Cork ETB
Dublin and Dún Laoghaire ETB
Donegal ETB
Galway and Roscommon ETB
Kerry ETB
Kilkenny and Carlow ETB
Kildare and Wicklow ETB
Limerick and Clare ETB
Louth and Meath ETB
Laois and Offaly ETB
Longford and Westmeath ETB
Mayo, Sligo and Leitrim ETB
Tipperary ETB
Waterford and Wexford ETB

QQI's role is to monitor and review the QA of providers, and the effectiveness of a 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 submitted an interim quality report. The interim quality report records developments and impacts in furtherance of recommendations arising from each ETB's review report, as well as other QA activities.

This thematic analysis aims to highlight the main themes, initiatives, challenges and innovations across the sector. This detailed report is intended to support shared learning and guide future sectoral development.

METHODOLOGY

The **interim quality report** provides an update to each ETB's inaugural review follow-up report, in addition to information regarding quality plans and initiatives in the ETB.

The interim quality reports include links to published quality assurance policies and procedures of the ETB. Within the report each ETB is asked to give particular attention to specific impacts arising from QA actions/initiatives, including:

- 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.
- additional **reflections**.

The thematic analysis generally focuses on the following questions:

- What are the key themes and topics addressed in the interim quality reports?
- What are the key findings presented in the interim quality reports?

This analysis employed a mixed-methods approach, combining the capabilities of MAXQDA Tailwind and Microsoft Copilot. MAXQDA Tailwind, an AI qualitative data analysis assistant, facilitated the initial organisation of the data. Tailwind was used to manage large textual datasets and identify recurring themes.

Using Tailwind, a thematic analysis was conducted to identify overarching themes and sub-themes. This further involved a process of reviewing the data, refining the themes, and identifying relationships between different themes.

To ensure the accuracy and clarity of the final report, Microsoft 365 Copilot was employed as a proofreading tool. Copilot was used to review the final draft for grammatical errors and stylistic inconsistencies. All suggested edits were reviewed by a QQI executive. The tool provided an efficient first layer of proofing.

1. QUALITY ASSURANCE GOVERNANCE AND STRATEGY

The analysis of the Interim Quality Reports provided by the ETBs in 2025 reveals activities across the sector seeking to improve quality assurance (QA) governance and strategically align it with their overarching missions and objectives. ETBs are engaged in addressing recommendations stemming from the QQI inaugural review, with interim reports serving as a common mechanism to track and highlight new initiatives.

STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT AND MISSION INTEGRATION

A core theme across the reports is the integration of QA activities with the ETBs' strategic plans and organisational objectives. There are examples of ETBs mapping QA actions to strategic goals and key performance indicators (KPIs) to ensure coherence and impact. For instance, City of Dublin ETB has included KPIs for its QA governance groups and linked its service plan to strategic objectives. Similarly, Kerry ETB has embedded its new core values into its Strategy Statement. WWETB explicitly link its QA efforts to *Strategic Goal 1-Quality* of its 2023-2027 Strategy Statement. LMETB is developing a FET Strategy aligned with national priorities, underpinned by enabling strategies that include QA.

GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES AND OVERSIGHT MECHANISMS

The establishment and refinement of formal governance structures are central to QA management. Most ETBs operate with high-level Quality Councils or similar bodies to provide independent strategic oversight, policy approval and monitoring of QA activities.

A number of ETBs have conducted a review of their Terms of Reference (ToR) to clarify roles, responsibilities, and improve operational effectiveness. KCETB undertook an independent review of its governance system, leading to restructuring and clarification of roles, including changing "working groups" to "committees" to emphasise governance responsibilities. KWETB conducted a governance review workshop and induction seminar for its subgroups, with QQI representation, Tipperary ETB reviewed its programme approval committee (PAC) and QA governance group structures, leading to changes in membership and processes. Reports note perceived benefits such as changes to accountability and transparency in decision-making processes.

STAKEHOLDER PARTICIPATION AND EXTERNAL REPRESENTATION

Reports identify widening stakeholder participation, including learner participation, as a recurring theme. There is evidence that the learner voice is recognised as a key element of quality within ETBs, with many ETBs implementing various mechanisms to enable its inclusion. Some examples include establishing learner councils, conducting learner surveys, creating learner forums, and ensuring direct learner representation on governance committees. LCETB, for example, is building learner structures at campus and College of FET levels, with representation on its Quality Council.

The importance of stakeholder engagement, particularly with employers, was stressed in the Synthesis of the Education & Training Board Follow-Up Reports to the Inaugural QA

Review Process (2024)[2]. This continues into the interim quality reports. Many ETBs are incorporating external representation from industry and community sectors into their QA governance bodies. Donegal ETB updated its Quality Council membership to include external representation from industry and community. Kerry ETB and its FET Quality Council's external chair and members indicate the ETB's goal for externality. LMETB notes plans to include employer and learner representatives on its quality assurance governance management committee (QAGMC) and sub-committees by the end of 2025. Some ETBs, such as City of Dublin ETB and LCETB, also include representation from higher education institutions (HEIs).

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2   https://www.qqi.ie/sites/default/files/2024-11/quality-in-further-education-training-2024.pdf

2. QA DOCUMENTATION AND POLICY DEVELOPMENT

The development and accessibility of QA documentation and policies are evident areas of activity. Several ETBs are developing or have developed QA manuals or frameworks to standardise policies and procedures. Reports indicate that ETBs aim to standardise practices, ensure compliance, and provide guidance for staff and learners. This overarching objective is highlighted across each report. For example, DDLETB opted for a suite of interrelated documents within a QA Framework housed on a QA Hub, rather than a single handbook, and adopted a "Policy on Policies" approach. LOETB noted its aim to publish its FET QA Manual by September 2025.

There is a trend towards digitising and centralising QA documentation, often using platforms like SharePoint or dedicated QA Hubs, to improve accessibility for staff. GRETB has a QA section with a repository for all documents on SharePoint, including an Educator Hub and Policy and Procedures Library.

There is also reported evidence that ETBs are developing and revising specific policies to address needs. Several key policy areas are receiving attention across the ETBs:

- **Academic Integrity and GenAI**: An emerging focus is the development and implementation of academic integrity policies, often specifically addressing the ethical use of Generative AI in assessment. This includes the creation of misconduct procedures, training, and resources for both staff and learners.

- **Blended Learning**: Many ETBs are actively developing blended learning strategies and policies, frequently in preparation for applying to QQI for an extension of their scope of provision. This often involves self-evaluation and gap analyses.

- **Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)**: RPL frameworks, policies, and procedures are being developed or piloted by some ETBs to facilitate access, transfer, and progression for learners. City of Dublin ETB is developing a "Hub and Spoke" RPL model, while DDLETB emphasises the need for a structured and well-resourced RPL framework.

- **Teaching, Learning & Assessment (TLA)**: Policies and strategic frameworks for TLA are under development or review, often incorporating principles of universal design for learning (UDL) and enhancing feedback mechanisms.

- **Staff Professional Learning & Development (PL&D)**: Policies and strategies for staff PL&D are being developed to support staff in implementing new QA frameworks and enhancing their skills.

- **Learner Support and Handbooks**: Several ETBs are developing or updating Learner Handbooks and Learner Support Policies to provide clear guidance and support to students.

- **Programme Development & Approval**: Policies and procedures governing programme development, approval, and review are undergoing continuous refinement across many ETBs.

GOVERNANCE AND REVIEW MECHANISMS

Self-evaluation, monitoring and review policies and frameworks are being developed or implemented to foster continuous quality improvement. Stakeholder consultation, involving staff, learners, and external experts, is a recurring theme in policy development and review processes.

The interim reports indicate that ETBs are providing training, workshops, and briefing sessions to staff on new or updated policies and procedures. Digital tools like MS Teams, Power BI, and E-Zines are being utilised for enhanced communication and data management. Efforts to use "Plain English" in documentation are also noted by City of Dublin ETB, MSLETB and Tipperary ETB to improve accessibility and understanding.

While many commonalities exist, some ETBs exhibit unique approaches. LCETB made a strategic decision to harmonise QA policy/procedures and curriculum for all programmes (excluding craft apprenticeships), phasing out TQAS[3] and Assessment Instrument Specification (AIS). LCETB and LMETB are specifically developing FET Data Management Policies and procedures for the enhanced use of quantitative data in decision-making. DDLETB is piloting Submit.com to automate and manage applications like Course Approvals, aiming to migrate all governance documentation to this software. Tipperary ETB collaborated with KCETB and LMETB on a draft 'Collaborative Provision Policy', indicating inter-ETB cooperation in policy development. MSLETB has implemented a "Part-Time Services QA Lead" role within its Back to Education Initiative (BTEI) to provide support for educators and oversee authentication processes. As noted earlier, the impact of Generative AI on assessment design and academic integrity is a new and noticeable area of policy development across multiple ETBs, reflecting a need to adapt to technological changes. An overarching trend evidenced in the reports is the ETBs' move towards harmonisation from disparate centre-level policies to standardised across the organisation.

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3   Transition Quality Assurance System (TQAS) – Developed by SOLAS to support the training programmes and Training Centres transferring to ETBs. It is an overarching Quality Assurance system that reflects the content of the SOLAS, QQI FETAC QA agreement originally established in 2006.

3.   LEARNER VOICE AND ENGAGEMENT

The importance of learner voice and engagement was stressed in the Synthesis of the Education & Training Board Follow-Up Reports to the Inaugural QA Review Process (2024)[4]. Mechanisms to enhance learner voice and engagement continues to be a focus across all ETBs, with some initiatives systematically capturing, integrating, and acting upon learner feedback to inform strategies and quality enhancements.

All ETBs conduct an annual learner survey to gather feedback. Many ETBs are refining these surveys to achieve better effectiveness and accessibility. CMETB has developed two distinct survey versions tailored to different National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) levels and conducted a Plain English review, resulting in a 61% increase in responses. Cork ETB employs six different survey instruments to reflect its diverse learner population, while WWETB is piloting a digital system with five distinct surveys and branching logic, incorporating immersive reader and translation options for accessibility. LOETB and KCETB also use multi-stage feedback forms (e.g., post-induction, mid-course, end-of-course). The findings from these surveys are used to inform centre and FET-wide reviews, priorities, and policy development.

Reports identify a need for training, guidance, and support for learner representatives. Kerry ETB, for example, provides induction and ongoing training to learner representatives alongside other governance members. There is also a reported focus on inclusivity and diversifying learner voices. Some efforts are being made to capture feedback from marginalised learners, with specific initiatives like Cork ETB's Youthreach subgroup and City of Dublin ETB's sensory audits with autistic learners. LWETB's shift from digital surveys to in-person focus groups seeks to engage learners with lower literacy or digital skills.

Learner Forums and Student Councils are widely established or in development to provide direct platforms for learners to express their views. City of Dublin ETB is developing a framework for learner leadership and engagement, including a Learner Leadership Week. CMETB indicates a commitment to establishing a FET Learner Council in 2025, building on data from an optional learner voice section in their survey. Cork ETB has a Learner Voice Group with an assigned support role and a newsletter. DDLETB hosted a Learner Forum with AONTAS, engaging 94 learners directly and 254 online. GRETB has regional Learner Forums whose feedback is a standing agenda item for QA councils. KCETB has an annual Learner Forum, and Kerry ETB has re-established its Learner Council. LWETB has its own learner forum using in-person focus groups, finding them more effective than digital surveys for deeper insights. Tipperary ETB established a FET Student Council in 2022/2023, which has become active internally and externally, with sub-committees focusing on specific topics. WWETB has renamed its Learner Forum to Learner Council and is collaborating with AONTAS to develop it.

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4   https://www.qqi.ie/sites/default/files/2024-11/quality-in-further-education-training-2024.pdf

LEARNERS IN GOVERNANCE AND QA

ETBs report they are increasingly integrating learner voice into QA governance and structures, with more learners represented on Quality Councils, Governance Boards, and related committees.

Kerry ETB has learner representatives on its FET Quality Council and Kerry College Governance Board, with induction and ongoing training provided to the learners. MSLETB includes learner representation on its FET Quality Council. Tipperary ETB has the chair of its FET Student Council as a member of the FET Committee, linking to the ETB Board. GRETB includes learner feedback as a standing agenda item for its Quality Council. KWETB is revising processes to collate feedback from class evaluations centrally to inform QA improvements. LCETB has representation on various structures, including the Quality Council. A common theme is the link between learner voice initiatives and QA processes. Learner feedback is often used to inform QA enhancements, self-evaluation, programme reviews, and policy development across almost all ETBs. For instance, Donegal ETB uses student feedback to shape its integrated QA system, and LCETB's Learner Voice Policy findings are considered at all levels of quality governance.

Many ETBs leverage the expertise of AONTAS for training, facilitating learner forums, and developing learner voice initiatives. CMETB is engaging with AONTAS to establish its FET Learner Council and facilitated a FET-wide forum with them. Cork ETB has engaged with AONTAS for the National FET Learner Forum. DDLETB collaborated with AONTAS for a Learner Forum and plans future events. GRETB sought and received training from AONTAS. LOETB has hosted several AONTAS FET Learner Forum events and engaged in an Ambassador training project with them. LMETB utilised an AONTAS-facilitated Learner Voice report. MSLETB learners participated in an AONTAS report launch, leading to local learner voice events. Tipperary ETB participates in the annual AONTAS National FET Learner Forum. WWETB is collaborating with AONTAS to support its Learner Council.

SUPPORT FOR LEARNERS

There is reported evidence that ETBs are implementing diverse initiatives regarding learner supports, some focusing on inclusivity, accessibility, and holistic development. Some efforts have been directed towards improving physical and digital learning environments, particularly for learners with disabilities and those requiring language support, by integrating UDL principles and providing assistive technologies. Furthermore, ETBs are developing frameworks for academic and well-being support, including mental health first aid training for staff and structured counselling services. These initiatives are sometimes underpinned by data management systems to track learner progress and needs, alongside strategic partnerships to expand access and progression opportunities.

Many ETBs are developing multi-faceted support systems that address both academic and personal well-being needs of learners. Both City of Dublin ETB and Cork ETB are

developing approaches to identify learner needs. This includes the revision of forms to capture needs at entry into FET and using learner survey data to inform support responses.

Mental health first-aid training is being introduced across centres for staff, and professional counselling services are offered to learners. LMETB has developed e-learning modules for mental health and a FET Learner Virtual Hub. KCETB is developing a FET Learner Handbook and enhancing a Learner Support Portal. LWETB offers one-to-one counselling services and a Digital Wellness App (SPECTRUM)[5] and organised a Learner Wellbeing Day.

There is evidence of dedicated disability support services being extended across many FET colleges, with formal communication links established between support teams and external organisations. There are efforts also underway in some ETBs to advocate for the expansion of the Fund for Students with Disabilities across all FET programmes.

The interim reports indicate that academic learning supports are also being improved in some ETBs. Many have developed online student hubs with resources for academic writing, referencing, and study skills. Dyslexia assessment pilots and psychoeducational assessments are being implemented to identify and support learners with specific learning differences.

ETBs are also focusing on supporting diverse cohorts of learners to engage effectively. City of Dublin ETB provides training and networking for student representatives and have conducted sensory audits based on neurodivergent learner feedback. WWETB has a Learner Support Fund, a dedicated Learner Support Service, and initiatives like the Rainbow Connection[6] and Future Focused Initiative[7]. Kerry ETB provides induction and ongoing training for learner representatives and has completed a Campus Learner Support Unit. CMETB launched "The Journey" podcast[8] series featuring past learners and has secured additional funding for learner supports.

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5   https://lwetbfet.ie/learner-support/

6   https://library.etbi.ie/library/wwetb

7   https://www.wwetb.ie/learner-supports/

8   https://www.cmetb.ie/the-journey-podcast/

4. PROFESSIONAL LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT (PL&D)

In the interim quality reports, all ETBs indicate a commitment to professional learning and development for staff, increasingly adopting a strategic and formalised approach. Many ETBs have developed or are in the process of developing PL&D policies and strategies. These strategies are frequently informed by training needs analyses to ensure relevance and alignment with national, sectoral and local strategic goals. For instance, DDLETB's PL&D programme is informed by regular analysis and its Statement of Strategy, while CMETB's PL&D Action Plan is updated in line with new SOLAS and CMETB FET Strategies. Tipperary ETB's Statement of Strategy includes a goal for continuous organisational learning and capacity development, tasking each pillar with annual training plans.

Several ETBs leverage Erasmus+ programmes for staff mobility, job shadowing, and international collaboration. Tipperary ETB and LCETB have secured Erasmus+ accreditation, allowing for strategic PL&D opportunities. Cork ETB actively promotes and funds external micro-credentials and is developing internal bite-sized eLearning.

Reports indicate that ETBs are establishing and utilising dedicated digital platforms to centralise and disseminate PL&D information and resources. These include SharePoint sites, intranets, and MS Teams hubs, serving as "one-stop shops" for staff to access opportunities, register for workshops, and engage with curated content. Examples include DDLETB's PD Hub, Cork ETB's PL&D SharePoint Training site, and WWETB's Staff Hub. These platforms aim to streamline access, improve information flow, and enhance engagement, with DDLETB reporting a reduction in no-shows. LWETB also uses a PL&D TEL Wakelet and MS Teams for advertising opportunities.

Induction programmes for new staff are a priority across many ETBs, often encompassing organisational overviews, QA briefings, and operational matters. Cork ETB and LCETB are developing e-learning approaches for induction to cater to staff size and diversity. Reports describe mentoring and coaching initiatives being introduced, with City of Dublin ETB establishing a peer mentoring programme for specific roles and LCETB developing a formal mentoring scheme for new learning practitioners. Cork ETB and DDLETB are developing bespoke leadership development programmes for managers and staff, with GRETB also designing a four-day course for managers. KWETB and LCETB are developing staff handbooks to support integration and provide essential information.

COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE AND COLLABORATION

Communities of Practice (CoPs) and professional learning networks are widely recognised and implemented as mechanisms for fostering collaboration, knowledge

sharing, and the dissemination of best practices. These CoPs exist across various subject areas (e.g., ICT, ESOL, Healthcare, Horticulture) and roles (e.g., Administration staff, QA champions). While some ETBs are reviewing CoPs due to low uptake, others are piloting new subject-area CoPs. LCETB plans to expand CoPs further with clear guidelines, and LMETB is actively encouraging face-to-face meetings to boost participation. WWETB's Teaching, Learning & Assessment Network has developed organically to become a CoP, fostering collaboration and innovation.

DIGITAL SKILLS, AI, AND UNIVERSAL DESIGN FOR LEARNING (UDL)

Training in Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL), digital tools, and the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into teaching, learning, and assessment is a focus reported in the interim quality reports. Several ETBs offer workshops and resources on these topics. UDL is also gaining prominence, with many ETBs offering training, digital badges, and actively working to embed UDL principles into practice conducted extensive UDL sessions for staff. For example, WWETB's TLA Network focused its first project on UDL, producing various deliverables.

QA INTEGRATION AND ASSESSMENT

PL&D is linked with QA across many ETBs. Training is frequently provided on QA processes, assessment writing, policy implementation, and maintaining standards. City of Dublin ETB provides training in assessment writing, and Cork ETB's QA Office offers training on various assessment-related topics and piloted QA Clinics. LCETB's QA induction covers assessments and quality assurance. Donegal ETB inserted best practices through CoPs during policy development, and Kerry ETB delivers regular QA briefing sessions to staff.

TRACKING AND EVALUATION

While many ETBs mention evaluating PL&D impact, the sophistication and success of tracking mechanisms vary. LWETB developed a PL&D database but describes challenges with data accuracy and completeness, seeking dedicated administrative support and a national approach. WWETB generates monthly reports on PL&D uptake and impact, indicating a more mature system. CMETB evaluates all staff training events and plans to monitor the impact of its annual PL&D Week. Initiatives include City of Dublin ETB's emphasis on staff involvement in policy development, CMETB's focus on staff wellbeing through Wellbeing Champions and a Remote Working Policy, and LCETB's and LWETB's specific ESOL induction sessions and coordinator roles due to increased ESOL learners. MSLETB introduced a Back to Education Initiative (BTEI) QA Lead role to enhance support for educators in part-time services, a practice they are considering extending.

WELLBEING AND INCLUSION

Reports indicate that wellbeing training and initiatives are promoted among FET staff, with opportunities available through various channels. Training related to equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI), and disability awareness is also a common theme. Kerry

ETB, for example, held a FET Staff Day with a presentation on 'Diversity and Equity in FET' and a workshop on 'Introduction to Autism'. Cork ETB provides intellectual disability training for staff delivering to participants with disabilities. Specific language support training is also provided, such as City of Dublin ETB identifying and training staff in TEL tools for language development, and DDLETB's ESOL Development Officer providing training in language assessment and Content and Language Integrated Learning.

5. PROGRAMME DEVELOPMENT

As previously evidenced in both the Inaugural Review and Follow Up Reports, the topic of programme development continues to be a central and active area across all ETBs, characterised by an aim to be responsive to learner, employer, and regional needs, coupled with collaboration and a drive for innovation.

SYSTEMATIC PROGRAMME DEVELOPMENT AND VALIDATION

Several ETBs have processes for creating, reviewing, and updating programmes. This includes established stage-gate processes, the review and updating of policies, and the development of documentation. Some ETBs have dedicated roles for programme development, programme governance boards (PGBs) or programme approval groups (PAGs) to oversee the process. There is a focus in some ETBs on exceeding targets for new or revalidated programmes and ensuring programmes are fit for purpose.

COLLABORATION AND SECTORAL APPROACH

A key theme in the interim quality reports is the collaboration among ETBs, QQI and ETBI. This is evident in the National Module Update Process, where nearly all ETBs are involved, often in partnerships (e.g., City of Dublin ETB with KWETB, CMETB with Donegal ETB, Kerry ETB with Tipperary ETB, LCETB with GRETB, and WWETB with Cork ETB). This collaborative effort aims to update common awards system (CAS) modules, build sectoral capacity, and ensure consistency and relevance across the FET sector. ETBs also frequently engage in differential validation of programmes developed by other ETBs or SOLAS, streamlining the validation process.

RESPONDING TO NEEDS: EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT AND REGIONAL RELEVANCE

- Reports identify programme relevance to industry and regional needs as a common focus. Many ETBs engage with employers through various mechanisms, including Employer Portals, Employer Engagement Teams, Expos, and direct collaboration on curriculum development. Reports indicate that this feedback directly informs the development of new programmes and micro-qualifications in some ETBs. Specific examples include KCETB's focus on HGV and bus driver training and Cork ETB's industry-focused micro-qualifications for the Life Science sector.

Some ETBs are adapting their curriculum to incorporate reported trends and technologies:

- **Digital Learning and Blended Provision**: Many ETBs are developing or refining digital learning strategies and policies and applying to QQI for extended scope of provision for blended and online learning. CMETB was a leader in preparing documentation based on updated QQI guidelines for blended programmes, sharing these as templates.

- **Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Immersive Technologies**: Reports indicate initiatives to integrate AI and immersive technologies. CMETB is developing AI guidelines and an Introduction to AI special purpose award (SPA). DDLETB is utilising AI and virtual reality (VR) for a Soft Skills for Elder Care SPA. GRETB and MSLETB have validated SPAs in Immersive Technology and Wind Energy with Immersive Technologies. Tipperary ETB leads a Level 5 "Increasing Productivity with AI" micro-qualification. WWETB has developed procedures for academic integrity in the context of generative AI.

- **Green Skills and Sustainability:** Several ETBs are developing programmes focused on sustainability and green skills, such as Cork ETB's validated awards in Environmental Sustainability and Circular Economy, DDLETB's new QQI green programmes, GRETB's Sustainable Supply Chain Procurement, and LMETB's involvement in developing green skills SPAs.

ASSESSMENT / INTEGRITY AND APPROVAL OF LEARNER RESULTS

The integrity and approval of learner results are maintained through internal verification (IV) and external authentication (EA) processes. Many ETBs are reviewing, updating, or standardising these procedures and templates. Results approval panels (RAPs) remain a standard mechanism, with efforts to improve their efficiency and data utilisation. DDLETB and Kerry ETB are focusing on incorporating more quantitative data into EA reports to enhance analysis, though DDLETB notes challenges with subjective EA ratings. LCETB has streamlined its certification process through an updated QA Client App that integrates IV, EA booking, and RAP results.

The shift towards blended and online learning is prompting a review of assessment policies and the exploration of online proctoring in some ETBs. DDLETB and LOETB specifically mention piloting or implementing "Safe Exam Browser" to assure the integrity of computer-based examinations in these new delivery modes.

UDL principles are increasingly integrated into assessment design and staff training to promote inclusivity. LOETB's interim report indicates this this through implementing audio recording for Moodle exam questions, allowing learners to listen to questions and promoting a more inclusive exam experience.

6. PATHWAYS AND PROGRESSION

Many ETBs are creating progression pathways for learners. Developments and enhancements have been undertaken in a number of areas:

RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING (RPL)

RPL is a growing area of focus, with ETBs developing frameworks and appointing dedicated staff. City of Dublin ETB and CMETB have appointed RPL Coordinators and have developed policies. DDLETB's case study on RPL describes the resource implications and the need for a structured, well-resourced framework beyond "goodwill."

GUIDANCE SERVICES AND LEARNER SUPPORT

Most ETBs provide guidance services, often through dedicated Learner Support Officers and Guidance Counsellors. Efforts are made to ensure accessibility through various channels, including online platforms, drop-in sessions, and outreach. There is a focus on providing targeted support for diverse and vulnerable groups, such as Youthreach learners, prisoners, individuals experiencing homelessness, the Traveller community, those with disabilities, refugees, and NALA[9] learners. Wellbeing and mental health supports are also integrated into these services. Information dissemination is enhanced through digital hubs, portals, podcasts, and updated information packs emphasising the importance of UDL principles in communication. Resource gaps, such as vacant language support posts, can impede progress in specific areas.

PROGRAMMES

- **Tertiary Degrees**: Co-creation and co-delivery of programmes with HEIs are increasing, leading to Tertiary Degrees. Examples include City of Dublin ETB's partnerships with NCI, Cork ETB's New Horizons Southern Strategic Alliance with UCC and MTU, and Kerry ETB's degrees with MTU.

- **Apprenticeships**: The expansion and development of national apprenticeships are a major focus, with ETBs leading or participating in various new programmes. LCETB, for instance, is the largest apprenticeship provider in Ireland.

ADMISSIONS POLICIES AND PROCESSES

Admissions policies and processes are undergoing review and revision across several ETBs to address inclusivity, consistency, and transparency, particularly with the introduction of blended learning. Centralised admissions systems are being implemented to streamline applications

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9   https://www.nala.ie/

COLLEGE OF FET

The establishment of FET colleges is a recurring theme across multiple ETBs, driven by strategic goals to consolidate services, enhance quality, and meet regional needs. Several ETBs, including CMETB, Cork ETB, and MSLETB, are engaged in projects to create new FET colleges or consolidate existing provisions into unified structures. These initiatives often involve planning, rebranding, and the development of support services to ensure consistency and accessibility for learners. The process is influenced by national strategies, such as the SOLAS FET Strategy, and aims to improve the overall learner experience and responsiveness to industry demands. However, challenges such as budgetary constraints and staffing requirements are often cited.

LCETB operates under a College of FET (CFET) Strategic Framework, which provides direction for all FET provision and support services. The CFET is also working on developing learner structures within its campuses and at the CFET level, aiming for a consistent approach that includes formal learner structures across all types of learning.

TRACKING AND DATA COLLECTION

Tracking and data collection are recognised by most ETBs as vital for understanding learner journeys and informing provision. Many ETBs collaborate with SOLAS for national tracking while also developing local mechanisms. There is a focus on improving data quality and even designing longitudinal studies to track post-FET graduates. However, some ETBs highlight that tracking progression to HE is a national systematic process that ETBs cannot unilaterally change.

7. DATA MANAGEMENT AND STRATEGIC USE

Some ETBs emphasise that data management and its strategic use are fundamental for informing evidence-based decision-making, monitoring performance, and driving quality enhancements. This strategic imperative is often linked to achieving organisational objectives and fulfilling their strategic performance agreement (SPA) with SOLAS, which involve setting and monitoring KPIs. For instance, WWETB has completed actions to develop a data strategy policy with organisational performance indicators, while LCETB aligns its monitoring with EQAVET indicators and its SPA targets. Tipperary ETB integrates data into its Area Based Planning, considering a wide range of quantitative and qualitative data for course planning.

DATA SOURCES AND SYSTEMS

The programme learner support system (PLSS) is recognised as a core data source. Many ETBs are working to optimise PLSS utilisation, improve data quality, and integrate it with other systems. KCETB has designated PLSS as the "single source of truth" and integrates it into many internal systems. CMETB cross-checks PLSS data with the QQI Business System (QBS) and is developing a Power BI database to layer data from both. Cork ETB has archived and databased over 37 million PLSS records, matching them with QQI, CSO, and Pobal[10] data. Beyond PLSS, ETBs leverage various internal data, such as QQI certification data, internal audit checks, and external data like labour market reports, CSO census data, and deprivation indices.

DATA ANALYSIS, VISUALISATION, AND REPORTING

Tableau and Power BI are widely adopted tools for data interpretation, reporting, and visualisation across multiple ETBs. City of Dublin ETB uses Tableau for optimising data interpretation and circulating monthly reports. CMETB uses Tableau for ongoing monitoring and identifying discrepancies, and Power BI for an interactive learner database. Cork ETB uses Tableau Server for internal analytics and Power BI for external labour market reports. Regular reporting mechanisms are common, including monthly management information system (MIS) reports. These reports are disseminated via internal platforms like SharePoint and MS Teams or dedicated publications such as "Databytes"[11] and "FET DATA BITES"[12].

RESOURCES AND DATA LITERACY

Reports note the establishment of dedicated data teams, officers, or units to manage and analyse data. City of Dublin ETB recruited a data and strategy team in Q1 2024. Cork ETB established a Strategy, Planning and Reporting Support Unit (SPPSU) in 2023. DDLETB assigned a QA Officer to dedicate half their role to data support and analysis. LOETB designated a specific Data and Information Management role in August 2024. Alongside this, many ETBs recognise the importance of improving data literacy and providing

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10   https://www.pobal.ie/

11   Cavan and Monaghan ETB (CMETB)

12   Tipperary ETB

training for staff. Kerry ETB conducted focused training sessions on PLSS data collection uniformity, and WWETB continues scheduled PLSS training for data inputters.

DATA QUALITY AND GOVERNANCE

Reports identify improving data quality, accuracy, and completeness as a priority. Cork ETB developed a data procedure focusing on best practices and data quality. KCETB regularly checks PLSS data to close gaps and ensures courses on PLSS are QA Approved. Donegal ETB monitors ESF+[13] programme data gaps and support tickets to identify and correct source issues. Data governance often also extends to GDPR compliance, with GRETB and LWETB checking data management systems for compliance and managing data migration. KCETB conducted an audit of learner record storage and access.

CHALLENGES AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Several ETBs highlight challenges, including staffing and resource limitations for data management and analysis. LMETB notes that current data collection and use for strategic decision-making are underdeveloped and requires a more systemic approach. DDLETB identified issues with subjective KPIs, suggesting "innate Irish kindness" might undermine evaluation effectiveness. Cork ETB aims to move beyond descriptive data to more predictive and prescriptive models. LMETB also points to the need for routinely capturing external stakeholder voices, such as employers, in formal QA processes. LWETB faces challenges with data migration to SharePoint and the decentralised nature of FET operations impacting centralised data management. National collaboration is a common theme, with many ETBs participating in national working groups like the PLSS Advisory Group to enhance national systems.

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13   https://www.eufunds.ie/european-social-fund/

8.   COMMUNICATION AND BRANDING

The analysis of the interim quality reports reveals a commitment among many ETBs to enhancing communication and branding, driven by strategic priorities and recommendations for improved public information and stakeholder engagement.

Many ETBs link their communication and branding efforts to overarching strategic statements and review recommendations. This often translates into the development of communication strategies and policies, such as social media policies and digital communication policies. A common theme is the establishment or refinement of branding guidelines to ensure a unified and recognisable identity across all offerings. This includes new logos and visual identities, particularly for FET campus areas and Colleges of FET.

## DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION AND ONLINE PRESENCE

A common focus in many ETBs is on website development and redesign, aiming for user-friendly, accessible platforms that serve as central hubs for information. These websites often feature dedicated sections for FET services, employers, and learners, sometimes incorporating course finders and application systems. Social media engagement is reported to be a key external communication strategy, with some ETBs actively using platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn to share news, promote events, and engage with various audiences. Internally, SharePoint and Microsoft Teams are widely adopted for resource sharing, document repositories, and staff communication. There is an emphasis on digital accessibility, with initiatives such as Plain English training, alt text for images, immersive reader, and compliance with web accessibility directives.

MARKETING AND PROMOTION

Marketing campaigns are often employed to promote FET offerings, often coinciding with rebranding initiatives or new programme launches. These campaigns utilise a diverse range of media, including traditional advertising, digital marketing, videos featuring staff and students, and podcasts. A key objective in many ETBs is to promote pathways, progression opportunities, and the overall value of FET, including non-accredited courses. Innovative approaches include CMETB's "The Journey" podcast, GRETB's Aqua Farm VR platform, and LOETB's mobile rigs for construction career promotion.

While many themes are common, ETBs exhibit variations in their approaches. Some, like DDLETB and GRETB, have appointed dedicated Communications Officers, while others, such as City of Dublin ETB, utilise a "Hub and Spoke" model or cross-functional working groups. The maturity of digital infrastructure varies, with some ETBs like CMETB and Cork College of FET having systems like employer portals and centralised admissions, while others are still in earlier stages of website redesign and SharePoint migration. Specific learner groups are targeted by some ETBs; City of Dublin ETB addresses disability stigma, DDLETB focuses on non-accredited courses, and Kerry

ETB ensures compliance with the Official Languages Act, including bilingual signage. Donegal ETB documents detailed media monitoring and analytics, while WWETB is piloting a digital learner survey system. LOETB engages learners through a "Creative Project" competition, an annual event for FET learners to display their creative projects, and "Learner Ambassador Training." LWETB provides detailed plans for its Intranet development and IT infrastructure. Overall, reports describe ETBs developing communication and branding strategies with a focus on digital integration and stakeholder engagement.
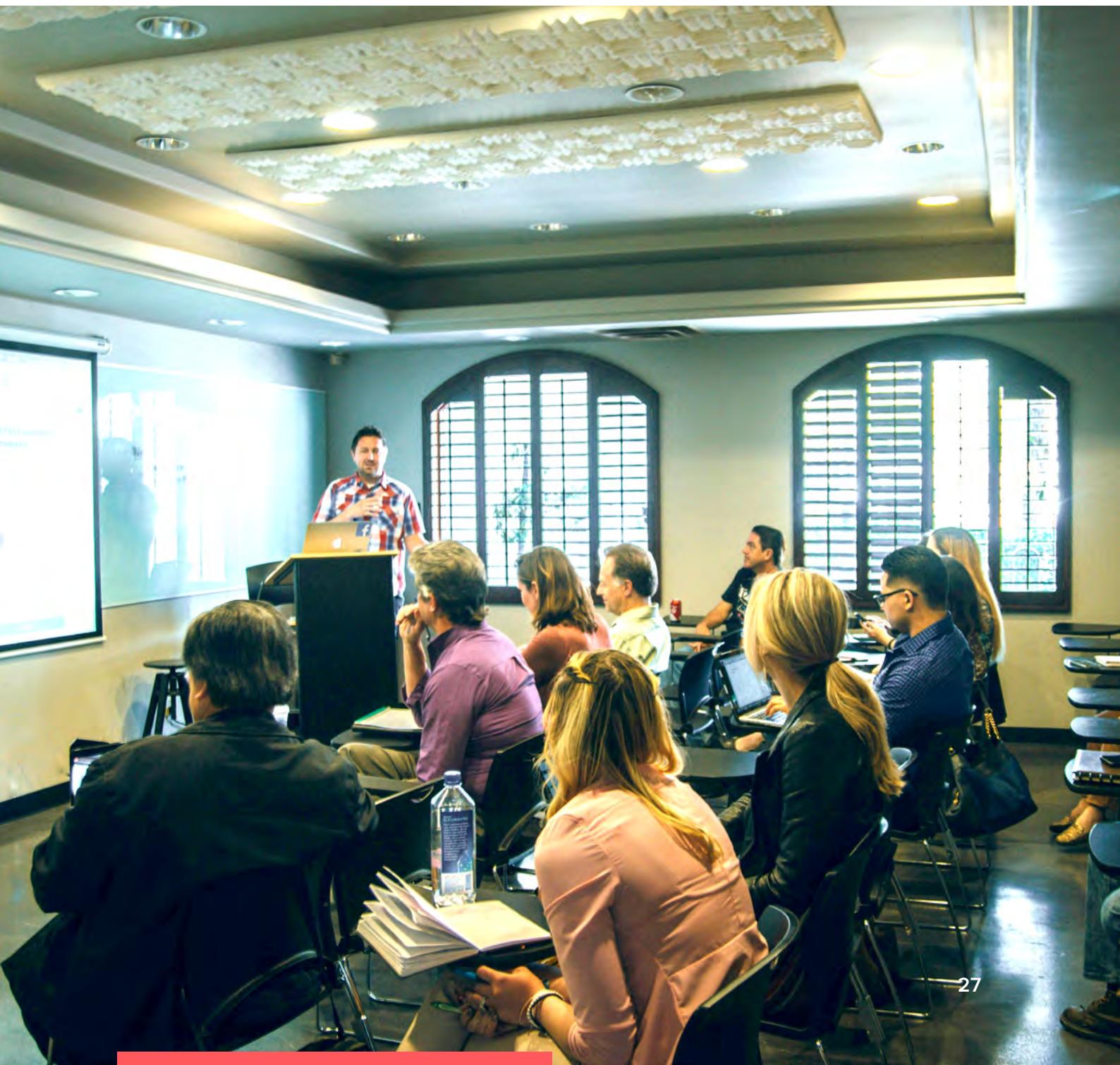
9. DIGITAL LEARNING AND TECHNOLOGY INTEGRATION

The integration of digital learning and technology is an evolving strategic priority across ETBs, largely driven by the need to adapt to changing educational landscapes and QQI requirements for blended and online provision.

A common thread across many ETBs is the development and implementation of strategies, policies, and action plans for blended and online learning. This is primarily in response to the impending expiration of QQI's emergency guidelines for blended/ online programmes in June 2025, necessitating formal applications for extended scope of provision. Many ETBs are undertaking detailed gap analyses to inform these developments. CMETB has developed a suite of documents, including a Blended Learning Strategy, Policy, Action Plan, Gap Analysis, and Self-Evaluation, which underwent both internal and external review. Working groups, often comprising representatives from various departments like Quality Assurance (QA), Professional Learning and Development (PL&D), and Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL), are often established to guide this process. Some ETBs are adopting a phased approach, initially focusing on synchronous blended learning.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY AND THE INTEGRATION OF AI

Reports note that the emergence of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has influenced discussions around academic integrity, leading to policy development and training initiatives. Many ETBs are actively developing or updating policies on the ethical use of AI in teaching, learning, and assessment. The integration of AI detection tools, such as Turnitin, is a common strategy to safeguard academic integrity, with many ETBs implementing or piloting its use. In some ETBs, training for both staff and learners on AI use and academic integrity is a priority. Others have developed specific guidelines on AI use with strict protocols for application approval. LCETB launched version 2 of its "Guidance on AI Use in Education," which was shared nationally. WWETB has drafted extensive procedures for Academic Integrity, including six key pillars and supplementary documents specifically addressing AI.

DIGITAL INFRASTRUCTURE AND DATA MANAGEMENT

ETBs are investing in digital infrastructure and data management systems. Virtual learning environments (VLEs) like Moodle and Microsoft 365 are widely used for course delivery and assessment. Internal SharePoint sites and intranets are crucial for staff communication, resource sharing, and policy dissemination. Data management and quality are emphasised, with tools like Tableau and Power BI used for data visualisation and analysis of PLSS data. Cork ETB showcases in-house software development for tracking metrics. DDLETB is investing in "Submit.com" to digitise QA documentation, and LCETB has updated its QA Client App for certification processes. Challenges related to IT staff resources and broadband connectivity are acknowledged. LWETB provides a detailed account of its intranet development, data migration to OneDrive/

SharePoint, and the implementation of an asset management system (ITEMIT) for laptop loans. MSLETB notes that some digital learning initiatives, such as a Learner App and Digital Learning Hubs, are on hold due to budgetary constraints.

ONLINE ASSESSMENT TOOLS AND INTEGRITY MEASURES

Many ETBs are implementing various online assessment tools and strategies to ensure academic integrity in digital environments. This includes the use of Microsoft 365 forms for surveys and the piloting of "Safe Exam Browser" for computer-based examinations. KCETB is exploring online proctoring. The widespread adoption of Turnitin for plagiarism and AI detection documents the objective to maintain assessment integrity.

10. SELF-EVALUATION AND QUALITY ENHANCEMENT

The topic of self-evaluation and quality enhancement is a theme across all interim quality reports. All ETBs are engaged to a certain degree in systematic processes to assess their performance, identify areas for improvement, and implement actions to enhance overall quality, largely driven by recommendations from the QQI inaugural review. The interim quality report itself serves as a mechanism for detailing progress and impacts of these initiatives.

Key Themes and Common Patterns:

- **Data-Driven Decision Making**: A persistent theme is the reliance on data for monitoring, evaluation, and strategic planning. Some ETBs are using KPIs, certification data, and various reporting tools like Tableau and Power BI to track progress against strategic objectives and identify areas for improvement.

- **Integration of Learner Voice**: Many ETBs utilise the systematic collection and integration of learner feedback to inform QA developments and programme improvements. This is achieved through annual learner surveys, forums, student councils, and direct engagement. City of Dublin ETB established a Learner Support and Engagement Service (LSES) following its inaugural review, while CMETB refined its annual Learner Voice Survey and plans for a FET Learner Council. Kerry ETB's FET Quality Council designed a learner survey, and learners attend council meetings, and LMETB uses internal annual learner experience surveys and the AONTAS Learner Voice report.

- **Policy and Procedure Development and Review**: A fundamental aspect of self-evaluation is the continuous development, review, and updating of QA policies and procedures. These are often organised within frameworks or handbooks to ensure consistency and clarity.

- **Strengthening Governance Structures**: There is evidence that ETBs are refining their QA governance structures, such as Quality Councils, Steering Groups, and Working Groups, to ensure oversight, accountability, and broad stakeholder representation.

- **Systematic Programme Development and Review**: There is a focus on systematically developing, approving, validating, and reviewing programmes to ensure they are current, relevant, and meet industry and learner needs. Many ETBs participate in the National Module Update Process.

- **PL&D**: ETBs invest in staff training, professional learning, and the establishment of communities of practice to enhance QA capacity and teaching quality.

- **Employer and Stakeholder Engagement**: Engagement with industry and community stakeholders is crucial for informing programme development, identifying reported needs, and ensuring the responsiveness of provision.

REPORTED TRENDS

- **Structured Self-Evaluation Frameworks**: While ETBs conduct self-evaluation, some have developed highly structured frameworks. LOETB created a "Self-Evaluation Pack" for centres to conduct consistent evaluations. LCETB introduced a "Quality Review Framework" comprising annual Quality Improvement Planning, a three-year Self-Evaluation Process, and Curriculum Review.

- **National Collaboration and Pilots**: Many ETBs highlight their participation in national working groups and pilot initiatives, such as the CAS programme review, the module update process, and the Wider Benefits of Learning (WBL) tool.

- **Focus on Specific Areas**: While broad, some ETBs highlight particular areas of focus. Cork ETB's "Inclusive Spaces Project" focuses on universal design and supporting learners with diverse needs. Kerry ETB emphasises its long track record in RPL, particularly for specific programmes. LMETB is developing a Guiding QA Framework for third-party delivery, especially for specialised provision like the Advanced Manufacturing Training Centre of Excellence.

CHALLENGES AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

The interim quality reports also acknowledge challenges, such as processing QA documentation, ensuring consistent data use, resource constraints for policy development, and governance challenges within QA structures. Despite these, reports describe ongoing efforts towards improvement, often using case studies to illustrate QA enhancements and their impacts.

11. STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT AND PARTNERSHIPS

Stakeholder engagement and partnerships are cited as central to the strategic development of FET provision across all reports, aiming to align educational offerings with external needs and create integrated pathways. This is demonstrated through a multi-faceted approach in many ETBs involving employers, higher education institutions, community organisations, as well as other ETBs.

EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT AND INDUSTRY PARTNERSHIPS

A common theme is the emphasis on employer engagement to ensure provision is responsive to workforce demands. Many ETBs have established dedicated employer engagement teams or units to strategically manage these relationships. These teams often serve as a single point of contact for businesses and are responsible for gathering feedback for programme and micro-qualification development. To streamline interactions and manage data, several ETBs are implementing or expanding customer relationship management (CRM) systems and employer portals. CMETB and DDLETB have launched dedicated employer portals and websites as "one-stop shops" for businesses. KCETB is developing an ETB-wide Employer Engagement Framework and CRM. Engagement also occurs through events, expos, and networking groups, such as the Employment and Training Expos hosted by CMETB, industry networking events by Cork ETB and Kerry ETB, and annual business breakfasts by GRETB and LWETB. Specific industry collaborations are highlighted, such as Cork ETB's partnership with ALCON[14] for upskilling programmes and Kerry ETB's work on the Commercial Diving and Wind Turbine Maintenance Technician programmes. KCETB addresses national skill shortages by delivering numerous driving-related courses.

TERTIARY EDUCATION ALLIANCES AND PROGRESSION PATHWAYS

As noted earlier, an area of focus is the development of partnerships with HEIs to create progression pathways and co-create degrees. This often involves the National Tertiary Office (NTO)[15] as a key driver. Many ETBs are developing or have launched Tertiary Degrees. Cork ETB provides detailed examples of "1+3" and "1+4" models, including dual registration, which fosters a sense of belonging for students. DDLETB is planning several tertiary awards and access programmes with TU Dublin and University College Dublin (UCD). Other ETBs report engagement in developing tertiary degrees and MOUs with HEIs like South East TU (SETU), TU of the Shannon (TUS), Munster TU (MTU), University College Cork (UCC), and Atlantic TU (ATU). WWETB hosts a FET Symposium with SETU to foster professional and strategic relationships.

COLLABORATION ACROSS ETBS AND NATIONAL INITIATIVES

Collaboration among ETBs is extensive, particularly in programme development and module updates. The national CAS programme reviews and module update process is a recurring theme, with ETBs partnering on specific reviews. DDLETB leads the CoP

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14   https://www.alcon.com/

15   https://nto.hea.ie/

for Early Learning and Care (ELC) programme managers across all 16 ETBs. ETBs also collaborate on sharing best practices, such as sharing blended learning documents, and on specific apprenticeship programmes, like GRETB with LCETB and Kerry ETB. Tipperary ETB and LMETB are involved in developing micro-qualifications and green skills initiatives with SOLAS.

COMMUNITY AND INCLUSIVE INITIATIVES

Reports describe engagement with community organisations to support diverse learner groups and address local needs. City of Dublin ETB collaborates with AsIAm[16] for autism-friendly initiatives and captures voices from organisations like Down Syndrome Ireland[17] and Pavee Point[18]. Cork ETB works with the Traveller Visibility Group[19], Cork Simon[20], and The Recovery Academy[21] for inclusive programmes. Donegal ETB maintains regular communication with community stakeholders for provision development. LCETB collaborates with external partners to support vulnerable learners, including the Traveller and Roma communities. LWETB details extensive multi-agency collaborations for literacy, health literacy, and supporting individuals with disabilities, including specific projects like "Men of Steel"[22] and "Well-Westmeath"[23]. LOETB engages with AONTAS for learner ambassador programmes and has Service Level Agreements with community organisations.

INTERNATIONALISATION (ERASMUS+)

Many ETBs leverage Erasmus+ initiatives for staff and learner mobilities, professional development, and international projects. Several ETBs report participation. LCETB notes a broader scope, including KA2[24] Strategic Partnerships and participation in a Centre of Vocational Excellence (INSIDE-CoVE[25], E4GreenRD[26] projects), involving multiple European partners.

OTHER ENGAGEMENTS

Other engagements highlighted by ETBs include GRETB's Knowledge Transfer Initiative for Arboriculture, involving a range of state agencies, universities, and environmental organisations. MSLETB has a focus on expanding national apprenticeship provision, including academic partnerships for new apprenticeship development. LWETB provides an in-depth look at multi-agency collaborations for literacy and community development, showcasing specific innovative projects. As noted earlier, WWETB hosts a FET Symposium with SETU, fostering a deeper academic and research-oriented collaboration.

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16   https://asiam.ie/
17   https://downsyndrome.ie/
18   https://www.paveepoint.ie/
19   http://www.tvgcork.ie/
20   https://www.corksimon.ie/
21   https://recoveryacademyireland.ie/
22   https://www.adultliteracyforlife.ie/projects/men-of-steel/
23   https://www.adultliteracyforlife.ie/projects/well-westmeath/
24   https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/programme-guide/part-b/key-action-2
25   https://inside-cove.eu/
26   https://e4greenrd.com/project-about

12. EQUALITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION (EDI) INITIATIVES

Reports indicate that EDI initiatives are an evolving focus across ETBs. While reports highlight this commitment, they vary in the depth and specificity of their initiatives, showcasing both common patterns and unique approaches.

- **Overarching Policies and Strategic Frameworks** are foundational to EDI efforts. Many ETBs have recently developed or are in the process of finalising EDI policies and strategies. These policies often underpin recruitment practices and outline commitments to all stakeholders. The establishment of dedicated working groups and advisory groups, such as the cross-service sphere working group in in City of Dublin ETB or the Active Inclusion Advisory Group in Tipperary ETB, points to a more structured approach to policy development and implementation.

- **Universal Design for Learning (UDL)** is widely adopted as a core pedagogical framework for fostering inclusion. Numerous ETBs are actively implementing UDL principles through staff training and professional development opportunities, often leading to UDL Digital Badges. UDL is being integrated into programme design and assessment practices. Some ETBs have established UDL working groups and developed specific resources like UDL checklists/toolkits and promotional videos to support its widespread adoption.

- **Learner Support Services** are central to EDI initiatives, aiming to address a wide array of academic, personal, and financial needs. Many ETBs are developing or have established Learner Support Frameworks and dedicated Learner Support Units or Services to provide a "one-stop shop" for learners. These services often include initial assessment of needs, counselling, laptop and assistive technology loan schemes and financial assistance through Learner Assistance Funds or the Discretionary Learner Fund. The expansion of the Fund for Students with Disabilities (FSD) to all FET learners is a shared advocacy point, with some ETBs creating internal funds to support those not meeting FSD.

- **Support for Specific Learner Groups is an aspect of ED**I. There is evidence across many ETBs that:

  - **Learners with Disabilities and Additional Needs** receive extensive attention, including dyslexia assessments, reasonable accommodations, assistive technology, and the appointment of Disability Officers. Sensory audits and the creation of sensory spaces are noted in to create more inclusive physical environments.

  - **Traveller and Roma Communities** are supported through targeted mentoring programmes, co-designed courses, and dedicated guidance services.

  - **Refugee and ESOL Learners** benefit from new QQI-accredited ESOL programmes, orientation programmes, and trauma-aware approaches to language and literacy acquisition.

- – **Other specific initiatives** include programmes for individuals experiencing homelessness or with addiction/trauma backgrounds, care-experienced learners, and efforts to promote female participation in apprenticeships.
- **Staff Development and Training** are often highlighted as crucial for EDI implementation. Training covers EDI principles, UDL, dyslexia assessment, and disability awareness. Some ETBs offer formal qualifications like a "Framework Masters in Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in FET"[27] or a "Part-time Graduate Certificate in Equality, Diversity and Inclusion"[28].

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27 City of Dublin ETB

28 Waterford and Wexford ETB

CONCLUSIONS

The 2025 interim quality reports from Ireland's ETBs collectively describe efforts to enable quality assurance, strategic alignment, and continuous improvement. Across all ETBs, there is evidence reported that quality assurance is not a peripheral function but is integrated with strategic planning and organisational objectives. Some improvements in QA governance structures, with Quality Councils and oversight committees established in many ETBs, seek to ensure that decision-making is transparent, accountable, and inclusive of diverse stakeholder voices. The sector's review of these mechanisms, including the expansion of external and learner representation, works towards a culture of openness and responsiveness.

There is evidence of the development, centralisation, and digitisation of quality assurance policies and procedures. The widespread adoption of digital platforms aims to improve accessibility and standardisation, while ongoing policy development seeks to address emerging needs such as academic integrity, blended learning, and the ethical use of artificial intelligence. In many cases these efforts are complemented by stakeholder consultation, aiming to ensure that policy frameworks remain current and responsive to the evolving educational landscape.

A sector-wide emphasis on learner voice is in evidence in the interim reports. Mechanisms such as annual surveys, learner forums, and, in some cases, direct representation on governance bodies have become practice, highlighting learner perspectives. Collaboration with organisations like AONTAS has increased, while targeted supports and training indicate inclusivity and engagement. It is reported that the integration of learner feedback into quality assurance and governance processes is now largely embedded across the sector, informing both strategic and operational decisions.

Professional learning and development for staff is increasingly strategic and formalised, with ETBs establishing digital platforms for professional development, induction and mentoring programmes, and communities of practice. Training in digital skills, artificial intelligence, and Universal Design for Learning is widespread.

Programme development seeks to be responsive to learner, employer, and regional needs, with collaboration among ETBs, awarding bodies, and industry partners. The sector is active in areas such as digital learning, artificial intelligence, green skills, and sustainability. Reports describe processes for programme validation and assessment integrity.

Reports indicate that the strategic use of data has become more prominent in some ETB operations. Investments in data systems, analytics tools, and dedicated data teams to improve the sector's capacity for evidence-based decision making are noted as an area for attention. While challenges remain in data quality, integration, and resource allocation, there is evidence in the reports of the sector's commitment to continuous improvement.

Reports indicate equality, diversity, and inclusion as an emerging focus across ETBs, with policies, frameworks, and targeted supports for diverse learner groups noted. The adoption of Universal Design for Learning, the expansion of learner support services, and staff training in EDI principles are recorded activities. Reports suggest that continued attention to resource gaps and the needs of marginalised groups will be essential for sustaining improvements.

Collaboration, both within the ETB sector and with external partners, has supported capacity building. National initiatives, inter-ETB projects, and partnerships with higher education, employers, and community organisations have informed provision and created integrated pathways for learners.

Despite some progress, reports identify ongoing challenges, including resource constraints, data management complexities, and the need for further harmonisation of policies and practices. Reports suggest that the rapid pace of technological change, particularly in digital learning and artificial intelligence, will require sustained investment and agility.