



# DUBLIN AND DÚN LAOGHAIRE EDUCATION AND TRAINING BOARD

FURTHER EDUCATION  
AND TRAINING

Self-Evaluation Report 2022



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# Contents

<b>Glossary</b>		<b>7</b>
<b>Foreword</b>		<b>10</b>
<b>Chapter 1   Dublin and Dún Laoghaire ETB in Context</b>		<b>11</b>
1.1	Background	12
1.2	Strategic Priorities for DDLETB	13
1.3	The Region at a Glance	14
1.4	Conclusion	20
<b>Chapter 2   Undertaking a Self-Evaluation Process: The Journey Taken</b>		<b>21</b>
2.1	Overview	22
2.2	Approach to the Self-Evaluation Process	23
2.3	Consultation Process	25
2.4	Development of the Self-Evaluation Report	25
2.5	Conclusion	27
<b>Chapter 3   Responding to the COVID-19 Pandemic</b>		<b>28</b>
3.1	Overview	29
3.2	Challenges Identified	29
3.3	Reflections on Remote Delivery	35
3.4	Reflections on Times of Change... Where to From Here?	38
3.5	Conclusion	39
<b>Chapter 4   Governance and Management of Quality</b>		<b>40</b>
4.1	Dublin and Dún Laoghaire ETB's Mission and Strategy	41
4.1.1	The Current Context	41
4.1.2	Evaluation	48
4.1.3	The ETB's Mission and Strategy: Effective Practice Identified	51
4.1.4	The ETB's Mission and Strategy: Areas for Improvement	51
4.1.5	Conclusion	52
4.2	Structures for the Governance and Management of Quality Assurance	53
4.2.1	The Current Context	53
4.2.2	Evaluation	59
4.2.3	Governance of Quality: Effective Practice Identified	60
4.2.4	Governance of Quality: Areas for Improvement	60
4.2.5	Conclusion	61

4.3	The Documentation of Quality Assurance Policy and Procedures	62
4.3.1	The Current Context	62
4.3.2	Evaluation of the Implementation and Effectiveness of QA Policy and Procedures	63
4.3.3	Documentation of QA Policy and Procedures: Effective Practice Identified	65
4.3.4	Documentation of QA Policy and Procedures: Areas for Improvement	65
4.3.5	Conclusion	66
4.4	Staff Recruitment, Development and Management	67
4.4.1	The Current Context	67
4.4.2	Evaluation of Professional Development	74
4.4.3	Staff Recruitment, Management and Development: Effective Practice Identified	75
4.4.4	Staff Recruitment, Management and Development: Areas for Improvement	76
4.4.5	Conclusion	77
4.5	Programme Development, Approval and Submission for Validation	78
4.5.1	The Current Context	78
4.5.2	Evaluation	85
4.5.3	Programme Development: Effective Practice Identified	88
4.5.4	Programme Development: Areas for Improvement	88
4.5.5	Conclusion	89
4.6	Access, Transfer and Progression	90
4.6.1	The Current Context	90
4.6.2	Evaluation	99
4.6.3	Access, Transfer and Progression: Effective Practice Identified	100
4.6.4	Access, Transfer and Progression: Areas for Improvement	100
4.6.5	Conclusion	101
4.7	Integrity and Approval of Learner Results	102
4.7.1	The Current Context	102
4.7.2	Evaluation	107
4.7.3	Integrity and Approval of Learner Results: Effective Practice Identified	108
4.7.4	Integrity and Approval of Learner Results: Areas for Improvement	108
4.7.5	Conclusion	108

4.8	Information and Data Management	109
4.8.1	The Current Context	109
4.8.2	Evaluation	112
4.8.3	Information and Data Management: Effective Practice Identified	113
4.8.4	Information and Data Management: Areas for Improvement	113
4.8.5	Conclusion	114
4.9	Public Information and Communications	115
4.9.1	The Current Context	115
4.9.2	Evaluation	117
4.9.3	Public Information and Communications: Effective Practice Identified	118
4.9.4	Public Information and Communications: Areas for Improvement	119
4.9.5	Conclusion	119
4.10	Reflections on the Governance and Management of Quality in DDLETB	120
<b>Chapter 5   Teaching, Learning and Assessment</b>		<b>122</b>
5.1	The Teaching and Learning Environment	123
5.1.1	The Current Context	123
5.1.2	Evaluation	129
5.1.3	Learning Environment: Effective Practice Identified	134
5.1.4	Learning Environment: Areas for Improvement	135
5.1.5	Conclusion	136
5.2	Assessment of Learners	136
5.2.1	The Current Context	136
5.2.2	Evaluation	140
5.2.3	Assessment of Learners: Effective Practice Identified	142
5.2.4	Assessment of Learners: Areas for Improvement	143
5.2.5	Conclusion	143
5.3	Supports for Learners	144
5.1.3	The Current Context	144
5.3.2	Evaluation	151
5.3.3	Supports for Learners: Effective Practice Identified	153
5.3.4	Supports for Learners: Areas for Improvement	153
5.3.5	Conclusion	154

<b>Chapter 6   Self-Evaluation, Monitoring and Review</b>		<b>155</b>
6.1	Self-Evaluation, Monitoring and Review	156
6.1.1	The Current Context	156
6.1.2	Evaluation	160
6.1.3	Self-Evaluation, Monitoring and Review: Effective Practice Identified	160
6.1.4	Self-Evaluation, Monitoring and Review: Areas for Improvement	161
6.1.5	Conclusion	161
6.2	Programme Monitoring and Review	162
6.2.1	The Current Context	162
6.2.2	Evaluation	165
6.2.3	Programme Monitoring and Review: Effective Practice Identified	165
6.2.4	Programme Monitoring and Review: Areas for Improvement	166
6.2.5	Conclusion	166
6.3	Oversight, Monitoring, and Review of Relationships with External/Third parties	167
6.3.1	The Current Context	167
6.3.2	Evaluation	169
6.3.3	Oversight of External Relationships: Effective Practice Identified	177
6.3.4	Oversight of External Relationships: Areas for Improvement	178
6.3.5	Conclusion	179
<b>Chapter 7   Conclusion</b>		<b>180</b>
<b>Appendices</b>		<b>183</b>
<b>Appendix 1: Inaugural Review Steering Group Members</b>		<b>184</b>
<b>Appendix 2: Inaugural Review Steering Group, Terms of Reference</b>		<b>185</b>
<b>Appendix 3: National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ)</b>		<b>190</b>
<b>Appendix 4: QA Governance Units</b>		<b>190</b>
<b>References</b>		<b>193</b>

# Glossary

	Definition
AEGIS	Adult Education Guidance and Information Service
AO	Authorised Officer
AONTAS	Aos Oideachais Náisiúnta Trí Aontú Saorálach
BTEI	Back to Education Initiative
CAC	Course Approvals Committee
CAO	Central Applications Office
CAS	Common Award System
CEF	Community Education Facilitator
CEIP	Centre Evaluation and Improvement Plan
CFE	College of Further Education
CompTIA	Computer Technology Industry Association
CTC	Community Training Centre
DDLETB	Dublin and Dún Laoghaire Education and Training Board
DEFHERIS	Department of Further & Higher Education, Research, Innovation & Science
DES	Department of Education and Skills
DESI	Digital Economy and Society Index
DRSF	Dublin Regional Skills Forum
DSP	Department of Social Protection
EA	External Authenticator/Authentication
ERT	Emergency Remote Teaching
ESER	Executive Self-Evaluation Report
ESF	European Social Fund
ESOL	English to Speakers of Other Languages
ESRI	Economic and Social Research Institute
ETB	Education and Training Board
ETBI	Education and Training Boards Ireland
FARR	Funding Allocation Request and Reporting
FÁS	Foras Áiseanna Saothar
FE	Further Education
FESS	Further Education Support Service
FET	Further Education and Training
FETCH	Further Education and Training Course Hub
FOI	Freedom of Information
FSD	Fund for Students with Disabilities
HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institute
HELS	Higher Education Links Scheme
IER	Independent External Review Panel
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
ITEC	International Therapy Examination Council
IV	Internal Verifier/Verification



Definition	
LO	Learning Outcomes
LTI	Local Training Initiative
LTP	Local Training provider
MIMLO	Minimum Intended Module Learning Outcomes
MIPLO	Minimum Intended Programme Learning Outcomes
MIS	Management Information System
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NCC	National Course Calendar
NFQ	National Framework of Qualifications
NPD	National Programme Database
OSD	Organisation Support and Development
PAEC	Programmes and Awards Committee (QQI)
PD	Professional Development
PDWG	Programme Development Working Group
PEIL	Programme for Employment, Inclusion and Learning
PLC	Post Leaving Certificate
PLSS	Programme Learner Support System
PSS	Psychological Support Services
PUP	Pandemic Unemployment Payment
QA	Quality Assurance
QIP	Quality Improvement Plan
QQI	Quality and Qualifications Ireland
RAP	Results Approval Panel
RCCRS	Results Capture & Certification Reporting System
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
SER	Self-Evaluation Report
SLA	Service Level Agreement
SLMRU	Skills and Labour Market Research Unit
SME	Small to Medium Sized Enterprise
SOLAS	An tSeirbhís Oideachais Leanúaigh agus Scileanna/Further Education and Training Skills Authority
SST	Specific Skills Training
STA	Skills to Advance
STP	Specialist Training Programme
SPA	Strategic Performance Agreement
TEL	Technology Enhanced Learning
TC	Training Centre
UDL	Universal Design for Learning
VEC	Vocational Education Committee
VLE	Virtual Learning Environment
YR	Youthreach

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# Foreword

On behalf of Dublin and Dún Laoghaire Education and Training Board (DDLETB), we are proud to present this *Self-Evaluation Report* which has been produced as part of the Inaugural Review of the approach to Quality Assurance (QA) in DDLETB's Further Education and Training services.

DDLETB's vision is "to actively lead the provision of high-quality education and training" and its mission is "to provide a wide range of education and training programmes, services and supports to young people and adults across the DDLETB region". To help implement the strategy, DDLETB has identified strategic goals, including the provision of high-quality education and training programmes and a high-quality experience for learners.

Therefore, quality has always been a priority for DDLETB; the Inaugural Review has provided a timely opportunity to reflect on how our QA systems have supported the achievement of these goals and how they can continue to play a role in the implementation of our new Statement of Strategy 2022-2026.

The self-evaluation process provided a framework for reflection on how our quality assurance systems are delivering a high-quality experience for learners and other stakeholders, and how well they are meeting the requirements of the statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for providers set out by Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI). The collaborative nature of the process provided all those directly and indirectly involved in the delivery of education and training, with the opportunity to consider their role in quality assurance. It facilitated the identification of both effective practice and areas for improvement, as well as potential future enhancements.

We are satisfied that the content of this *Self-Evaluation Report* is an accurate reflection of the current approach to quality assurance in DDLETB. We look forward to the next stage of the Inaugural Review. The external perspective and expertise the review panel will bring to the process is very welcome and we are confident it will lead to the development of a more robust quality improvement plan, one that will foster a culture of quality in Further Education and Training into the future.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all the learners, staff, community partners and employers who participated in surveys and focus groups for this self-evaluation process. Thank you also to the members of the Quality Council, Inaugural Review Steering Group, staff in the Organisation Support and Development section as well as the managers of the Quality Assurance and Planning and Strategy Units and their teams for their professionalism, integrity, and honesty and for working so hard to produce both the Provider Profile and the *Self Evaluation Report* on behalf of DDLETB.

Caitríona Murphy  
Chief Executive, DDLETB

Siobhán Lynch  
Director of FET, DDLETB

# **1 DUBLIN AND DÚN LAOGHAIRE EDUCATION AND TRAINING BOARD IN CONTEXT**

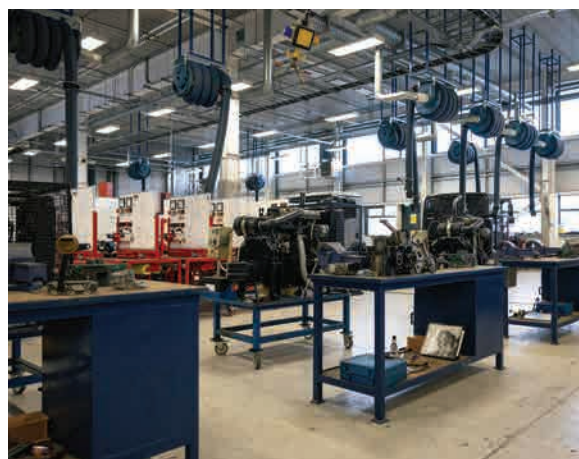
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Dublin and Dún Laoghaire Education and Training Board (DDLETB) welcomes the opportunity to engage in this Inaugural Review (**Inaugural Review of Quality Assurance in Education and Training Boards**). Chapter 1 of this report provides a brief analysis of some of the trends outlined in the accompanying **Provider Profile** and considers some of the challenges that the organisation and its learners will face in the coming years. With these challenges come opportunities for the strategic direction of DDLETB, the continual improvement of the quality assurance system and the evolving culture of quality.

## 1.1 Background

Dublin and Dún Laoghaire Education and Training Board (DDLETB) is one of 16 ETBs which were established under **The Education and Training Boards Act, 2013**. Following ministerial approval, County Dublin Vocational Education Committee (VEC) and Dún Laoghaire VEC were dissolved on 1st July 2013, and the Dublin and Dún Laoghaire Education and Training Board was officially established, encompassing the catchment area of the two VECs. Three (3) former FÁS Training Centres (Baldoyle Training Centre, Tallaght Training Centre, and Loughlinstown Training Centre) were initially transferred to SOLAS and were then amalgamated with the new Dublin and Dún Laoghaire Education and Training Board in January 2014.

DDLETB serves a population of nearly 800,000 people, with a budget of circa €230m per year with 4,000 staff, delivering education and training to approximately 70,000 learners in 650 locations through a network of schools, colleges, centres, outreach, and community-based settings in the DDLETB region.



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Further education and training in DDLETB is responsible for delivering a range of full-time, part-time and online programmes to a diverse range of learners. The FET budget is circa €75m annually. In 2019, there were 21,074 learners participating in FET across the region. Due to the pandemic, there was a decline in learners participating in FET programmes in 2020 and 2021. However, the planned learner numbers for 2022 are close to those achieved in 2019.

The FET sector in DDLETB consists of four (4) services located in 40 Centres, each with its own distinct identity and target learner groups. This includes four (4) geographically based Adult Education Services, five (5) dedicated Further Education Colleges, six (6) Further Education Centres located in post-Primary schools known as Dual Provision schools, three (3) Training Centres located in Baldoyle, Tallaght and Loughlinstown, and 11 Youthreach Centres. The Training Centres also support external providers contracted by DDLETB to provide education and training, including three (3) Community Training Centres, five (5) Specialist Training Providers, three (3) Justice Workshops and seven (7) Local Training Initiatives delivered in the community. DDLETB also provides a range of services through cooperation arrangements with other organisations, grants and other initiatives.

## 1.2 Strategic priorities for DDLETB

DDLETB is guided in its own strategic priorities by government policy and national strategies. In 2020, SOLAS published *Future FET: Transforming Learning 2020-2024* (SOLAS, 2020) with three strategic priorities including building skills, fostering inclusion and creating pathways. This strategy also describes a framework for FET and the enabling themes to support the achievement of these priorities. Addressing these priorities will enable DDLETB to keep the learner at the heart of everything it does.

At governmental level, the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS) was established in 2020 and its role is to “make sure public investment and policy in these areas give opportunities to everyone, including the most vulnerable in society”.<sup>1</sup> DDLETB is well-positioned to support DFHERIS in meeting the goals outlined in the DFHERIS Statement of Strategy 2021-2023.(2021)

Other important strategies include, for example, the *Action Plan for Apprenticeships 2021-2025*<sup>2</sup> (DFHERIS, 2021), *Pathways to Work Strategy*<sup>3</sup>(2021) and the *Adult Literacy for Life: 10 Year Adult Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy Strategy*.(DFHERIS, 2021)

As it develops its new *Statement of Strategy*, DDLETB will ensure that the learning from this Inaugural Review process and national priorities are embedded in its own goals and priorities. It is clear that a robust approach to quality assurance and a continued focus on developing a quality culture across FET is required in order to ensure DDLETB continues to fulfil its mission and strategy in an ever-changing environment. Continued investment in quality assurance and fostering culture of quality across FET will remain a key priority for DDLETB.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.ie/en/organisation-information/c481f-about-the-department-of-further-and-higher-education-research-innovation-and-science/>.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/0879f-action-plan-for-apprenticeship-2021-2025/>.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/e06cd-pathways-to-work-government-unveils-ambitious-plan-to-get-people-back-to-work-post-pandemic/>

## 1.3 The Region at a Glance

The following section outlines some of the key trends and challenges and how DDLETB will address and prioritise them over the coming months and years.

### Population: Trends and Challenges

DDLETB serves three separate administrative areas, namely Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown, Fingal and South County Dublin County Councils. These county councils are among the largest in the country and range in population from 296,020 in Fingal, to South County Dublin with a population over 278,767, and Dún Laoghaire Rathdown with a population of over 218,018<sup>4</sup>. The populations in all three of these areas have recently seen rapid growth and continued growth is forecast for the future. The population of Fingal alone is projected to increase to between 327,000 and 333,000 by 2026<sup>5</sup>.

**Table 1.1 - Population in the DDLETB Region<sup>6</sup>**

County	Towns including all Electoral Divisions	Population 2016 census
Fingal Northwest and Northeast	Blanchardstown	74,008
	Swords	42,524
	Balbriggan (Urban and Rural)	24,470
South County Dublin (Southwest)	Tallaght	75,578
	Lucan	47,711
	Clondalkin	46,201
Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown (Southeast)	Dundrum	23,157
	Dun Laoghaire	25,891
	Blackrock	30,022

Further growth is anticipated, as the Fingal Development Plan (2017) notes that Swords is envisaged to grow to a population of 100,000.<sup>7</sup> The population of the Tallaght area is also expected to reach more than 100,000 in a matter of years and it has already outgrown cities such as Galway, Limerick and Waterford.

<sup>4</sup> CSO, <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-rsdgi/regionalsdgsireland2017/nt>.

<sup>5</sup> <https://consult.fingal.ie/en/consultation/fingal-county-development-plan-2023-2029-strategic-issues-paper/chapter/fingal-county-socio-economic-profile>.

<sup>6</sup> <https://cso.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=2cec04bc6348443c9945d70f9dae9990>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.fingal.ie/sustainableswords/demographics>.

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The population age of both Fingal and South Dublin County councils are below the national average age of 37.4, with the average age being 34.3<sup>8</sup> years in Fingal and 35.5 years<sup>9</sup> in South County Dublin. The percentage of retired people in the Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown area, at 11.9%, is higher than the national average of 8%<sup>10</sup>.

### **Population: Addressing the Challenge**

While meeting the needs of such a large and expanding population is a challenge, as each administrative area that it serves has its own distinct ecosystem of industry and employers driving economic development in these areas, there is potential for employers and employees to engage with FET in order to up-skill and re-skill employees to meet current and future skills needs. The supply of skilled craftspeople is also a priority and a plan to address the backlog in craft apprenticeship training caused by COVID-19 was announced in September 2021. DDLETB is upgrading its facilities as part of an emergency response to accommodate a higher number of apprentice electricians, plumbers, and carpenters in 2022/2023, and will continue to evolve in response to the distinct needs of the populations in each administrative area.

DDLETB will work with SOLAS to ensure that it has the appropriate resources in place, both physical and in terms of staffing to meet these challenges. Historically, most of the FET provision in DDLETB was delivered in areas where buildings were owned at the time of amalgamation, this has resulted in more provision in the south of the county and less in areas of growth such as Fingal. While the balance has now been addressed somewhat, more progress is required in this area. The new Strategic Performance Agreement will provide an opportunity to bid for, and access, funding based on regional demand and learner needs. An opportunity to revise the existing staffing structure in FET would also be welcomed as the current structure is complex, with sanction only given for an approved list of grades and titles. This can impact on the capacity to attract and recruit highly skilled instructors and tutors with the experience needed to deliver apprenticeships and other FET provision.

### **Diversity: Trends and Challenges**

DDLETB is home to a very diverse population, with a considerable range of needs. Clondalkin/Lucan and Tallaght are home to over 50% of Irish Travellers in the DDLETB area. Furthermore, in 2016, approximately 24% of the population of Swords were born overseas<sup>11</sup>. According to research conducted on behalf of Youth Services DDLETB,<sup>12</sup> the cultural and ethnic background of the 0-24 years olds in DDLETB is the most diverse in the country.

The diverse needs of that population are further reflected in the percentage of the population who report having a disability. In South County Dublin and Dún-Laoghaire Rathdown, those percentages are 13.1% and 12.5% respectively,<sup>13</sup> slightly below the national average of 13.5%<sup>14</sup>. Fingal had the lowest rate of disability in the country at 10.8%.<sup>15</sup> Significantly, however, in all three counties there

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.fingalchamber.ie/about-fingal>.

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.sdcc.ie/en/services/our-council/about->

<sup>10</sup> [https://www.dlrco.ie/sites/default/files/atoms/files/dlr\\_county\\_profile\\_data\\_april\\_2015.pdf](https://www.dlrco.ie/sites/default/files/atoms/files/dlr_county_profile_data_april_2015.pdf).

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.fingal.ie/sustainableswords/demographics>

<sup>12</sup> Socio-economic profile of area and an analysis of current provision, 2018.

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cp9hdc/p8hdc/p9d/>.

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cp9hdc/p8hdc/p9d/>.

<sup>15</sup> <https://nda.ie/resources/factsheets/nda-factsheet-1-disability-statistics-briefing-information.pdf>.



are areas where the percentage of the population with a disability is well above that national average. This includes Loughinstown, Sallynoggin and Shankill in Dun Laoghaire Rathdown<sup>16</sup>, Tallaght-Millbrook and Clondalkin-Rowlagh in South County Dublin<sup>17</sup> and the Kilsallaghan area of Fingal.<sup>18</sup>

### **Diversity: Addressing the Challenge**

DDLETB will continue to invest significantly across the three counties to meet the varied educational needs of a very diverse population and to support their progression in education and transition into the labour market and wider society. In addition, it remains important to invest in meeting the language development needs of migrants in order to support integration and improve the progression and employment opportunities while still providing the supports needed by all learners to enable them to reach their potential.

DDLETB is cognisant also of its legislative responsibilities in addressing the diverse needs of its learners. All public bodies in Ireland have responsibility to promote equality, prevent discrimination and protect the human rights of their employees, customers, service users and everyone affected by their policies and plans. This legal obligation, called the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty, originated in Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act<sup>19</sup>. DDLETB has developed an Equality Policy, and established a working group to identify a range of actions to address equality and human rights issues and ensure that the ETB is following relevant legislation including the Equal Status Act 2020<sup>20</sup> and the Disability Act, 2005. This will ensure that the needs of all learners are recognised and addressed through DDLETB's provision of further education and training.

### **Areas of disadvantage: Trends and Challenges**

The rates of disadvantage vary greatly across South County Dublin. The Tallaght South local electoral area has high levels of deprivation including two (2) unemployment blackspots. In Tallaght, there are 35 areas classified as very disadvantaged, and one (1) area classified as extremely disadvantaged. This is one of only three (3) such extremely disadvantaged areas in the

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<sup>16</sup> A Socio-Economic Profile of Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown for the LCDC.

<sup>17</sup> <https://cso.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=e72fab4bd4e9479ba402f471556fc24f>.

<sup>18</sup> <https://cso.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=e72fab4bd4e9479ba402f471556fc24f>.

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2014/act/25/enacted/en/html>.

<sup>20</sup> Equal Status Act, 2000, Section 7 ([irishstatutebook.ie](http://irishstatutebook.ie)).



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country and there are very high levels of people who are experiencing, or who are at risk of, poverty in these areas. Clondalkin also has significant levels of disadvantage including two (2) of the four (4) unemployment blackspots in South County Dublin.<sup>21</sup>

In the last census, Balbriggan's urban and rural areas showed signs of increased deprivation, resulting in the establishment of the Our Balbriggan Rejuvenation Plan (2019).<sup>22</sup> In Fingal, there are significant pockets of equally deprived communities, hidden by their more prosperous neighbours in the sub-areas of Blanchardstown, Corduff, Mulhuddart, Tyrellstown and Coolmine<sup>23</sup>. The same is true in Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown, with pockets of disadvantage in Sallynoggin South, Killiney South, Shankill-Rathsallagh, Ballybrack and Sallynoggin East, surrounded by more affluent communities<sup>24</sup>.

### **Areas of disadvantage: Addressing the Challenge**

The factors outlined above indicate a need to continue to work collaboratively with support agencies and the community and voluntary sector to drive social development. Therefore, DDLETB will continue to focus on engaging priority groups through services which prioritise disadvantaged areas and target priority groups for the delivery of programmes to encourage a return to education and training. Community Education was badly impacted by the pandemic but is showing signs of strong recovery and will be very important in working to engage these communities in education and training and to encourage progression. DDLETB will focus and invest in the implementation of the new *Adult Literacy for Life Strategy* in the communities throughout the region.

### **Unemployment: Trends and Challenges**

In December 2021, the CSO reported that Ireland's seasonally adjusted unemployment rate was 5.1%, the lowest rate since May of 2020. However, the COVID-19 Adjusted Measure of Unemployment could indicate a rate as high as 7.5% if all claimants of the Pandemic Unemployment Payment<sup>25</sup> were classified as being unemployed. In the DDLETB area, the average rate of unemployment in South Dublin is higher than the national average<sup>26</sup>. There are four (4) unemployment black spots in South County Dublin and one (1) in Blanchardstown. According to the Economic and Social Review (2021) the Dublin region has a significantly higher proportion of long-term unemployed PUP claimants than the national average. The evidence shows that long term unemployed PUP claimants are the group most at risk of remaining unemployed after the COVID-19 restrictions end.

### **Unemployment: Addressing the Challenge**

FET has long played a critical role in labour market activation and in up-skilling and re-skilling people in response to economic downturns. It will continue to work in partnership with the Department of Social Protection and INTREO to implement the *Pathways to Work Strategy* (2021) and target these groups with the *Skills to Compete* initiative which provides tailored supports to

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<sup>21</sup> South Dublin County Local Economic and Community Plan 2016-2021, p.3.

<sup>22</sup> Our Balbriggan 2019-2025 Rejuvenation: New Thinking, Fresh Leadership, Ambitious Initiatives.

<sup>23</sup> Fingal Local Economic and Community Plan 2016-2020, p. 28.

<sup>24</sup> A Socio-Economic Profile of Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown for the LCDC, p. 12.

<sup>25</sup> A social welfare payment for employees and self-employed people who lost their employment due to the COVID-19 public health emergency.

<sup>26</sup> [https://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/newsevents/documents/census2016summaryresultspart2/Chapter\\_2\\_Unemployment.pdf](https://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/newsevents/documents/census2016summaryresultspart2/Chapter_2_Unemployment.pdf)

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those who have lost their jobs as a result of COVID-19, Brexit or other reasons. Re-training and other supports to facilitate the transition for those impacted to employment in areas where opportunities exist will continue to be a priority for DDLETB.

### **Education Attainment: Trends and Challenges**

In the DDLETB area, there are over 100,000 people aged 15 and over who have less than upper secondary education and over 90,000 people aged over 15 who have upper second level education as their highest level of educational attainment. While significant proportions of the Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown population have 3<sup>rd</sup> level qualifications, South County Dublin has significantly lower levels of educational attainment within its population.

### **Education Attainment: Addressing the Challenge**

DDLETB continues to provide alternative options for early school leavers through the Youthreach programme and Community Training Centre provision. For those in employment, those with low levels of educational attainment tend to be in low-skilled employment which is vulnerable to cyclical downturns and industry changes. Therefore, DDLETB will continue to target these priority groups with provision designed to develop skills and encourage progression. Furthermore, engagement with employers to encourage investment in up-skilling low skilled employees through the **Skills to Advance** and **Skills for Work** programmes will continue to be a priority for DDLETB.

### **Employment: Trends and Challenges**

In Fingal, 98% of businesses are made up of small companies employing 10 or fewer staff. These are classed as SMEs and employ 109,000 people in the county. In 2016, a total of 89.7% (133,971) of the people in the labour force (available for employment) in Fingal were in employment.<sup>27</sup> The aviation sector is a major employer in the region, and includes Aer Lingus, Dublin Airport Authority, Cityjet, Servisair and Ryanair. The agri-food sector, a key employment sector for rural communities, includes enterprises such as Keelings, Country Crest, Sam Dennigan and Donnellys. The retail sector is also an important source of employment, with regionally significant shopping centres in Blanchardstown and Swords, retail warehousing and retailers with a national profile such as IKEA. In Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown, 58% (95,925) of the labour force were employed at the time of the last census.<sup>28</sup> There is a concentration of employment in the areas of financial services, wholesale/retail trade, professional, scientific, and technical activities, and education, each of which represent over 10% of overall employment amongst residents. Other significant employment sectors include information & communication (8.3%), manufacturing (5.5%) and public administration (5%).<sup>29</sup>

There is a diverse economy in South County Dublin, which is home to 6,713 business entities including several blue chip national and international corporations e.g., Microsoft, Google, Takeda, Pfizer, Johnson & Johnson, SAP and Independent News and Media. Key economic sectors in the county include bio-pharma, information technology, communications, electronics, hospitality, retail, transport, internationally traded services and prepared food.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> <https://www.fingalchamber.ie/about-fingal>.

<sup>28</sup> Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown Local Economic and Community Plan 2016-2021, (p. 12).

<sup>29</sup> Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown Local Economic and Community Plan 2016-2021, (p13).

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.sdcc.ie/en/services/business/enterprise/economic-strategy/a-jobs-strategy-for-south-dublin-county-2014.pdf>.

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Another factor to be considered with respect to the employment profile of the region, is the participation of women in the labour market which stands at just 56.2%, with a considerable number of them recorded as being “on home duties”.

### **Employment: Addressing the Challenge**

DDLETB will continue to align its provision to support learners and facilitate their transition into employment in areas where opportunities exist. A continued and enhanced focus on research and data to inform decision making so that DDLETB can respond in a timely manner to the ever-changing environment will be a priority. An expansion of its employer engagement services will also be considered. In the DDLETB area, 52% of the total female population is in employment, which is below the national average. DDLETB has a strong record of engaging female learners and can continue to encourage those who wish to return to work to consider FET options, including apprenticeships.

### **Digitalisation: Trends and Challenges**

Despite a vibrant technology sector and a strong use of technology across a large base of the population, there continues to be a digital divide. Indeed, the EU’s Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) reported that 52% of Ireland’s population in 2018 did not have basic digital skills<sup>31</sup>. The rate of technological innovation and development has been accelerated due to the pandemic, with the digital divide becoming even more apparent. It was noted in DDLETB that the basic digital skills need of vulnerable learners acted as a barrier to participation in remote learning during the pandemic.

### **Digitalisation: Addressing the Challenge**

The *Adult Literacy for Life* strategy launched in 2021 aims to decrease the proportion of adults in Ireland without basic digital skills from 47% to 20% (as measured by the *DESI*). The risk of automation of some roles has increased and DDLETB has an important role to play in ensuring up-skilling and re-skilling of those at risk of becoming redundant. DDLETB will work with SOLAS to deliver on this strategy over the coming years. DDLETB will also build on the successful initiatives during the pandemic to reduce the digital divide for learners and potential learners.

### **Sustainable Development: Trends and Challenges**

Climate change and the need for sustainable development represent significant and growing challenges to all areas of society and the economy. Education and training are at the heart of progressing positive action in order to address the future challenges. Key government priorities are outlined in the *Programme for Government 2022: Our Shared Future*.<sup>32</sup>

### **Sustainable Development: Addressing the Challenge**

DDLETB will continue to embed the future skills needs throughout its education and training services and also will prioritise the upskilling of the existing workforce for employment in new technologies and building methods.

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<sup>31</sup> Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) 2018, Country Report Ireland.

<sup>32</sup> <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/7e05d-programme-for-government-our-shared-future/>.

## 1.4 Conclusion

In summary, this chapter has outlined DDLETB's demographic and economic profile and has considered some of the challenges that it, and its learners will face in the coming years. DDLETB aims to address those challenges through the provision of relevant courses and initiatives that are up to date, fit-for-purpose and which address the needs of learners and their communities, employers and other external stakeholders as well as the wider society. To undertake this essential task, DDLETB will need to ensure that it has a Quality Assurance System which is robust enough to support those ambitious plans, while never losing sight of the learner, for whom this work is being undertaken.

DDLETB welcomes the opportunity to engage in this Inaugural Review, to reflect throughout the following chapters of this report on its QA System, to identify what it is doing well, and to consider how that system can be enhanced to support the important work ahead.

DDLETB welcomes the opportunity to engage in that reflection together with the External Review Panel, in the belief that it will affirm the DDLETB philosophical approach to quality that:



*"Together, we are building a culture of quality, to keep the learner at the heart of all we do."*

## **2 UNDERTAKING A SELF-EVALUATION PROCESS: THE JOURNEY TAKEN**

## 2.1 Overview

In 2018, Dublin and Dún Laoghaire Education and Training Board (DDLETB) underwent a re-engagement process with QQI, following the development of an *Executive Self-Evaluation Report (ESER)*. As outlined in the *Provider Profile* which accompanies this *Self-Evaluation Report*, the *ESER* was a high-level description of the existing DDLETB provision across its FET services, underpinned by the Quality Assurance (QA) systems which were in place at the time.

Following the submission of the *ESER* to the QQI Programmes and Awards Executive Committee (PAEC), DDLETB became a recognised provider in its own right in April 2018. Since then, DDLETB has been on a journey to develop and embed the governance structures which will provide the framework for a new, single Quality Assurance System. This was a requirement by QQI for approval as a recognised provider as a result of the re-engagement process.

### The Quality Cycle

The inaugural review process that DDLETB has now embarked on provides an opportunity to review and describe where it is on that journey, at this point in time. This will be the first of a series of cyclical review processes, instigated by QQI, that will document, and reflect upon, the development and evolution of DDLETB's quality assurance systems. As shown in the illustration of the Quality Cycle, in the 'Establishment' phase, QQI published their suite of QA guidelines, DDLETB developed its *ESER* outlining its QA systems and these were approved by QQI. Since then, DDLETB has been engaging in the Implementation, Evaluation and Improvement phase, through an annual process of monitoring its QA development in a series of Quality Improvement Plans and reporting on these to QQI in a series of annual Quality Dialogue Meetings. DDLETB is now engaged in the Internal Review phase, where it undertakes a self-evaluation process to review its QA procedures. That process is documented here, and the findings are reported on in Chapters 4-6 of this report. Finally, an External Review Panel will review DDLETB's QA systems, informed by this report, and make recommendations which will be acted upon as part of the next phase of continuous enhancement in the Quality Cycle.

#### The QQI Quality Cycle



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## 2.2 Approach to the Self-Evaluation Process

### Role of the Quality Council

As the governance body with overall responsibility for quality assurance, the DDLETB Quality Council were responsible for agreeing on the overall approach to preparing for the Inaugural Review. In this role, they were guided by the *Inaugural Review of Quality Assurance in Education and Training Boards: Review Handbook* (henceforth Review Handbook).

### Role of the Inaugural Review Steering Group

The Quality Council appointed an Inaugural Review Steering Group to have operational oversight of the process to prepare for the Inaugural Review. This group included representatives from all DDLETB Further Education and Training (FET) services, as well as from a wide range of roles. The Steering Group was further augmented by a learner representative to ensure that the learner voice was heard, and an external representative to ensure that external stakeholders were represented and to act as a critical friend in the developmental process. For a full list of Steering Group members, see Appendix 1. The Terms of Reference for the Steering group are available in Appendix 2.

A communications sub-group was established and used the following communications methods to inform internal and external stakeholder about the Inaugural Review Process:

- > QA Coordinators' briefings
- > Newsletters
- > Social media campaign
- > Poster campaign

It was decided that all services/centres should undertake a self-evaluation process in which they would evaluate their own practice against the range of objectives and criteria outlined in the Review Handbook.

To facilitate this, the QA Unit created surveys with questions based on each of the "Indicative Matters to be Explored", as outlined in pages 24-27 of the Review Handbook. The surveys (available here), totalling nearly 140 questions, included a mix of quantitative questions to facilitate analysis, and qualitative questions to allow for a richness of responses.

These surveys provided a unique opportunity for every centre to reflect on their own practice and identify areas for future improvement; they were collated, analysed and have informed this *Self-Evaluation Report*.

Other methods to gather information for the *Provider Profile* and *Self-Evaluation Report* included the AONTAS-hosted Learner Forum and survey, DDLETB staff surveys, and external stakeholders focus groups and surveys. In addition to qualitative data gathered in this way, quantitative data was gathered to inform the *Provider Profile* and this report. Table 2.1 outlines the methodologies used, and the number of respondents to the different surveys and focus groups.

**Table 2.1 Focus Groups and Surveys used to Inform this Self-Evaluation Report**

Focus Group/Survey	Respondents
FET Colleges and centres/service self-evaluation surveys, October 2021	31 services responded, representing all FET provision
Learner Forum (hosted by AONTAS), October 2021	85
Learner survey (organised by AONTAS), October 2021	662
DDLETB staff survey October 2021	157
Focus groups & surveys including employers, apprentices, community partners, contracted training providers, community training centres and external authenticators	78
External review of DDLETB governance processes	24
Data analysis focus groups	20
<b>Additional surveys referenced</b>	
Colleges and centres survey summer 2020	25
Colleges and centres survey summer 2021	17
Learner survey, summer 2020	453
Learner survey, summer 2021	845
Learner Forum (hosted by AONTAS) 2019	110
Staff survey, summer 2020	131
Staff survey summer 2021	155
External authenticator summer 2021	30

**Table 2.2 Secondary Data Sources used to Inform the Self-Evaluation Report and/or Provider Profile**

Programme Learner Support System (PLSS)
QQI statistical reports for DDLETB
QQI Annual Award Analysis 2020
Central Statistics Office (CSO) and other demographic data sources
SOLAS
Internal Verification/External Authentication/Results Approval Panel Reports



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## 2.3 Consultation Process

In order to ensure that centres could complete the self-evaluation survey as meaningfully as possible, it was decided to engage them in the survey design process. Briefings were organised for managers and QA staff within each service. These briefings provided participants with the opportunity to input into the survey and start considering how best to engage their centres/services in the evaluation process. Once the final wording of the questions was agreed, the surveys were sent out and were completed by centres as part of their local self-evaluation process. Additional surveys were sent out to FET staff, while surveys and focus groups were organised with a range of external stakeholders.

Feedback from a consultation process this large inevitably results in a vast amount of data to analyse. Therefore, members of the Steering Group as well as QA staff from across DDLETB met in a series of focus groups to analyse the data, and identify strengths, gaps and recommendations for future improvements. This process became a valuable source for the cross-fertilisation of ideas and experiences in itself; the data-gathering process was undertaken in the spirit of DDLETB's inclusive, cross-sectoral principles with participants from all services involved. In doing so, the process became a rich opportunity for further reflection and learning. In addition to conducting self-evaluation processes in the centres and services, surveys and focus groups were also conducted to understand the experience of other stakeholders, and a review of DDLETB-level QA governance processes was undertaken.

## 2.4 Development of the Self-Evaluation Report

Gathering the data for the self-evaluation report was done in the autumn of 2021, at a time when centres were still dealing with the ongoing uncertainties of COVID-19. That notwithstanding, the response to the process from all stakeholders—centres, teachers/tutors/ instructors, learners and external stakeholders has been remarkable, with most of them welcoming the opportunity to reflect on their practice and consider how they can continue to enhance the quality of the learning experience which they provide. See Table 2.3 for a timeline of the Inaugural Review process.



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**Table 2.3 Inaugural Review Timeline**

April – August 2021	Identification of Inaugural Review Steering Group, distribution of learner and staff COVID-19 response surveys, meeting of the Steering Group, planning for the self-evaluation process
August – November 2021	Briefings and centre/service self-evaluations, Learner Forum, staff consultation, focus groups, data analysis and the externally facilitated governance review
November 2021-February	Writing of <i>Provider Profile</i> and <i>Self-Evaluation Report</i> Governance process
February 25th, 2022	Self-evaluation report submitted
April 13, 2022	External Review Panel planning visit
May 9-13, 2022	External Review Panel visit

### Structure of the Self-Evaluation Report

The structure of this self-evaluation report has been guided by the recommendations of the QQI Review Handbook. Chapter 1 described DDLETB’s operational context, while this chapter (Chapter 2) has outlined the development of this Self-Evaluation Report. Chapter 3 describes the ETB’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic which has impacted and shaped so much of the ETB’s practice and policy development of the past two years. Subsequent chapters address the objectives set out in the QQI Review Handbook. Each chapter sets out to provide:

- > A description of the current context at corporate level and at centre level as appropriate
- > An evaluation of that context against QQI guidelines
- > A reflection on effective practice identified
- > Identification of areas for future improvement
- > Conclusions and potential future enhancements.

**Note:** Due to the different types of services which are included in the FET provision, staff who are engaged directly in the education and training of learners are known variously as teachers, tutors or instructors. For the sake of brevity in this report, they will be referred to collectively as ‘staff’, unless further differentiation is required.

For ease of access, links to reference documents have been included in the text as hyperlinks as appropriate.

Case studies have been included, where appropriate, to provide examples of the way in which the objective is being met. DDLETB is so much more than its QA systems or its statistical returns. Therefore, these case studies have been included to tell the story of learners’ experience in DDLETB.

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## 2.5 Conclusion

Preparing for this self-evaluation process involved the analysis of an extensive amount of data, but more than that, it provided all involved with the opportunity to listen; this process has become an opportunity for reflection, learning and growth. Above all, as DDLETB plans for a future beyond the Inaugural Review and the challenges imposed by COVID-19, this self-evaluation process has provided all involved in the delivery of education and training with the opportunity to consider how to further develop the culture of quality across the FET services in DDLETB, and to continue to keep the learner at the heart of everything that it does.



# **3 RESPONDING TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

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## 3.1 Overview

On March 12, 2020, all education and training centres in Ireland were ordered to close with a few hours' notice, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Overnight, everyone was sent home, and all teaching, learning and assessment had to switch suddenly from face-to-face to remote delivery. This chapter looks at DDLETB's response to the challenges that it faced due to these unprecedented events.

## 3.2 Challenges Identified

The timing of the sudden lockdown brought unique challenges. While much course work had already been completed, many learners still had to complete assessments. As the news was announced on March 12<sup>th</sup>, 2020, that centres were to be closed with immediate effect, centres and staff handed out learning resources, uploaded notes to Virtual Learning Environments and loaned digital devices before all going home to face the coming weeks and months of uncertainty. Contingency Guidelines were developed as a matter of urgency to support the modifications to teaching, learning and assessment that were required in order to ensure that learners could complete their courses and be assessed. These had to be comprehensive enough to meet the multiplicity of needs and differing contexts of learners, while simple enough to be useable at a time when all concerned were already under huge pressure. They addressed remote assessment, the development and design of alternative assessments, remote authentication, and how to deal with missing work placements. In developing these guidelines for DDLETB, the QA Unit was guided at all times by QQI's own evolving COVID-19 contingency guidelines, and regular contact with QQI's Quality Manager. When completed, these guidelines were submitted to QQI. Despite the challenges faced by centres and their learners by the suddenness of the lockdown, most learners were able to complete their courses as planned.



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**DDLETB learners achieved at total of 9,198 major, minor awards and special purpose awards, in 2020.<sup>33</sup>**

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<sup>33</sup> QQI Infographics.



### **Learning from the First Lockdown**

The first lockdown lasted from March 2020 to the summer of 2020. Over the course of that summer, it became clear that the impact of COVID-19 was likely to last into the new academic year, and the QA Unit therefore undertook a survey of learners, teachers/tutors/instructors and managers to learn from the experience of the spring, and to start planning for the year ahead. Responses were received from 453 learners, 131 staff and 25 managers. The responses were remarkably consistent, and the following themes emerged:

- > A digital divide existed for learners, with many completing assignments on phones, using free WIFI in cafés and supermarkets to upload assignments, or sharing a single digital device with a whole family. A similar digital divide was apparent for some staff. Therefore, a strong need for a digital device loan or rental was identified.
- > A number of platforms were being used, causing confusion for learners. Therefore, a single VLE and video conference platform within each centre was required.
- > A need for more training, both technical and pedagogical, was identified to support staff in the move to Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT).

The findings of these surveys were used by the QA and IT departments to identify supports that could be put in place should centres be forced to close again. In the event, after a short interlude of classroom teaching, centres were forced to close again and move largely to Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT). Armed with the learning from the first lockdown and the challenges it had revealed, vulnerable learners and practical subjects were prioritised for delivery in centre where possible, and contingency guidelines and other supports were put in place to ensure that teaching, learning and assessment for theoretical subjects could proceed remotely as smoothly as possible under the circumstances.

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The first lockdown had shown the importance of not only having the appropriate technical resources in place to overcome the digital divide, but also of supporting staff in their delivery of remote teaching, learning and assessment. DDLETB has always had a great interest in, and commitment to, Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL), and had published a TEL Action Plan 2017-2019, which included actions such as the building of staff capacity through Professional Development (PD), expanding the ICT infrastructure, and the development of a TEL hub. The unique challenges imposed by the COVID-19 lockdowns however, demanded a redoubling of efforts in this area. This was particularly important, as learners were now facing an extended period of remote learning, rather than just a few weeks or months, as had been the case with the first lockdown.

Therefore, having considered the feedback from the experience of the first lockdown, the IT department, in conjunction with the Digital Learning Team as part of the DDLETB Digital Connect Project, undertook a two-pronged approach to ensure the necessary supports were put in place, as DDLETB and the country moved into the second and subsequent lockdowns.

### **Digital response**

In order to ensure that learners and staff had the equipment required to engage in remote teaching, learning and assessment, the DDLETB IT Department purchased and distributed 1218 devices to learners and staff as part of its Digital Device Loan Scheme in 2020/21.

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## **1218 digital devices were loaned to DDLETB FET learners and staff in 2020/21 as part of the Digital Device Loan Scheme**

In addition, the Digital Connect Team developed a comprehensive programme of professional development (PD) workshops, delivered via MS Teams or Teams Live, to support the delivery of remote teaching, learning and assessment. This included near-daily drop-in sessions across a range of topics designed to facilitate staff to develop and deepen their digital skills. Furthermore, staff were encouraged to enrol in PD workshops on the pedagogical aspects of remote delivery. Sessions were delivered to all services of DDLETB: primary, post-primary as well as all FET services, and many were also open to learners and guardians, in order to ensure that everyone within the wider DDLETB community was supported in this unprecedented transition.

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### ***Digital Connect: Support Provided for the Entire ETB***

Number of sessions delivered from March 2020-Aug 2021	800+
Number of DDLETB attendees at Digital Connect sessions	10,000+

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### **Quality Assurance (QA) Response**

In addition to the need to ensure that learners and staff had the necessary equipment and skills, the move to Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT) required considerable quality assurance developments to ensure that standards were maintained, and that the integrity of assessment was assured. In this, DDLETB's governance systems—both those already in existence and new ones developed specifically for the context of COVID-19 and ERT—proved to be crucial in ensuring that DDLETB could maintain confidence in the certification that its learners achieved despite the exceptional circumstances which prevailed. The QA response was fully guided by QQI's COVID-19 Contingency Guidelines. Updated DDLETB COVID Contingency Guidelines were developed, approved and disseminated. These included guidelines for:

- > Emergency remote delivery of teaching and learning
- > Assessment of learners
- > Authentication of assessment.

In addition, digitised versions of the marking sheets for all modules were developed by the QA Unit.

### **Emergency Remote Teaching**

With these guidelines in place, centres prepared for more remote delivery. While the practical elements of courses were prioritised for delivery in centre to ensure that essential skills were gained, most theoretical elements of courses were delivered through Emergency Remote Teaching. See Case Study 1 for an example of how one service engaged with its vulnerable learners who were at risk of being further marginalised due to their low IT skills.

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## **CASE STUDY 1: Tutor Video Project**

The Tutor Video Project was a creative project undertaken by both the Community Education and Literacy Programmes of one of the Adult Education Services, in response to the lockdown. While developing a strategy to help get the most vulnerable learners online, tutors from the service created 62 demonstrational learning videos which were then posted to the service's YouTube Video Channel. All learners and staff were sent a link to the channel through PLSS. The service also informed community partners and asked them to promote the Channel. Video demonstrations included Art, Crafts, Well-being, Spanish, Irish, Gardening, Cookery, Maths, Creative Writing, Flower Arranging, and IT. To date, there have been approximately 4500 views and this number is growing. An example of a creative writing video is available [here](#).



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## Assessment Amendments

While some assessment techniques, such as assignments, were well-suited for ensuring reliable assessment in a remote context, others, such as exams, were less appropriate, especially as DDLETB did not have the structures in place to support proctored<sup>34</sup> online exams. Therefore, in line with QQI's Contingency Guidelines, it was decided that such assessments should be converted into assignments. To ensure that all learning outcomes (LOs) were addressed and standards were maintained, a system of supports and parallel governance oversight systems were put in place.

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### Approaches to Ensure the Integrity and Standards of Amended Assessments

Support Systems	Governance Oversight
Series of workshops on amending assessment techniques delivered by FESS and DDLETB QA Unit	Initial governance oversight delegated to centres: centre-level QA teams review <b>all</b> amended assessments to ensure all LOs addressed and appropriate standard maintained
Guidelines and toolkit developed to support the amendment of exams and skills demonstrations	20% of all amended assessments forwarded by <b>each</b> centre to DDLETB QA Unit for review. Where issues identified, assessors (and where appropriate local QA team) supported to bring amended assessment to the appropriate standard
Best practice exemplars identified and shared	Amended assessments <b>for all</b> centres forwarded to DDLETB Programmes Committee for ETB-level review and approval

## Award Amendments

Due to the extended lockdowns during 2020 and 2021, a large percentage of learners were unable to undertake their work experience placements. Under the rules of QQI's Common Awards System (CAS), where completing the Work Experience module is mandatory for most awards, this would have meant that most learners would have been unable to achieve certification, through no fault of their own. Therefore, the DDLETB QA Manager, together with QA managers from other ETBs met with QQI and agreed a number of amendments to award structures to include alternatives to the Work Experience modules. Personal and Professional Development modules at Levels 5 & 6 were included into relevant awards, while a new module in Career Planning and Preparation was developed to replace Work Experience at Level 4.

## Work Placement Modifications

QQI decided that while award modifications to replace the Work Experience module would be acceptable for some awards, other awards required the learners to acquire vocationally specific

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<sup>34</sup> A proctored exam is one where an authorised, neutral person acts as a proxy for the teacher/instructor and ensures the identity of the test taker and the integrity of the test taking environment.

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skills which would normally be acquired on work placements; simply replacing the Work Experience module would not be appropriate. Therefore, the DDLETB QA Manager joined a small national working group to negotiate an approach with QQI which involved each ETB developing the governance structures to oversee alternative approaches for learners to gain the vocationally specific skills required. DDLETB's approach was approved by QQI. See here for details of DDLETB's approach to Work Experience amendments. All work placement modifications were reviewed by the QA Unit, and approved by the DDLETB Programmes Committee.

### Contingency Authentication Processes

In order to ensure that certification could proceed with the required oversight, procedures for the remote internal verification and external authentication of e-portfolios were developed, and training was provided to teaching/training staff, QA staff and external authenticators to make sure these processes ran smoothly. External Authenticators were provided with ETB Office 365 accounts to ensure safe access to the centres' Virtual Learning Environments, and they were issued with 'Digital Maps' to help them navigate the learners' assessment materials.

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**DDLETB learners achieved 9,990 major, minor and special purpose awards in 2021.**

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### Assuring Learner Certifications in 2021

All amendments and developments undertaken at centre or governance level to DDLETB quality assurance policies, programmes, or assessment procedures were in line with QQI guidelines as well as being reviewed and approved by the relevant QA governance unit—either the Programmes Committee or the Quality Council. In this way, DDLETB ensured that it could remain assured

of the integrity of its programmes and certification, despite the unique circumstances which prevailed. **As a result of these efforts, DDLETB learners achieved at total of 9,990 major, minor awards and special purpose awards in 2021<sup>35</sup>.**

### Supporting Apprentices through COVID-19

A range of supports were put in place to ensure that delivery of the apprenticeship programmes continued despite the COVID-19 restrictions, with appropriate supports put in place for the apprentices. The intake of apprentices for Phase 2, was reduced to 50% capacity to ensure the appropriate distancing, and numeracy support continued online. For more on study supports for apprentices, see Case Study 32 in Chapter 5. In 2022, classes have reverted back to full capacity and for a number of trades—Electrical, Carpentry and Joinery, for example, the instructors are delivering additional hours each week, to facilitate additional enrolments in order to address the impact of COVID-19 restrictions.

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<sup>35</sup> QQI infographics.

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## 3.3 Reflections on Remote Delivery

Following the June 2021 certification period, DDLETB undertook a further survey of centres and staff in order to better understand the challenges and successes of the previous nine months, to evaluate whether the contingency measures instituted were sufficient, and to identify any future changes or developments needed. Responses were received from 17 centres, 155 staff members and 845 learners. This was nearly double the number of learner responses from the previous year, and possibly indicated learners' increasing confidence with online methodologies.

### Centre Survey, Summer 2021

This survey found that recruitment and retention of learners was a challenge in the context of centres closing and remaining closed, with additional responsibilities falling to coordinators, student liaison staff and guidance counsellors to ensure that learners engaged and remained engaged. This was particularly important for learners at Levels 2 and 3 of the National Framework of Qualifications (see Appendix 3), for whom remote engagement was more challenging, and who were at greater risk of leaving the course or disengaging with services.

In response to the learning of the first lockdown, most centres had adopted a single Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), and commented positively in this survey on the extensive IT supports and training provided. Some respondents suggested that IT training might become mandatory for all new staff as part of their induction process.

All centres reported making extensive use of the QA contingency guidelines and amendments that were developed to ensure the integrity of programme delivery and assessment. A sample of some feedback from the survey is included here.



*"The role of the Quality Office team cannot be underestimated here. To ensure quality we looked to them for guidance and support so that our own staff and teachers could be fully informed."*

*"The contingency guidelines became a 'Bible' as a point of reference and were so clear and concise."*

*"The support and quick response from the IT Team in head office was essential."*

### Staff Survey, Summer 2021

A survey of all FET staff was undertaken in the summer of 2021, and 155 responses were received. The feedback indicated that the year of largely remote delivery had been challenging, but that staff felt supported, and that the provision of professional learning opportunities had been essential. It was acknowledged that practical subjects worked best face-to-face (these had been prioritised for in-centre delivery where possible), but that the remote delivery of theoretical aspects of programmes worked well. That being said, it was noted that social interaction was missed by staff and learners and that important elements of the learning experience were lost.



*"There is no substitute like human interaction for learning the practical elements of a course."*

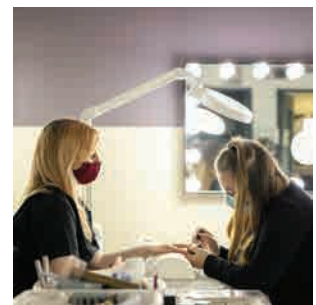
Suggestions for future improvement included the increased use of communities of practice, and the development of a digital resource library of collaborative materials—one for staff and one for learners.

Despite the challenges that the Emergency Remote Teaching had imposed on all staff, and the limitations of remote delivery that were acknowledged, of the 84% of respondents that expressed an opinion, a majority (64%) indicated that they would be interested in keeping some element of remote teaching into the future. This would seem to suggest that the supports put in place by the ETB went some way to achieving their intended purpose.

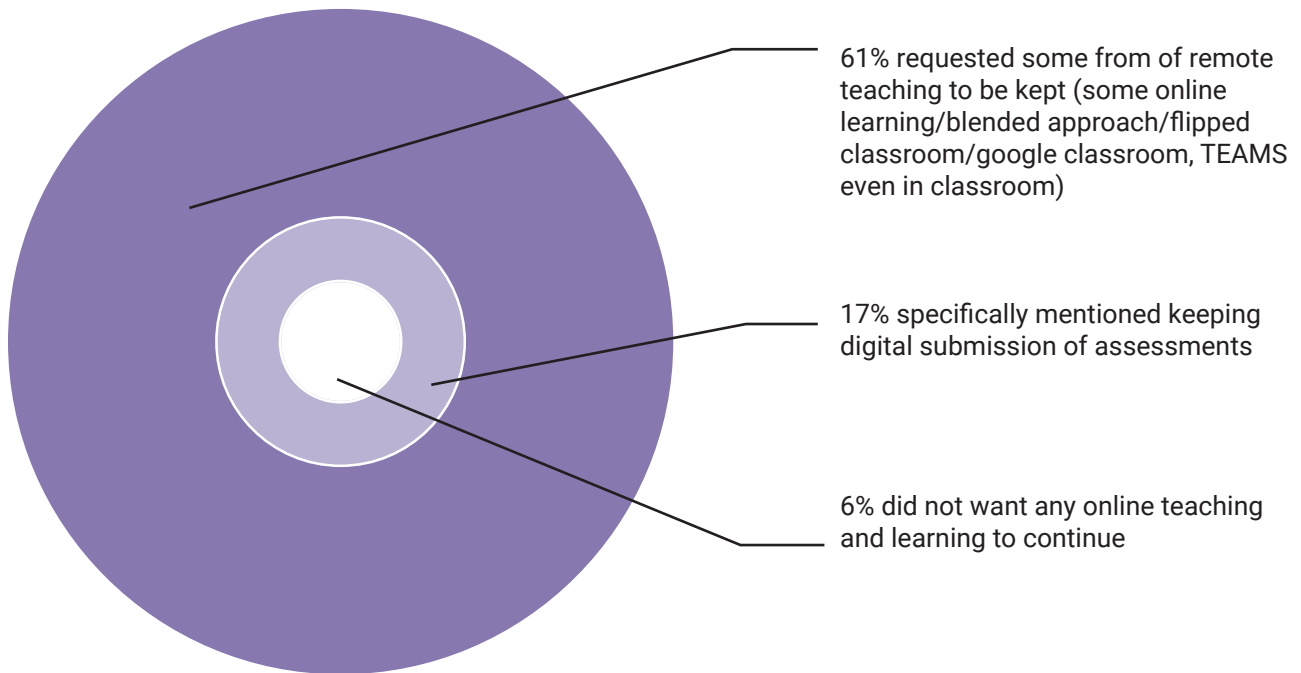


*"From all that was learned this year and with much exponential progress in Teaching and Learning—this must not now return to pre-COVID methods. I am a member and contributor to Harvard University Webinars and forums—I can tell you what has been done within DDLETB and the college I work in, not only are we on par but in fact ahead in many of our practices."*

*"I know it has been a very difficult year for everyone, but the staff in the college really, as the students would say, "Nailed it!"*

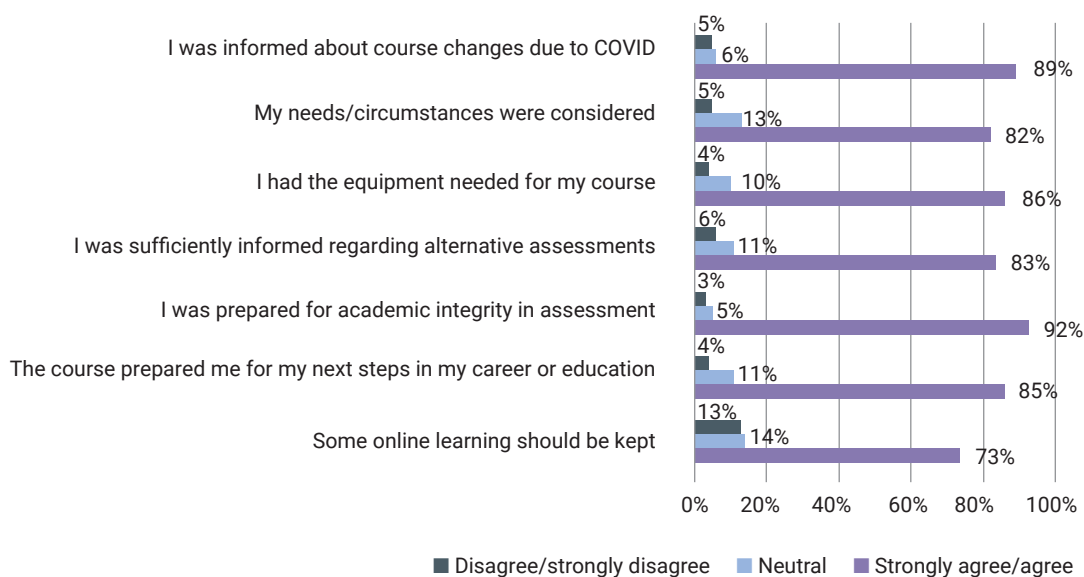


**Learners were surveyed in the summer**



**Learner Survey, Summer 2021**

Learners were surveyed in the summer of 2021, to get feedback on their experience of Emergency Remote Teaching. In total, 845 learners from all services responded. Learners reported that their greatest challenges were remaining motivated, and balancing home life with study. They also reported missing the social aspects and the interactions with classmates most of all. However, overall, learners seemed largely satisfied with their learning experience. Interestingly, similarly to the staff, a majority of learners expressed an interest in keeping elements of the new approach, with 73% saying that some online learning should be kept into the future.



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Overall, learners were cognisant of the efforts that the staff had gone to, to support them, and this was expressed in the feedback given below.

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**Learner Feedback to Teachers/Tutors/Instructors**



### 3.4 Reflections on Times of Change... Where to From Here?

DDLETB staff and learners have been on a remarkable journey together, pivoting in the shortest of time to move online, and learning on the job. To that extent, the past 23 months have been action research in real time, with the highest of stakes—minding the well-being of learners and ensuring that they achieved the learning experience which they had been seeking.

Despite the fact that centres did manage to recruit learners, up-skill their staff and ensure that programme delivery proceeded in a quality assured manner over the past 23 months, there has been an awareness that important elements of the learner experience had been lost, and could not be replicated in a fully remote context. As was noted in the staff feedback:



*“One of the principles of teaching and learning that was challenged during the pandemic, was the “hidden curriculum”—those opportunities to engage and explore with learners, ideas and concepts beyond the intended learning outcomes. The experience of reading physical cues in the classroom and peer collaboration in the classroom was similarly challenged”*

Nonetheless, the certification rates that were achieved by learners despite the challenges they faced, as well as the interest expressed by both staff and learners in keeping some aspects of remote learning, if only for theoretical subjects, would suggest that a blended model is one that could be considered by the ETB in the future, and DDLETB is engaging with QQI to explore the development of a Blended Learning Policy. While a small number of programmes were validated for blended learning, it is not currently within the organisation’s approved scope of provision for the majority of its programmes. However, discussions have commenced with QQI to explore a common approach to blended learning for all 16 ETB, and DDLETB will be engaging fully with this project in the coming year.

## 3.5 Conclusion

More than 23 months after centres were closed in March 2020 with no clarity as to what the next days, let alone weeks or months, would bring, DDLETB has been on a remarkable journey, and as a learning organisation, it is appropriate to reflect on that journey and on what has been achieved and learned.

Over the past 23 months, new governance structures have been devised, new QA policies have been developed, new resources have been developed, and innovative approaches to teaching and learning have been explored and disseminated through a broad range of professional development opportunities. Staff and learners went on a remarkable journey together and showed great ability to adapt to the new methodologies demanded by Emergency Remote Teaching. In the words of one manager:



*"If another emergency situation occurred, we have the capacity to adapt."*

The staff response to the challenges of the lockdowns was exceptional, with every effort being made to ensure that learners did not lose out on the opportunity to achieve their intended learning goals. Organisationally, DDLETB displayed an ability to solve problems while still ensuring high levels of QA oversight, and a commitment to maintaining the integrity of awards. Above all, the experience of the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated, both within its staff and as an organisation, a resilience and a determination to ensure that come what may, the learner will always remain at the heart of DDLETB.

# **4 GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT OF QUALITY**



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# Overview

This chapter explores all aspects of quality in DDLETB's FET provision. It looks at the governance and management of the FET quality assurance (QA) system; it considers the extent to which the QA system supports the ETB's mission and strategy, and examines the governance which manages that QA system and the way in which it is documented. It further explores the quality assurance underpinning a range of processes such as staff recruitment and development; programme development; access, transfer and progression; authentication processes; the management of information and data, as well as processes for managing public information and communication. For each of these topics, the current situation at both DDLETB and centre level is described and evaluated, and some suggestions for potential future enhancements are made.

## 4.1 DDLETB's Mission and Strategy

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**DDLETB's mission: To provide a wide range of education and training programmes, services and supports to children, young people and adults across the DDLETB region**

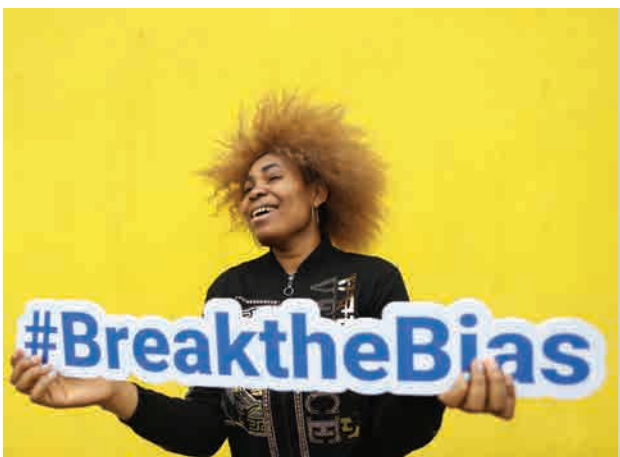
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### 4.1.1 The Current Context

DDLETB's Further Education and Training (FET) services are guided in all their activities by its *Statement of Strategy 2017-2021*, which outlines the organisation's mission and strategic goals.

This *Statement of Strategy* was completed following extensive consultation with internal and external stakeholders, including managers from across all of DDLETB's FET services.

The document outlines four strategic goals, with a number of strategic priorities to support each of those goals, as outlined in Table 4.1.



**Table 4.1 DDLETB strategic goals and priorities**

Strategic Goals	Strategic Priorities
<b>High quality education and training programmes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Excellent teaching and learning for all</li> <li>&gt; Quality assured provision with high levels of achievement and accreditation by learners</li> <li>&gt; Evidence-based planning, co-ordination and review</li> <li>&gt; Relevant, responsive, integrated and innovative programmes and initiatives</li> <li>&gt; Reflective practice to support improvement and sharing of knowledge, skills and resources</li> </ul>
<b>High quality experience for learners</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Positive learning experiences and environments with suitable resources and premises</li> <li>&gt; Relevant knowledge and skills for lifelong learning, personal development, progression and employment</li> <li>&gt; Commitment to technology-enhanced learning to support independent and collaborative learning</li> <li>&gt; Feedback to and from learners and parents</li> <li>&gt; Equality and active social inclusion</li> </ul>
<b>Organisational and staff development</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Identity as a leading provider and culture of innovation and improvement</li> <li>&gt; Ethical governance to ensure accountability and value for money</li> <li>&gt; Capacity building for active leadership</li> <li>&gt; Staff support, continuing professional and career development</li> </ul>
<b>Effective communication and collaboration</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Enhanced internal and external communication systems</li> <li>&gt; Strategic networking and partnerships with key stakeholders</li> </ul>

### **Achieving Strategic Goals and Priorities**

To support the achievement of these goals and priorities, two units, a Quality Assurance Unit, and a Strategy and Planning Unit were established in 2019. Each unit is led by a manager and supported by a team of three Development Officers. Each QA Development Officer has responsibility for providing dedicated support to a particular FET service.<sup>36</sup> A description of the responsibilities of the two units is outlined in this chapter.

<sup>36</sup> The FET services are: Adult Education Services, FE Colleges and Centres, Training Centres, Youthreach.

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The *Statement of Strategy* guides all development in FET. All new documentation such as annual service plans, the Executive Self-Evaluation Report or the series of Quality Improvement Plans (QIPs) reflect the *Statement of Strategy*, and support the achievement of its strategic goals. As a result of this consistent approach, since the launch of the *Statement of Strategy* in 2017, a wide range of actions and projects have ensured that the ETB's strategic goals are met. These include:

- > development of a QA governance system to have oversight of the development of new QA policies and procedures, and the quality of all FET service provision.
- > development of the Course Approval Committee to support evidence-based, coordinated planning of new, innovative and relevant courses, which are responsive to local and national needs.
- > governance oversight of authentication reports and certification data which has provided evidence of high levels of achievement and certification (see *Provider Profile*, Section 8, for more details of certification).
- > development of equality-proofed Admissions Policies.
- > development of two Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL) Hubs and the *Digital Connect* project.
- > development of a *Leadership Development Initiative* which has been offered to all FET middle and senior managers.
- > support for communities of practice, such as for the new Early Learning and Care programme to support reflective practice.
- > monitoring of feedback to learners as part of the Internal Verification process.
- > development of innovative new programmes and courses.
- > development of learner surveys to evaluate the quality of the learning experience.
- > extensive engagement in strategic networks such as the Chief Executives' (CE) Forum, the Directors of Further Education and Training (DFET) Forum, the QA Network, the Regional Skills Forum, and numerous other networks and forums.
- > collaboration with other ETBs, such as:
  - acting as a collaborating provider in 2016 + apprenticeships.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> 2016 +Apprenticeships are new apprenticeships that lead to an award between Level 5 –10 on the National Framework of Qualifications. Apprenticeships 2016 + can be between 2-4 years in duration. Their development and roll-out is overseen by industry-led groups (consortia) working with education and training providers and other partners. All new apprenticeships developed in Ireland after 2016 must follow this new approach.

- collaborating on the development with Kildare Wicklow ETB, of the “50 Shades Greener” programme aimed, at decarbonising the Hospitality and Tourism industry. Recruitment is currently underway for this programme.
- leading the new awards in Early Learning and Care on behalf of all 16 ETBs.

These are just a few of the initiatives undertaken within FET, but they are indicative of DDLETB’s commitment to ensuring that the goals outlined in the *Strategic Statement 2017-2021* are met. The success in achieving these goals is reflected in feedback from these learners who said:



*“Just to reiterate my thanks and appreciation for enabling me to further my education and to up-skill. I was a full time manager in retail when COVID struck and although I was anxious at the prospect of returning to education, I didn’t need to be as I was continuously supported and this reignited a passion for education in me and I will continue to further this because of this chance.”*

*“I want to say Thank you to all staff that worked ... to improve our skills. After this course I became more confident in my English and I could integrate myself in society easier.”*

### **FET Structures to Support the Achievement of the Strategic Goals**

The QA Unit was established to support the ongoing development of the QA System, while the Planning and Strategy Unit was established to facilitate the analysis of data and achieve the strategic priority of evidence-based decision making at centre and ETB level. Other structures established to support the achievement of the strategic goals and priorities are the FET Management Team and the FE Network.

### **Quality Assurance Unit**

DDLETB has a dedicated Quality Assurance (QA) Unit, led by the Quality Assurance Manager, and supported by three QA Officers. See Table 4.2 below for the roles and responsibilities of the DDLETB FET QA Unit



**Table 4.2 Roles and Responsibilities of the QA Unit**

> Provide day-to-day QA support and guidance to all Further Education and Training (FET) centres
> Support the development of structures of governance for the management of quality assurance in FET in DDLETB
> Support the implementation of, and provide secretarial support to, DDLETB QA governance groups, including the monitoring of new course approval requests on behalf of the Course Approval Committee
> Prepare annual Quality Improvement Plans, and report on same to QQI
> Develop QA policies and procedures as part of the QA Handbook
> Support QA development working groups, projects, and consultation processes
> Provide training in the implementation of QA policies and procedures to all FET centres
> Support the implementation of QA policies and procedures in all FET centres,
> Develop and manage the QAHub Sharepoint to house and communicate QA policies, procedures and curriculum documentation
> Support the review of all existing programmes and programme documentation, (programme/module reviews and assessment specifications)
> Support the development and validation of all new programmes
> Support the roll-out of all new programmes
> Develop and roll out guidelines for Professional Development (PD) in DDLETB FET
> Develop and implement a calendar of PD opportunities for DDLETB FET
> Provide annual reports on the uptake of PD within FET
> Develop and manage the Professional Development Sharepoint site
> Manage the quality@ddletb.ie email address, to provide day-to-day QA support to all FET centres
> Manage the pd@ddletb.i.e email address, to manage the delivery of all FET PD opportunities

Each of the QA officers has responsibility for a given service, and specific areas of QA responsibility as outlined above. The QA Unit supports the development of annual Quality Improvement Plans, which are approved by the Quality Council. These plans review the achievement of previously identified quality improvement goals and identify new quality enhancement goals to be achieved.

## FET Strategy and Planning Unit

The FET Strategy and Planning Unit is headed by a manager and three development officers. The remit, roles and responsibilities of the Strategy and Planning Unit are outlined in Table 4.3 below.

**Table 4.3 Strategy and Planning Unit**

Remit of the Strategy and Planning Unit
> Achieve the FET strategic aims and objectives of DDLETB's <i>Statement of Strategy</i>
> Coordinate and submit the annual FET plan to SOLAS
> Meet the non-financial audit, governance and reporting requirements of FET that are incumbent on DDLETB as a statutory body and public service
> Employ evidence-based decision making using the qualitative and quantitative data available through the management information system and other data sets
> Innovate or respond to new opportunities, emerging trends or constraints.
This remit is served by the Strategy and Planning Unit role and responsibility for:
> Implementing a range of strategy and policy initiatives, innovations or developments
> The use, review and analysis of research and data for business planning and reporting including Programme Learner Support Systems (PLSS) and FARR
> Providing day-to-day support, training and guidance to FET colleagues with the data requirements of PLSS
> Building the capacity in the use of management information systems for business planning and compliance with the non-financial audit or governance requirements of Irish government or EU funding
> Delivering structured, responsive assistance, supports and training to FET managers and local centres
> Leading or participating in working groups, project teams and consultations, both internally and externally



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## FET Management Team

Chaired by the Chief Executive (CE), the FET Management Team consists of College Principals, Training Centre Managers, Dual Provision School Principals, Adult Education Officers, the Regional Youthreach Coordinator and the Managers for Quality as well as Strategy and Planning. This group meets regularly to review implementation of strategic issues, and quality assurance is included on the agenda for each meeting.

## FE Network

The commitment to supporting high quality education and training programmes is further promoted by the **FE Network**, a network comprised of FE and Dual provision college Principals, Deputy Principals and FE coordinators. It is chaired by a member of the network and is attended by the Director of FET, and the Managers for QA as well as Strategy and Planning. The network shares learning and promotes best practice amongst its members, and QA is included on the agenda for each meeting. The network is supported in its work by sub-committees for FE policy review and Erasmus + projects.



## 4.1.2 Evaluation

### Embedding a Culture of Quality

The first goals of the *Statement of Strategy* refer to “High quality education and training programmes” and “High quality experience for learners”. In essence, these goals seek to enhance a culture of quality across DDLETB—one that is embedded in every classroom and in every interaction with every learner. Case Study 2 provides an example of how that message of embedding a culture of quality has been communicated throughout a service. In the surveys undertaken in preparation for this review, this commitment to a culture of quality was apparent throughout, with managers commenting that:

“

*“We consistently strive to ensure that we deliver an efficient, effective and consistent QA function.”*

and

*“We have a commitment to excellence when it comes to QA governance structures and in this regard we strive for improvement...[T]ransparency is threaded throughout the academic year using our IV partners, our QA weekly drop-in, our QA CPD and online availability of QA information for all teachers.”*

Staff also commented that:

*“The QA policies and procedures are excellent. There are excellent, dedicated local teams that drive quality within individual services. The QA Unit are responsive and open to feedback. The QA Unit are very organised and documentation is clear and easy to understand.”*

and

*“I observe daily, the comprehensive culture of QA in my centre”.*





## CASE STUDY 2: Youthreach Quality Day—Developing a Culture of Quality

All Youthreach staff were invited to attend a Youthreach Quality Day, led by the QA Manager and the QA Unit, with the involvement of the Youthreach Regional Coordinator, the Chief Executive and the Director of FET. The purpose of this day was to facilitate each Youthreach staff member to recognise their own role in developing a culture of quality and explore concepts around its governance. A key message of the day was that quality was about the commitment of every staff member to ensuring both a quality learning experience for the learners in the classroom, and the integrity of assessment. In the feedback regarding key learning from the day, one respondent replied with a single word: “Integrity”.

Arising from that Quality Day, it was agreed to develop a panel of external authenticators specifically for the Youthreach service. The purpose of the EA process is to confirm consistency of assessment results and provide feedback to support the ongoing enhancement of assessment processes within a centre. This Youthreach panel now meets annually with the QA Unit and the Youthreach Regional Coordinator following external authentication, to plan supports to enhance quality within the centres for the coming year. A key recommendation of the joint EA panel was the development of a Community of Practice for Youthreach QA Coordinators, which now meets regularly, supported by the QA Officer with responsibility for Youthreach. This Community of Practice has proven to be highly successful.



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In a further survey to FET staff, respondents were asked: **“Do you have any suggestions as to how DDLETB could further develop a culture of quality enhancement?”** Suggestions for further developing a culture of quality enhancement included:

- > further embedding of robust QA oversight processes
- > more communities of practice and other communications processes
- > continual training and professional development opportunities for staff
- > guidance on the development and use of evaluations.

While the strength of the QA systems within many centres was acknowledged, there was a recognition of the importance of further embedding a culture of quality at all levels of the organisation, but particularly in the classroom. As one respondent commented:

“...we can have all the processes and procedures ... but quality provision is about our learners and their experience and we need to continue to include them, listen, let their voices be heard so that the quality culture is fostered so that we can make improvements that make a real difference.”

A number of respondents suggested that the QA unit could deliver further training within centres, specifically around the embedding of a culture of quality. Overall, the importance of quality assured systems to support provision was recognised, as with this staff member who commented:

“QA is the glue that holds us all together.”

### **Embedding a culture of quality: The external perspective**

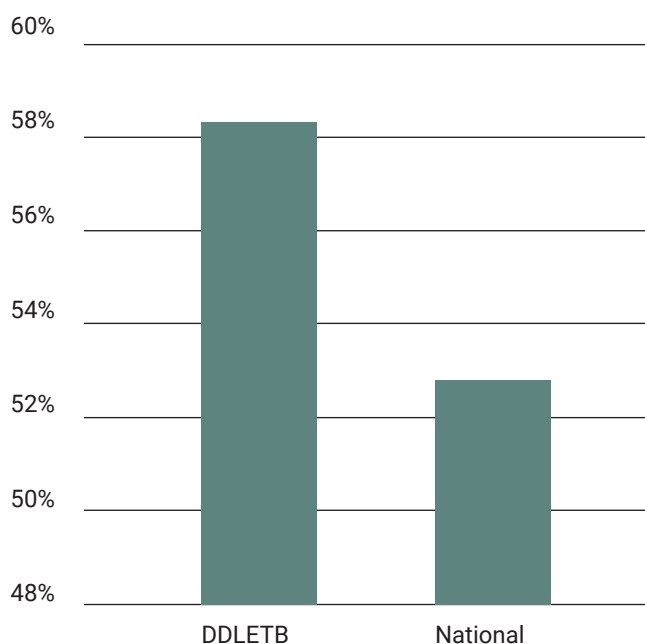
External Authenticators (EAs) were surveyed and asked to comment on DDLETB’s commitment to embedding a culture of quality. Responses included:

“[DDLETB] are the leaders, in my opinion, of development and integration of new strategies.”

“It is very evident that DDLETB is always committed and strategic in their approach to quality.”

“...it is very evident from the assignment briefs and the creative work which is presented by the students that a culture of quality is at the core of programs [sic] delivery.”

#### Distinctions Achieved in 2020



#### Delivering High Quality Programmes: The Learner Perspective

DDLETB's strategic goals aim to offer high quality education and training programmes, as well as a high-quality learner experience. The success of these goals is reflected in the certification data: In 2020, DDLETB learners achieved an average of 58% Distinctions across all levels, as opposed to a national average of 53% across all levels (see graph).<sup>38</sup>

Furthermore, when surveyed about their satisfaction with the teaching and learning they had experienced in their courses, out of a total of 662 respondents, 90% of learners said they were very satisfied or satisfied.<sup>39</sup>

#### 4.1.3 The ETB's Mission and Strategy: Effective Practice Identified

- > DDLETB has shown leadership and ownership of quality in FET by establishing the QA Unit which has supported the development of DDLETB's QA system and promoted a culture of quality which was acknowledged in surveys by external authenticators and reflected across all services.
- > The DDLETB and FET structures to support the achievement of strategic goals are well established.
- > DDLETB's strategic goals and priorities guide all development within DDLETB FET.
- > In FET, the achievement of these goals is evidenced by the fact that 90% of learners surveyed said that they were satisfied or very satisfied with the quality of the teaching and learning they had experienced.

#### 4.1.4 The ETB's Mission and Strategy: Areas for Improvement

- > The new *Statement of Strategy 2022-2026* is due to be published in the second quarter of 2022.<sup>40</sup> This provides an opportunity to consider how the already strong commitment to culture of quality can be further embedded across DDLETB FET.

<sup>38</sup> Comparison of QQI report of DDLETB certification data with *Annual Analysis of Awards made by QQI 2020*.

<sup>39</sup> AONTAS Learner survey, October 2021.

<sup>40</sup> Once finalised, the *Statement of Strategy 2022-2026* will be published on [www.ddletb.ie](http://www.ddletb.ie).

- > The further development of the Quality Assurance Unit will enhance FET capacity to ensure high-quality provision by providing organisational oversight, ensuring the development and dissemination of a new common QA System and the accompanying QA.
- > An increased focus on professional development opportunities for FET staff will support high quality education and training programmes.
- > The QA Unit should continue to work strategically with the Planning and Strategy Unit to monitor and use data to provide evidence of progress towards the achievement of organisational and FET priorities and use the data generated to monitor quality indicators such as retention, certification and progression levels. This will help to support evidence-based decision making particularly in relation to programme planning, design, and development.

## 4.1.5 Conclusion

The *QQI Core Guidelines* ask that a provider's operational objectives are aligned with their mission and strategy. The ETB-level review has shown that the goals and strategic priorities of the Statement of Strategy **are** supported by the QA system, while the development of a Quality Unit and FET Strategy and Planning Unit is evidence of the organisational commitment to support those goals.

The centre-level self-evaluations showed a strong commitment to the development of a culture of quality as well as extensive evidence of the continuous enhancement of that quality. The staff survey indicated an interest in further workshops on embedding a culture of quality. The QA Unit would need to be further resourced to replicate the Youthreach Quality Day across all centres, however, alternative models of delivery for similar sessions could be explored to support the further enhancement of a culture of quality.

### **Potential Future Enhancements:**

- > Align the structure of annual Quality Improvement Plans to ensure a systematic consideration of quality assurance-related goals within the new *Statement of Strategy*.
- > Identify initiatives to support the further embedding of a culture of quality in FET, including staff feedback given as part of this evaluation, delivery of Quality Day workshops, increased professional development and further support for communities of practice.
- > Build on examples of good practice such as the *Quality Matters* newsletter, and the *Team DDLETB newsletter* in relation to communication regarding quality enhancement, and explore other modes of delivery that will further embed a quality of culture.

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## 4.2 Structures for the Governance and Management of Quality Assurance

### 4.2.1 The Current Context

#### DDLETB Corporate Governance

DDLETB is governed by a Board of twenty-one (21) members. The functions of the Board are either executive or reserved. Executive functions are carried out by the Chief Executive and reserved functions are carried out by the Board. The Chief Executive is responsible for the oversight and management of DDLETB, and is supported in this role by the Senior Management Team which is structured across four separate, but interlinked, divisions: Further Education & Training, Organisation Support & Development, Primary Schools and Youth Services as well as Post-Primary Schools. DDLETB is further supported through the Audit and Risk Committee (ARC), the Finance Committee, School Boards of Management, Youth & Sports Committee and the Youthreach Committee. All committees are composed of Board members and other agreed representatives. A *Code of Practice for the Governance of Education and Training Boards (DES, 2019)* governs DDLETB.

DDLETB is subject to annual audits by the Office of the Comptroller & Auditor General, as well as to audits on behalf of the European Social Fund (ESF). Additionally, the Internal Audit Unit has been set up to audit the sector and DDLETB is audited in two or three areas each year. This is often a programme-based audit at the request of the Department of Education and SOLAS.

#### Development of an ETB-level QA governance system

At the time of the amalgamation, DDLETB operated under four (4) separate Quality Assurance (QA) agreements with Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI). These were:

- > Co. Dublin VEC QA Agreement
- > Dún Laoghaire VEC FE Colleges QA Agreement
- > Dún Laoghaire VEC Adult Education QA Agreement
- > Training Centres Transitional Quality Assurance System.



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In 2018, DDLETB underwent a re-engagement process with QQI, following the development of an *Executive Self-Evaluation Report, (ESER)* and became a recognised provider. As part of that process, DDLETB committed to developing a system for the governance and management of quality assurance. The governance system was developed in 2018, with the support of an external consultant. Two key principles underpinned that governance system:

- > **The principle of cross-service representation.** This dictates that all services and a range of roles, should be represented where possible on all QA governance groups. This principle ensures that every service's needs can be included when quality assurance is being considered.
- > **The principle of separation of responsibilities** between those who develop materials/make decisions and those who approve them.

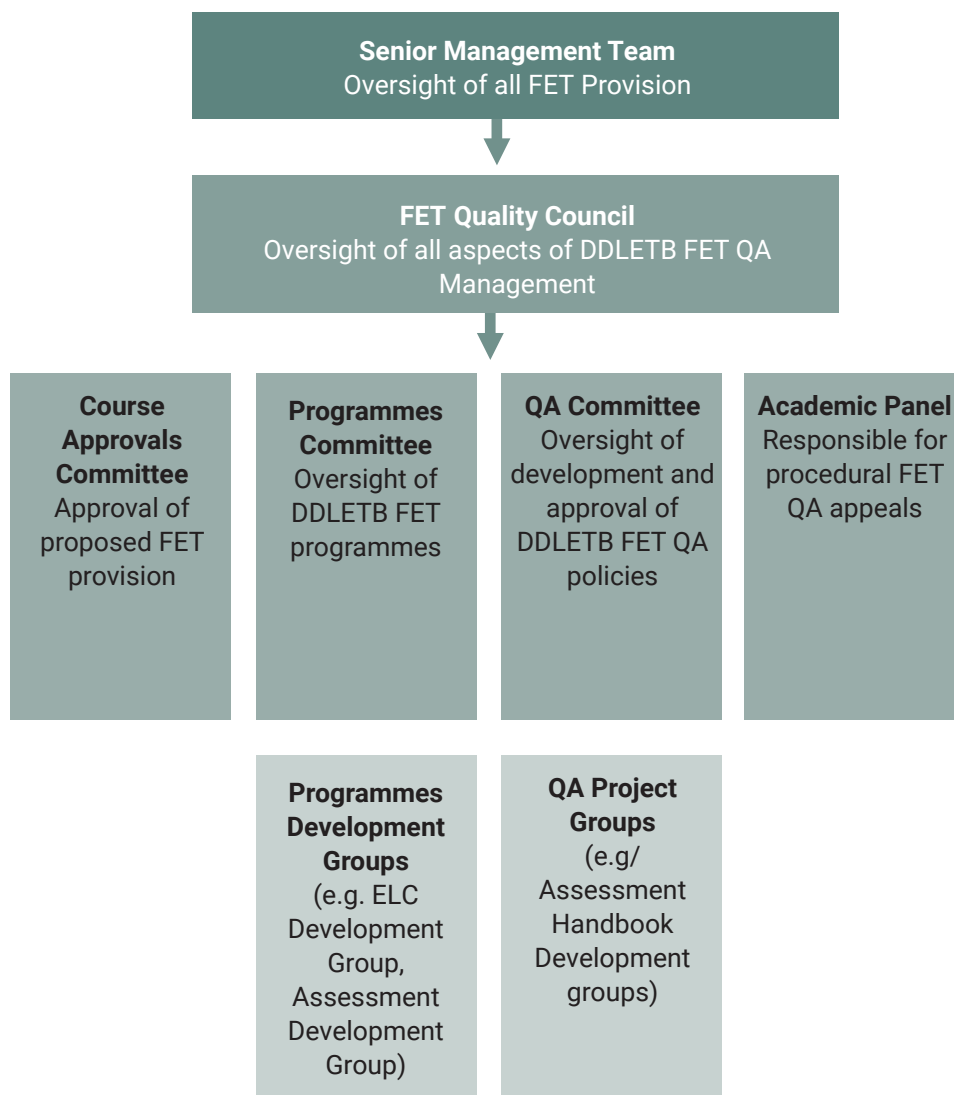
Overarching operating principles for the governance system, terms of reference and meeting schedules for each of the governance groups were developed (see Table 4.4 below), and the system was rolled out on a phased basis from late 2018 onwards.

The Quality Council is the overarching governance unit, and it reports to the Senior Management Team. It is supported in its role by three further committees and two working groups. An Academic Panel deals with procedural appeals by learners that have been exhausted at centre level. Further details of each of the governance groups are available in Appendix 4. The structure of the governance system is demonstrated in the illustration below.





**The QA governance system**



**Table 4.4 QA Governance Units and Terms of Reference**

	QA Governance Unit	Membership and Terms of Reference
Tier 1	<p><b>Quality Council</b>  <b>Oversight</b> of the planning, co-ordination, quality, development and improvement of all aspects of Further Education and Training</p>	<p><b>Membership:</b> Senior management representatives from all FET services  <i>Terms of Reference available here</i></p>
Tier 2	<p><b>Course Approval Committee</b>  <b>Responsible</b> for approval of all requests for FET course delivery</p>	<p><b>Membership:</b> DFET, Manager for Quality, Manager for Strategy and Planning  <i>Terms of Reference available here</i></p>
	<p><b>Programmes Committee</b>  <b>Responsible</b> for planning, co-ordination, development and quality of the FET programmes other than apprenticeships</p>	<p><b>Membership:</b> Staff members with relevant experience from across all services  <i>Terms of Reference available here</i></p>
	<p><b>QA Committee</b>  <b>Responsible</b> for development, co-ordination and improvement of FET quality assured policies, procedures, and processes</p>	<p><b>Membership:</b> Staff members with relevant experience from across all services  <i>Terms of Reference available here</i></p>
Tier 3	<p><b>Programme Development Project Group/s</b>            Working group/s convened to develop FET programme materials.</p>	<p><b>Membership:</b> Staff members with relevant subject matter expertise from across all services  <i>Terms of reference available here</i></p>
	<p><b>QA Project Group/s</b>            Working group/s convened to support the QA Committee in the review, amendment and development of FET quality assurance policies and procedures</p>	<p><b>Membership:</b> Staff members with relevant expertise/experience from across all services  <i>Terms of reference available here</i></p>
	<p><b>Academic Panel</b>            Group convened to adjudicate on procedural appeals that have been exhausted at centre level.</p>	<p><b>Membership:</b> Staff members who hold positions of responsibility in their own centre, and who have knowledge of the area under appeal.  <i>Terms of reference available here</i></p>

### Centre-Level Roles and Governance in FET

The roles and groups that are responsible for the governance of quality at centre-level vary, depending on the service that the individual centre belongs to (see Table 4.5). The heads of each centre/service report directly to the Director of FET and are supported at ETB level in their delivery of FET programmes by the DDLETB QA Unit. Regular briefings are offered to all centre-level QA staff, and each service has a dedicated support officer within the QA Unit. See Case Study 3 for an example of how an understanding of the governance of QA can be supported at centre level.



**Table 4.5 Centre-Level Governance and QA**

	Further Education Service	Training Centre	Adult Education Service	Youthreach
Centre level responsibility	Principal (reports to Director of FET)	Manager (reports to Director of FET)	Adult Education Officer (reports to Director of FET)	Centre coordinator (reports to Regional Coordinator who reports to Director of FET)
Programme level responsibility	Deputy Principals/ Assistant Principals/ Department heads/ Further Education Coordinator/ course coordinators	Assistant Managers	Adult Literacy Organiser, Community Education Facilitator, Programme Co-ordinator etc.	Centre coordinator
Day-to-day responsibility	Teachers	Instructors, instructors/tutors in 2 <sup>nd</sup> provider settings	Adult educators/ teachers/tutors	Teachers/ Resource staff
QA Support	QA Coordinator/ exam secretary etc. & QA Unit	Training Standards Officers/Assistant Training Standards Officer & QA Unit	QA Coordinator & QA Unit	QA Coordinator & QA Unit
Certification type	Primarily QQI certification, mostly NFQ Levels 5 & 6; some other awarding bodies	QQI certification, mostly Levels 4-6, some NFQ Level 3; delivery of other awarding body certification	Primarily QQI certification mostly NFQ Levels 2-5, some NFQ Level 6; uncertified programmes	Only QQI certification, mostly NFQ Levels 2-4
QA System	DDLETB QA & awarding body-specific QA as appropriate	DDLETB QA include some Training Centre-specific procedures. All contracted training delivered under DDLETB QA. Awarding body-specific QA as appropriate	DDLETB QA & awarding body-specific QA as appropriate. Community partners delivering on behalf of AES use DDLETB QA	DDLETB QA

### CASE STUDY 3: Conference of DDLETB Results Approvals Panels

Through an analysis of authentication reports in summer 2019, it became apparent that an understanding of the governance role of the Results Approval Panels (RAPs) could be further enhanced. The QA Unit therefore organised a day-long RAP Conference in March 2020 for the chairs of all the centres' Results Approval Panels.

Over the course of the day, participants explored the governance role that the RAP plays in the assessment/certification processes; they were introduced to revised Internal Verification (IV) and External Authentication (EA) documentation (see section 4.3.1) and they engaged in workshop activities to deepen their understanding of the responsibilities of the panel.

A few days after the RAP conference, the government imposed the first COVID-19 lockdown, and instantly all assessment and authentication had to be moved online. Thanks to the experience of the RAP conference, the chairs of the Results Approvals Panels had a clear understanding of their crucial governance role. This understanding was a key factor in the success of DDLETB's sudden transition to Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT), and in ensuring the continued integrity of the assessment and authentication processes throughout the COVID-19 crisis.





#### 4.2.2 Evaluation

The development and roll-out of the governance system in late 2018 meant that it was possible to undertake a first review of the system in late 2019/early 2020. This review recommended revising where the responsibility for granting course approval requests should reside, in order to avoid any perception of conflict of interest. This responsibility was therefore moved from the Programmes Committee and given to the newly formed Course Approvals Committee.

As noted above, the existence of the QA governance structures were instrumental in the success of the sudden move to Emergency Remote Teaching during the COVID-19 lockdowns. However, due to the imperative to respond in a timely fashion to the urgent issues that were arising, a number of decisions were brought directly to the Quality Council, rather than first being considered by the QA Committee. While it addressed the urgent needs arising from the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly in its early days, this approach should be reviewed, so that each element of the governance system can fulfil its functions according to its terms of reference.

Surveys were sent out to all FET centres as part of the preparation for this self-evaluation, to identify how QA and its governance operated at centre level. Respondents to these surveys were largely managers and QA staff, although in some centres all staff members became involved in the self-evaluation process. An additional survey was sent out, to be completed by individual staff members, to gauge their personal understanding and experience of quality assurance. Respondents to this survey were largely teachers/tutors/ instructors but included a range of other roles as well.

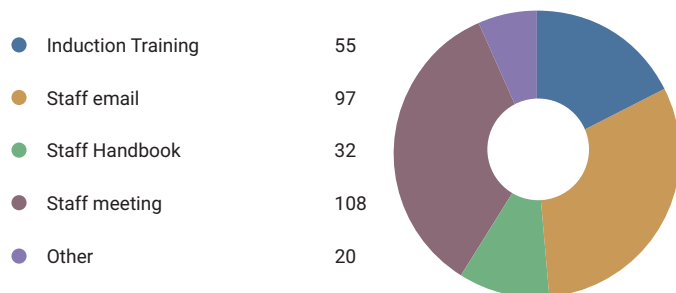
In overseeing the governance of quality within their own centres, it was clear that centre managers and QA staff understood the principle of the separation of responsibility, with one manager commenting:



*“We believe that independent oversight is integral to the integrity of the QA Process.”*

Centres were asked to rate the effectiveness of their local QA governance from 1-5 (where 5=very effective), and the average score was 4.4. While there is always room for improvement, this result would indicate high levels of confidence in local QA governance, and is a testament to the strong local QA procedures that are in place.

**How are you informed about QA procedures in your centre?  
(n=157)**



In order to elicit the staff perspective about local QA governance and procedures, staff were asked: **“How are you informed about local QA procedures that support teaching, learning and assessment, at your centre?”**

The most common responses listed a variety of communications methods (see below) which suggests that staff **are** being informed about QA procedures, with other responses referencing the role of the ETB QA Unit, or the role of the Training Standards Officer in the context of contracted training.<sup>41</sup> This would suggest that the governance of local QA procedures are being communicated appropriately.

### 4.2.3 Governance of Quality: Effective Practice Identified

- > Governance structures are robust enough to be adapted and show potential for ongoing renewal, an essential feature in any governance system.
- > The governance structures proved profoundly significant when COVID-19 hit and centres were forced to switch to Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT), as they allowed the FET centres to respond quickly, but in a quality assured manner with governance oversight. These governance structures provided a solid foundation in times of unparalleled uncertainty locally, nationally and globally; they allowed emergency assessment procedures and contingency assessment measures to be developed and approved in a timely, responsive and flexible manner. Details on the response during the COVID-19 pandemic are outlined in Chapter 3.

### 4.2.4 Governance of Quality: Areas for Improvement

- > Following an initial review of the governance system, the course approval function was removed from the Programmes Committee and given to the newly created Course Approvals Committee. While this move has been very successful, it has highlighted the need for a further overall review of the governance system.
- > A further review following the COVID-19 crisis has shown that many urgent decisions were dealt with directly by the Quality Council rather than the QA Committee (see Table 4.2), due to the imperative for a rapid response. This, however, did impact on the role of the QA Committee during that time, and should now be reviewed to support the function of that group.

<sup>41</sup> Much of the delivery of courses in training centres is undertaken by contracted training providers, under the DDLETB QA agreement.

- 
- > While the governance units have representatives from all FET services, there is currently no learner representative. Consideration will be given as to how the learner voice can be included in the QA governance system.

## 4.2.5 Conclusion

The *QQI Core QA Guidelines* specify the need for a documented system of governance, with clearly separated responsibilities. This review has shown evidence of a documented governance system which differentiates responsibilities, is robust, and is capable of being reviewed to remain fit-for-purpose.

The experience of the COVID-19 pandemic provided great insights into governance and its role in supporting an organisation at all times, but especially in times of crisis. It seems opportune to reflect on that learning and to consider how it may shape the operation of the QA governance system into the future. Additionally, as noted above, the role of the Programmes Committee warrants further consideration, following the creation of the Course Approvals Committee. It has therefore been decided to undertake a full review of the DDLETB governance system to reflect on the role of the committees and the inclusion of external stakeholders such as learners. An external consultant has been engaged to undertake this work, and initial findings from this review are due in the first quarter of 2022.

There are high levels of confidence in those procedures which have been developed, either locally or jointly through groups such as the FE Network, to support centre-level QA practice. This reflects the commitment to robust QA practices across the service.

### **Potential Future Enhancements:**

- > Implement findings of the governance review to enhance the effectiveness of QA governance structures.
- > Develop a plan to ensure the inclusion of the learner voice in the governance system.

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## 4.3 The Documentation of Quality Assurance Policy and Procedures

### 4.3.1 The Current Context

#### Approach to the Development and Approval of QA Policy and Procedures

As part of the re-engagement process with QI, work began in 2019 on the development an overarching Quality Assurance System for all FET services, with plans for an accompanying Quality Assurance Manual.

The approach to the documentation of quality assurance policies and procedures in DDLETB has been largely influenced by the need to ensure the continued integrity of the assessment processes. Therefore, early work focussed on the development of common assessment procedure handbooks. The assessment procedures handbooks in Table 4.6 were developed and launched in September 2019.

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**Table 4.6 Assessment Procedures Handbooks**

<i>Reasonable Accommodation</i>	<i>Assessment Process Appeals</i>
<i>Assessment Deadlines</i>	<i>Assessment Results Appeals</i>
<i>Examinations</i>	<i>Secure Storage</i>
<i>Assessment Malpractice</i>	

These were the first QA documents to be developed in common for all DDLETB FET services. They were followed by the development of common Internal Verification (IV), External Authentication (EA) and Results Approval Panel (RAP) guidelines, procedures and reporting templates. These were launched at the RAP conference in March 2020 (see Section 4.2 above), days before the first COVID-19 lockdown.

While this development work was important and well-received, it was decided to approach the development of an overarching Quality Assurance System from a **foundational** perspective, through the development of an initial *Policy on Policies*, upon which all future policy development could be based. Work on this policy was at an advanced stage when the first lockdown happened, and DDLETB went into COVID-19 contingency mode.

Given the challenges raised by the COVID-19 lockdown, it was decided to focus on the development of a suite of common contingency guidelines and procedures to address the immediate issues raised by COVID-19. As a result, work on the *Policy on Policies* has not yet been completed.

### 4.3.2 Evaluation of the Implementation and Effectiveness of QA Policy and Procedures

In order to establish the situation in centres regarding currently documented QA policies and procedures, managers and QA staff were surveyed and asked:

***Please rate how effective you feel DDLETB QA policies and procedures are in addressing/maintaining the quality of QQI provision in your centre?***

Out of a scale of 1-5 (5=very effective), the average response was **4.4**, indicating a high degree of confidence in the effectiveness of QA policies and procedures. See Case Study 4, for an example of the effective implementation and communication of QA procedures within a service.

#### CASE STUDY 4: Service-Level QA Hub

In February 2020, one of DDLETB's Adult Education Services rolled out a local SharePoint QA Hub which is exclusively for all documentation relating to their QA processes. This allows all teaching staff to have easy access to the most up to date templates, resources and documentation required to ensure quality provision at all times. There is an Admin Hub where teachers/tutors can upload their results and also where programme coordinators can update the QA spreadsheet with all information pertaining to the submission. There is also a space where all staff have their own folders for uploading ePortfolios and teacher/tutor packs. The internal verification processes follow the guidelines set out to ensure best practice in line with DDLETB assessment procedures. In the staff survey undertaken as part of this process, one teacher from this service commented:



*"Our experience here locally of having a QA Hub has been very positive and was of huge benefit when working remotely."*

The survey further asked:

***Please rate how effective you feel DDLETB QA policies and procedures are in addressing/maintaining the quality of non-QQI provision in your centre?***

In this case, the average response rate was **3.75**. The somewhat lower response rate may be due to the challenge of managing the QA policies and procedures of the other awarding body in parallel with that of DDLETB.

Managers responded very positively when asked if they knew how to propose a policy or procedure if they identified a need, with one manager saying:

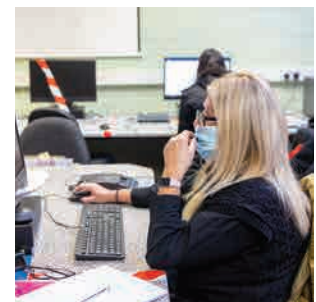
“We welcome ideas from our staff about how policies work at ground level...[I]f a teacher has a question/query or finds a particular policy challenging to implement they bring this issue to a ... team member who can then bring it to the principal. Following consultation with the principal regarding the proposed policy change, the principal brings this suggestion to an ETB working group.”

Suggestions for new policy development that emerged from the survey included a:

- > Blended Learning Policy
- > Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Policy
- > Support for Learners Policy
- > Course Approvals Policy.

Staff were asked: **“Where do you see areas for improvement in the development and implementation of QA procedures?”** The most common response was the request for a standardised QA Induction session to be developed for all new teachers/tutors/instructors across the FET centres, which could be delivered as a part of the regular induction for new staff. Other responses included:

- > yearly review of local procedures with all staff
- > further development of common DDLETB-wide procedures
- > communities of practice to develop consistency across centres.





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### 4.3.3 Documentation of QA Policy and Procedures: Effective Practice Identified

- > It is clear from the responses to the survey that centres felt confident in the effectiveness of QA policies and procedures to maintain the quality of provision, and equally, that they felt confident in being able to propose new policies or procedures if they identified a need.
- > An inclusive, cross-sectoral approach to governance has been adopted, meaning that all services, and most centres would have representation in one governance unit/working group or another.
- > The assessment procedures handbooks are working well, as indicated by the requests from staff for more of them to be developed.
- > The new common Internal Verification, External Authentication and Results Approval Panel documentation was widely used for the first time in June 2021.
- > The local QA Hub mentioned above provides a good example of how local QA documentation is housed and shared; other centres use a variety of virtual learning environments (VLEs) to host QA documents.
- > A DDLETB-wide QA Hub is now complete. This not only houses all QA policies and procedures, but also allows the uploading of all governance and authentication reports for consideration by the governance system. It is planned that a parallel external website will allow all policies and procedures to be available to the public.

### 4.3.4 Documentation of QA Policy and Procedures: Areas for Improvement

- > In order to respond to the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, it was decided to focus on the development of contingency guidelines, in order to support centres to respond to the challenges they were facing. The work on the QA Manual must now recommence, with completion of the *Policy on Policies* to be prioritised.
- > Non-QQI awards are not currently referenced specifically in current DDLETB QA policies and procedures, and this should be addressed.
- > A process and schedule for the development and review of QA policies and procedures should be developed and implemented as part of the common QA Manual.
- > There should be clear procedures for proposing the development of new policies, with clear criteria for their approval.

## 4.3.5 Conclusion

The QQI Core QA Guidelines specify that the Quality Assurance system should be fully documented and published. While work on a common QA system is well underway, with common assessment procedures, Internal Verification, External Authentication and Results Approval Panel documentation as well as common COVID-19 contingency policies and procedures already in place, there is still much work to do. In particular, the development of an overarching QA System and an accompanying QA Manual needs to be recommenced now that the required COVID-19 contingencies have been developed. Following the completion of the governance review, it will be the role of the Quality Council and QA Committee to ensure that this work is undertaken.

### Potential Future Enhancements:

- > Recommence work on the common QA Manual, to include reference to non-QQI awards, in order to further develop the DDLETB QA System and ensure consistency.
- > Develop new and update existing policies in order to ensure the continuous improvement of the DDLETB QA systems.



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## 4.4 Staff Recruitment, Development and Management

This section considers DDLETB's recruitment of suitably qualified staff, its ongoing professional development of those staff and how they are kept informed of developments within the organisation which are of relevance to them.

### 4.4.1 The Current Context

#### Staff recruitment

DDLETB is committed to recruiting staff who have the skills and qualities necessary to carry out their roles, in a fair and consistent manner in line with the DDLETB Human Resources (HR) Recruitment and Selection Policy and process. Vacancies are advertised on the DDLETB website, and on other sites such as [www.etbvacancies.ie](http://www.etbvacancies.ie), with job specifications and required competencies clearly communicated. A formal interview process for shortlisted candidates is conducted in line with DDLETB HR policies and procedures, and successful candidates must be garda vetted. All interview panel members are trained in competency-based interview techniques. Staff with teaching contracts in further education colleges/centre and schools are registered with the Teaching Council and are Garda Vetted by the Teaching Council to work as teachers. Robust procedures were developed to support online recruitment processes following the COVID-19 lockdowns, and over 900 new staff members were recruited remotely during this time.

A centralised induction process takes place for newly appointed teachers. The sessions cover an overview of the organisation, supports offered to teachers, and an overview of supports offered by various departments of the organisation. This good practice could be widened to develop a centralised induction for all FET staff. In most cases, the induction for new staff in FET takes place at local level, although there is not a common approach to this. Therefore, a centralised induction for new FET staff could be developed.

#### Staff recruitment: Contracted Trainers

A framework of pre-qualified contractors is utilised to deliver Contracted Training contracts. Contractors must have systems in place for the quality assured delivery of curriculum, assessment and testing, in line with the framework agreement. Training Specifications are agreed prior to the delivery of a course, outlining course modules, certification, delivery methodologies, and tutor minimum pedagogical and professional experience to facilitate delivery. It is the responsibility of the contractor to recruit relevant personnel required to manage, administer and deliver courses in agreement with framework obligations.

#### Staff Recruitment: Community Training Providers

Community Training Providers are bound by service level agreements and contracts when delivering training programmes funded by DDLETB. These agreements are supplemented by Operational Guideline documents. The second provider is responsible for the recruitment, training and development of all staff in line with operational guidelines. All trainers and tutors who have responsibility for the delivery of any element of training must meet specified qualification criteria. Training Centres have responsibility for the oversight of community training providers.

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## Staff development

DDLETB is committed to the ongoing professional development (PD) of staff in DDLETB, sharing as it does, with SOLAS, the belief that “*FET learners will be the ultimate beneficiaries*” (SOLAS, 2020, p.5)<sup>42</sup>. Indeed, ensuring organisational and professional development is one of DDLETB’s strategic goals.<sup>43</sup> Opportunities for PD are identified and delivered at both DDLETB and centre level.

### Professional Development within DDLETB

In DDLETB, PD falls under the remit of the QA Manager. DDLETB has appointed a part-time coordinator with responsibility for the development and delivery of a programme of professional development opportunities for FET staff. These opportunities include externally delivered certified courses such as the SOLAS-promoted Level 8 Diploma in Change Management, courses at Levels 6, 7 and 8 in Technology Enhanced Learning, and a Level 9 Diploma in Programme Design and Validation. Staff can be sponsored by DDLETB for these courses, and to date, 46 staff members have availed of this opportunity. In addition, staff members may source their own professional development opportunities. Employees who participate in a certified further education/third level course which is directly related to their work may avail of the “Refund of Fees Scheme”.

Information regarding uncertified professional development opportunities is circulated through the Professional Development Calendar, or in *Quality Matters*, the ETB’s Quality and Professional Development newsletter. These PD opportunities may include:

- > externally delivered uncertified courses such as those offered by the Further Education Support Services (FESS)
- > internally delivered uncertified courses such as those offered by the QA Unit, the Strategy and Planning Unit, the Psychological Support Service, DDLETB Digital Learning Team or other services in DDLETB.

PD and the re-skilling opportunities it provides to staff, is also a vital component in the ability of DDLETB to identify, develop and implement new technical programmes (see Section 4.5).

### Examples of PD Offered at ETB level

#### Leadership development initiative

In recognition of the professional needs of senior and middle leaders and in line with the organisation’s strategic priority to build capacity for active leadership, DDLETB decided to offer a Leadership Development Initiative to its FET managers. Two consultants were engaged to develop this programme which was rolled out to FET leaders over two years. For details, see Case Study 5.

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<sup>42</sup> SOLAS FET Professional Learning and Development Statement of Strategy 2020-2024.

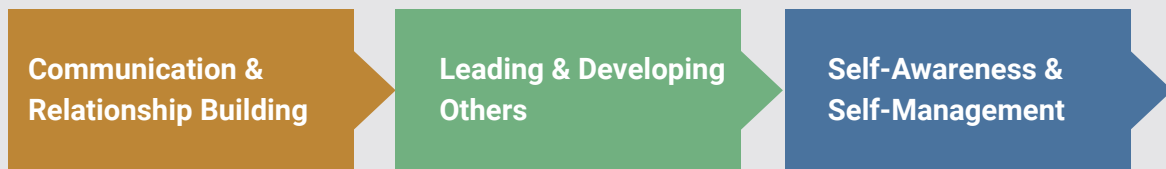
<sup>43</sup> DDLETB *Statement of Strategy 2017-2021*, p. 19.

## CASE STUDY 5: FET Leadership Development Initiative 2019 – 2021

Over two iterations in 2019/2020 and 2020/21, 40 leaders from across all FET services participated in a FET Leadership Development Initiative, consisting of five full- and half-day sessions, as well as several half-day peer support sessions delivered by two experienced external facilitators.

Following the outbreak of COVID-19, the programme continued on-line and programme content was adapted to take account of the additional pressures on leaders as a result of the pandemic. For example, opportunities were created for participants to share best practice in crisis management, in order to define a DDLETB FET leadership approach which is responsive, agile and flexible. The initiative was supported by the CEO, the Director of FET, the AEO for Quality, a project leader and an advisory group.

Participants on the 2021 programme have reported significant improvement in all of the major leadership competences:



The outcomes of the initiative for participants therefore include:

- > Deeper understanding of their professional identity as leaders
- > Recognition of parity: their ability to contribute and influence
- > Strengthened commitment to colleagues and DDLETB vision and values
- > Increased confidence in responding to change and challenge.

Participant feedback from the programme was universally positive e.g.:

- > *"I feel a lot more positive about my role as a leader."*
- > *"I see now where I can make a real difference – I didn't really believe that before."*
- > *"The community of practice approach was very supportive and empowering."*
- > *"The collaborative and personal relationships in supporting each other that is embedded in DDLETB leadership is something to acknowledge and really value"*

## Quality Assurance

The QA Unit delivers an extensive PD programme to support FET staff in their quality assured delivery of programmes. Recent examples are outlined in Table 4.7 below.

**Table 4.7 PD Workshops Delivered by the QA Unit**

PD Workshops	
Writing briefs	Development of assessment specifications
Integration of assessments	Assessing learner evidence
Devising alternative summative assessment tasks	Practical & pedagogical ways to engage students online
Active teaching methodologies	Feedback to learners
Online energisers	Minding ourselves in uncertain times
Quality assuring blended learning	Training for new QA coordinators
Development of ePortfolios and other digital evidence	External authenticator briefing.

The unit also support a number of communities of practice, particularly with regards to developing QA procedures, and addressing issues arising out of COVID-19, as outlined in Table 4.8.

**Table 4.8 Communities of Practice Supported by the QA Unit**

Communities of Practice
Youthreach
Healthcare
Early Learning and Care (DDLETB)
<b>Note: DDLETB currently supports the national Early Learning and Care Programme Managers Community of Practice</b>

Finally, the QA Unit organises QA Coordinator briefings, and delivers individual support workshops to centres on demand.

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## Technology Enhanced Learning

Since the outbreak of COVID-19, the Digital Learning Team in DDLETB have delivered over **800** sessions in order to support staff in their move to Emergency Remote Teaching. These sessions were attended by over **10,000** attendees from across the ETB, many of them attending multiple sessions, or attending the weekly drop-in sessions. For a sample of workshops delivered in Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL), see Table 4.9.

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**Table 4.9 TEL workshops delivered by the Digital Learning Team**

TEL workshops	
Microsoft Teams	Teams Live
OneDrive	MS Forms
Outlook	SharePoint
Sway	Moodle
Development of ePortfolios	Weekly drop-in support sessions
Preparation for remote Internal Verification and External Authentication (sessions for teaching/training staff, QA staff)	Preparation for remote External Authentication

### Planning and Strategy: Data Management Workshops

Regular workshops are delivered on data management including the use of the PLSS system for administrative staff, programme co-ordinators and FET centre managers. Workshops on using PLSS reports to generate data to inform planning and strategic decision-making have also been delivered to the FET management team, and relevant FET centre staff.

### Organisation Support and Development (OSD) Masterclass Series

A series of online masterclasses have been delivered by OSD to over 100 members of the DDLETB management team. The sessions serve as a useful induction for those who are new to their roles and as refresher for those who have been in their roles for some time. Masterclass topics have included information on organisational policies and procedures including procurement, finance, handling complaints, FOI requests and Data Protection etc.

### Training Needs Analysis Programme (Skills to Advance/Skills for Work)

The aim of this programme was to equip ETB staff involved in the Skills to Advance & Skills for Work programmes, with the skills and competence to make a diagnostic assessment of an enterprise in relation to their workforce development and conduct training needs analyses for selected companies.

### Middle Leadership Programme and Teacher Leadership Programme

Schools and colleges undertake professional development opportunities in Middle Leadership and Teacher Leadership programmes which have been developed centrally in DDLETB.

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## ***PD at Centre Level***

### **Training Needs Analysis**

At centre level, staff training needs are identified primarily through dialogue between staff members and their manager, or as a result of course evaluations, or authentication reports. Approaches to identifying training needs differ across the services, with training centres taking a more structured approach, while smaller centres currently adopt a more informal approach which may be more appropriate to their context.

However, undertaking a training needs analysis is particularly important with respect to technical PD and the need to maintain and develop skills in rapidly evolving employment sectors. Ensuring that the teachers'/tutors'/instructors' technical skills remain at the cutting edge of industry advances, is critical in ensuring the confidence of employers and industry sectors in the region, regarding DDLETB's ability to provide relevant training which matches their specific skill needs. It is acknowledged that a more standardised, centralised approach to training needs analysis will be necessary in order to ensure staff's technical skills remain relevant to the needs of industry.

DDLETB strives to ensure that staff have access to appropriate professional development opportunities. Table 4.10 outlines some PD topics, and a few examples of internal and external courses and workshops of which staff have availed.





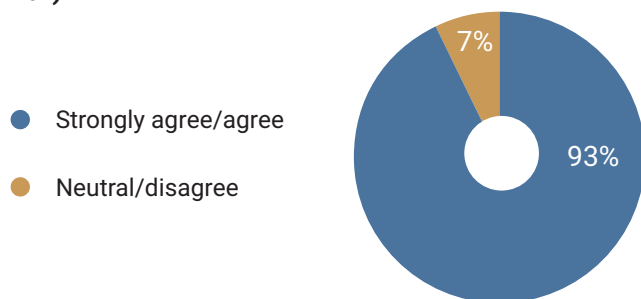
**Table 4.10 Examples of internal and external PD opportunities undertaken**

PD Topics	Internal & External PD Programmes
Teaching and learning	Universal Design for Learners Introduction to Recognition of Prior Learning Digital Badge Pedagogy of Online Learning Teaching Critical Thinking Skills MAPA (Behavioural Management Training)
Literacy, numeracy and digital Skills	Literacy and Numeracy Awareness
Learner supports	LGBTQ+ Awareness Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults Minding Ourselves in Uncertain Times
Management and Leadership	Leadership Development Initiative Level 8 Diploma in Change Management, NUI Galway Creativity, Innovation and Leadership
Enterprise Engagement	Stakeholder Collaboration Supplier Relations Training Training Needs Analysis Programme (Skills to Advance & Skills for Work programmes)
Information Communications Technology	PLSS training Technical Support PCs and Network G Suite Dashboard Training eCollege
Technology enhanced learning (TEL)	Level 8 Certificate in Technology Enhanced Learning (NUI Galway) Level 7 Certificate in Technology Enhanced Learning National College of Ireland (NCI) Level 6 Certificate in Technology and Learning (NCI) Using Teams and Office 365
Quality Assurance (QA)	Level 9 Programme Design and Validation (NUI Maynooth) Level 9, Recognition of Prior Learning, Policy, Practice & Pedagogy (Munster Technical University) (For more examples, see above).
Technical programmes-Vocational up-skilling and re-skilling	Hybrid and Electric Vehicle Bootcamp Certificate in Training in Low Energy Buildings MA in Adult Learning & Development Laser Techniques Python Programming IS101 Revised Rules for Electrical Installation

## 4.4.2 Evaluation of Professional Development

### The Staff Perspective

**Staff responses to the statement: "CPD is important to me" (n=157)**

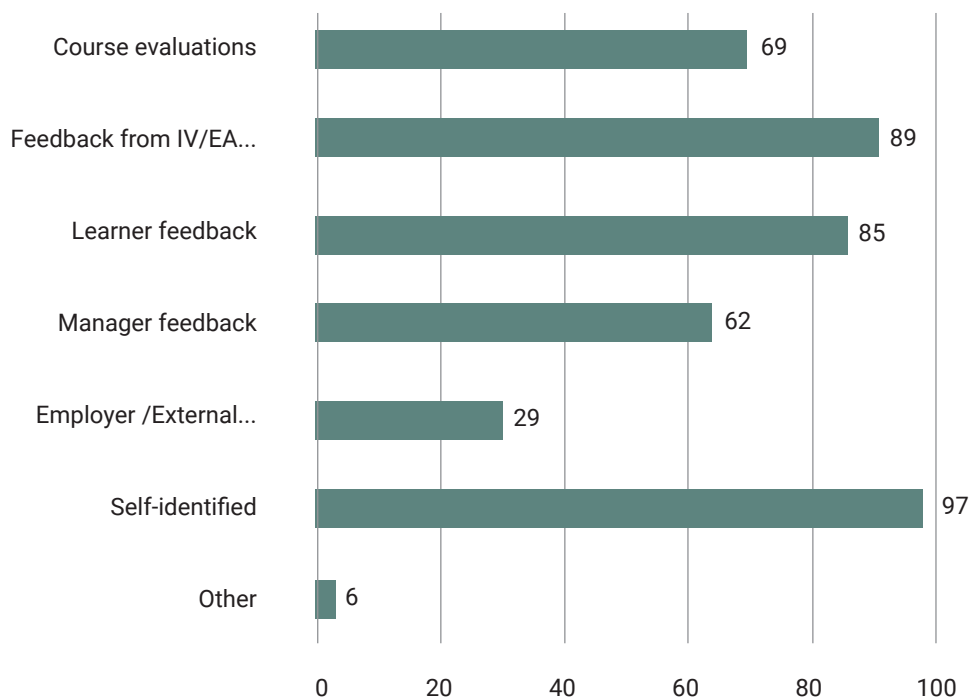


The initiatives above indicate DDLETB's organisational commitment to professional development, and this is echoed by a similar commitment from the staff.

When asked to rate the statement: "CPD [Continuous Professional Development] is important to me", **93%** of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed.

When staff were further asked how they identified their need for training, a range of sources were identified as illustrated here. Of particular note in these findings is the significant role that feedback from the authentication processes plays, and the number of staff who identified training needs themselves: this is testament to the personal commitment that DDLETB staff have to their professional development.

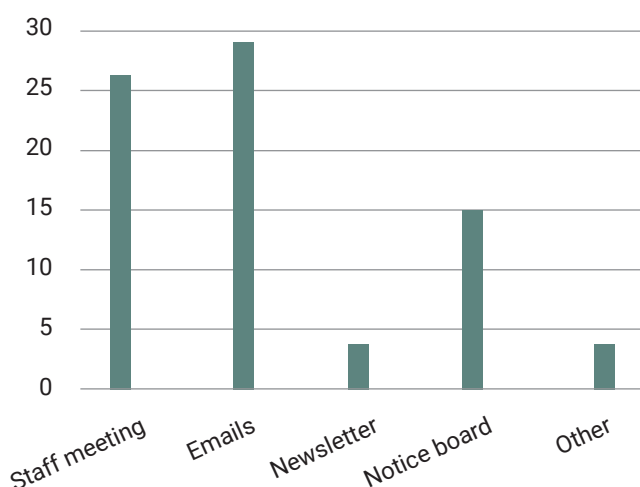
**Identification of staff training needs (n=157)**



## Staff Management: Communication with Staff

Staff are kept informed of developments in DDLETB through a variety of means. ETB-level developments are communicated through the FET Management Team (FMT) and QA is an agenda item at all its meetings. Developments are also communicated via the QA Coordinators' Network, through membership of the different governance units or working groups, through emails or the QA and Professional Development newsletter. From there, information is cascaded to staff in all centres via emails and staff training and meetings. A new QA Hub has been developed to replace the old QA document repository, and this site now includes a news feed that can be continuously updated to keep staff informed of developments.

**Centre Communication Methods with Staff (n=29)**



Managers use multiple communications methods to cascade information to staff, as shown in the graph. Clearly, great effort is put into ensuring that staff are kept informed of decisions and developments at ETB and centre-level, with one manager commenting:



*"We are committed to a democratic approach in decision-making ... with an emphasis on staff empowerment when it comes to organisational change."*

Communications is a two-way process, and so FET staff were surveyed in the summers of 2020 and 2021 as well as in October 2021, as part of this self-evaluation exercise. Feedback from those surveys informed DDLETB's contingency responses, including the extensive programme of TEL Professional Development workshops developed by the Digital Connect Team, and the development of streamlined remote Internal Verification processes. Findings from those surveys also informed this report.

### 4.4.3 Staff Recruitment, Development and Management: Effective Practice Identified

- > Recruitment processes are well embedded, with all centres following HR policies and using competency-based interviews when recruiting staff. This helps to ensure the competency of staff in FET.
- > There is a very good uptake from staff for certified and uncertified development opportunities, indicating a strong culture of professional development amongst staff members.
- > There is a clear organisational commitment to keeping all staff members informed of developments which are relevant to them, through the existence of online masterclasses, a variety of forums and working groups, and the use of multiple channels for communications.

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#### 4.4.4 Staff Recruitment, Development and Management: Areas for Improvement

- > To ensure that DDLETB's strategic goal of "Organisational and Staff Development"<sup>44</sup> continues to be met, DDLETB will build its capacity to develop and deliver a comprehensive Professional Development (PD) plan for FET and become more proactive in the identification and promotion of professional development opportunities to FET staff.
- > Work has commenced on a transparent set of guidelines for a PD support scheme. This work needs to be completed in order to ensure that more consistent and resourced PD opportunities are available to employees, so that the technical skills of staff remain at the cutting edge of industry advances. This is critical in maintaining the confidence of employers and industry sectors in the region, regarding DDLETB's ability to provide relevant training which matches their specific skill needs.
- > As DDLETB emerges from COVID-19, there are challenges particularly in the recruitment of staff with the required level of experience and qualifications across FET as noted in Chapter One. This has potential to impact the quality of education and training provision over time if it is not addressed.
- > A systematic method for tracking all PD, including that which is undertaken privately or at centre level by staff members is required in order to show progress with regard to PD objectives and goals across FET centres/schools and colleges.
- > The approach to training needs analysis across the services needs to be supported so that good practice is shared and enhanced.
- > Finally, the development of a Professional Development SharePoint Hub is currently planned. This site will advertise upcoming professional development opportunities, allow staff to register for any workshops of interest, and house a library of recordings of past workshops where appropriate. This development is due to be completed in 2022.



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<sup>44</sup> *Statement of Strategy 2017-2021*, p. 9.

## 4.4.5 Conclusion

DDLETB is committed to the ongoing Professional Development (PD) of its staff. This is essential in terms of maintaining stakeholder confidence that learners will be in a position to progress into employment or further/higher education with cutting edge skills and the latest insights from their chosen fields.

The QQI Core Guidelines ask that providers assure themselves of the competence of their staff, that staff members are kept informed of developments, and their views collected on matters that concern them. This review has shown that recruitment processes are in line with HR policies, and staff are both given information and solicited for their views. The guidelines also expect that there are opportunities for professional development. As shown above, those opportunities are being availed of, both with regards to technical skills and more general skills which are sourced and delivered centrally. However, while PD is being identified and offered centrally, it is apparent that there is more that could be done in this area, particularly with respect to the development of support guidelines.

### **Potential Future Enhancements:**

- > Develop and deliver a comprehensive Professional Development plan for FET, to include transparent support guidelines and ensure more consistent and resourced PD opportunities.
- > Ensure vocational up-skilling and re-skilling PD programmes are developed, funded and delivered in order to meet the needs of employers and communities.
- > Complete work on the Professional Development Sharepoint site and develop a system for keeping track of professional development undertaken by staff and delivered locally in FET centres.
- > Formalise the approach to training needs analysis across FET so that good practice is shared and enhanced.

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## 4.5 Programme Development, Approval and Submission for Validation

### 4.5.1 The Current Context

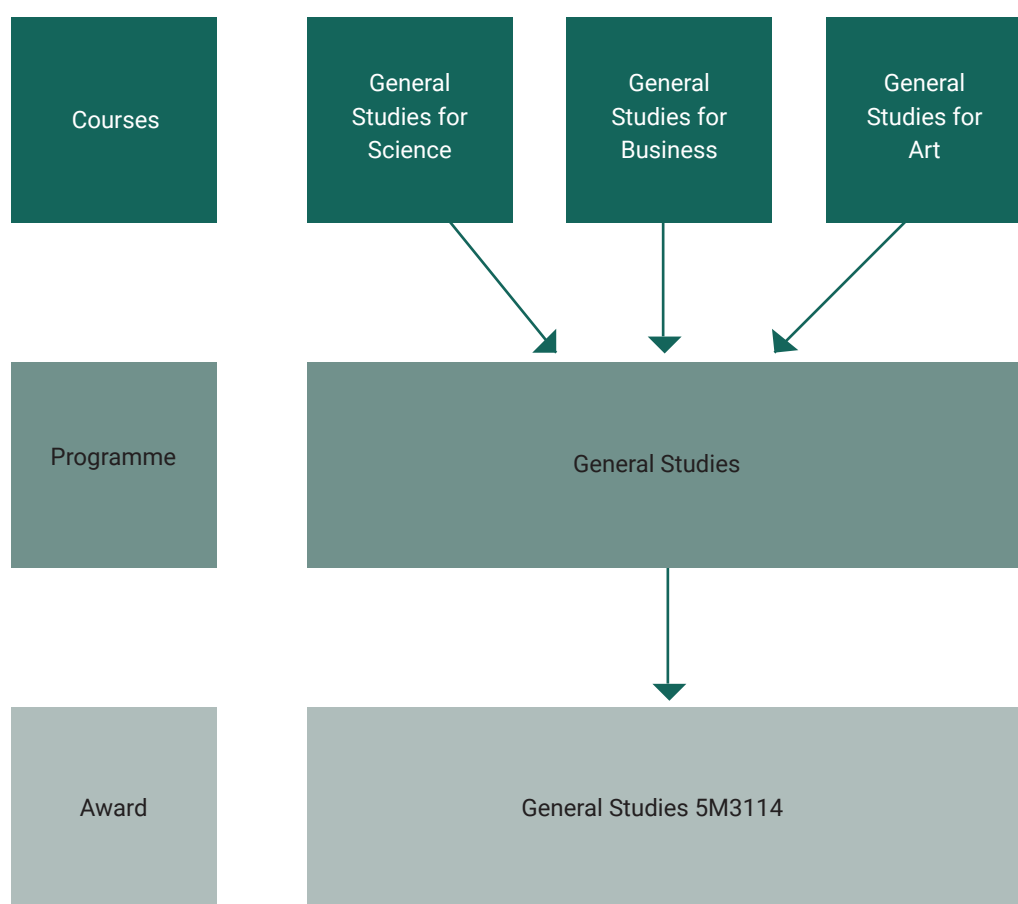
#### Programme Development

DDLETB is committed to the delivery of courses and programmes which are relevant to the needs of its learners, the community and the wider society. This may include provision of courses leading to existing programmes, or the development of new programmes leading to new or existing awards.

The term 'programme' is being used here in the context of validation, to refer to the document which has been validated by QQI, in order to lead to a specific award. The programme describes the manner in which the learner will achieve that award (e.g. teaching strategies, access, transfer and progression requirements and opportunities etc.). The term 'curriculum' refers to the programme learning outcomes and their assessment. The term 'course' refers to a specific iteration of that programme in a given location. Thus, DDLETB may run various courses, all offering different instances of the same programme, leading to the one award.

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#### Courses, Programmes and Awards



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All programmes leading to Common Awards Standards (CAS) are developed in line with Award Specifications (in the case of major and special purpose awards) or Component Specifications (in the case of minor awards), which have been published by QQI. These specify the learning outcomes which the learner is expected to achieve for a given award. For non-CAS awards, the learning outcomes, articulated as Minimum Intended Programme Learning Outcomes (MIPLOs) and Minimum Intended Module Learning Outcomes (MIMLOs) will be developed and approved as part of the validation process. For the development of non-CAS professional awards, such as is the case for apprenticeships and the new Early Learning and Care awards, the MIPLOs and MIMLOs are developed to be consistent with the broad standards outlined in the relevant Professional Award Type Descriptor.

In 2016, QQI published new *Policy and Criteria for the Validation of Programmes of Education and Training (2016)*, opening up the prospect of the development of new or updated programmes. When its new QA governance system was being developed, therefore, DDLETB decided to include procedures to oversee the quality assured development of programmes.

### **Governance of Programme Development**

A process has been established to provide governance oversight of programme development, and ensure that all QQI validation policies and criteria have been met (see illustration below).

According to this process:

- > Any centre wishing to propose development of a programme must apply to the **Programmes Committee**. The application to develop a new programme must outline the ways in which the proposed programme will meet the ETB's strategic goals, local and regional needs and present a business case for its development.
- > A **Programme Development Working Group (PDWG)**, consisting of subject matter experts and a curriculum development expert, is appointed, and development commences. As part of the development process, the PDWG must undertake research on national/international best practice, and consult with learners, practitioners and external experts to ensure that the new programme reflects cutting edge knowledge and skills for that field.
- > Once developed, the programme is **self-evaluated** to ensure that all validation criteria, such as learning outcomes; access, transfer and progression opportunities; learner workload etc. are addressed, and that it is compliant with relevant regulatory or professional bodies. For full details, see QQI's Policy and Criteria for the Validation of Programmes of Education and Training (2016).

### **Programme Approval**

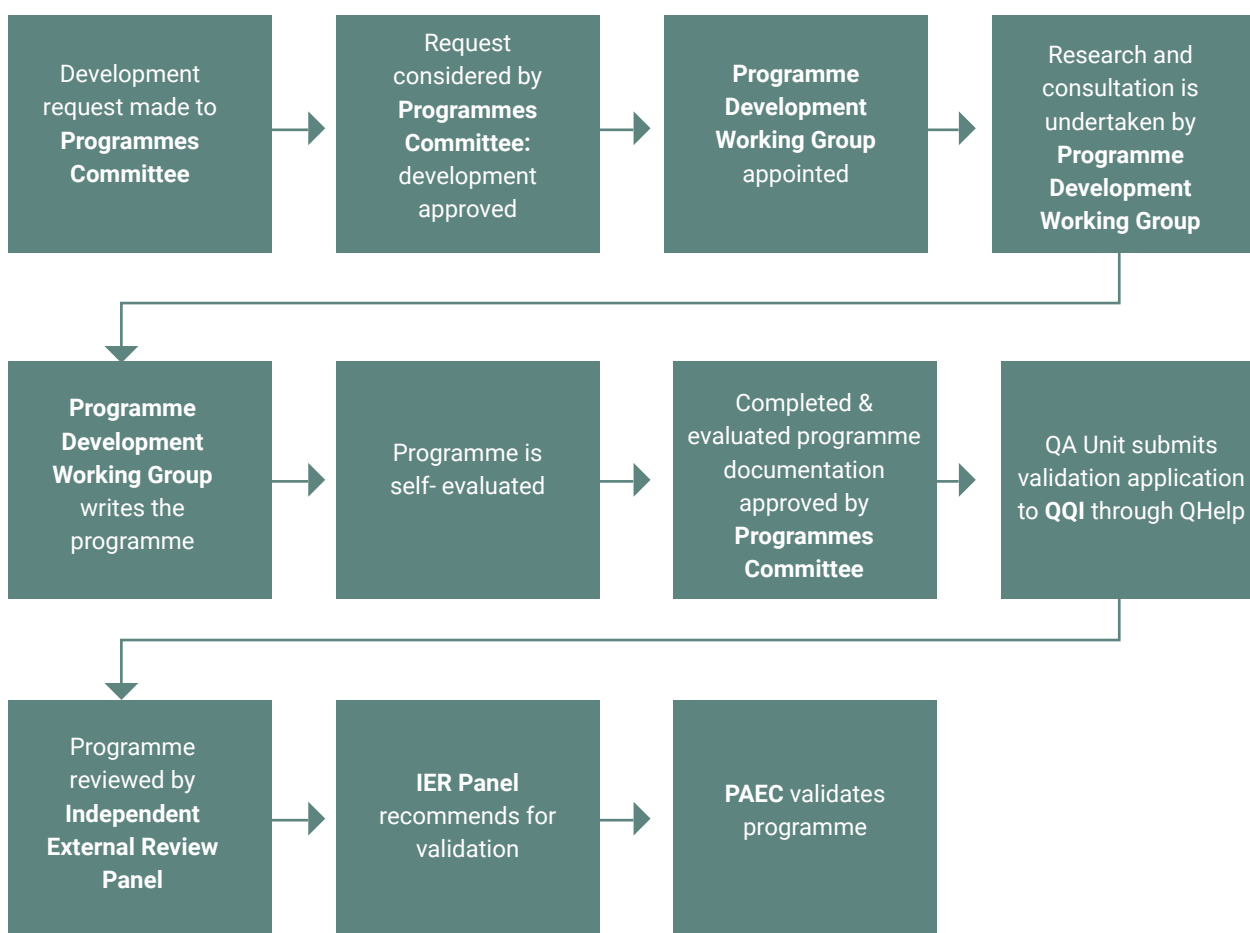
- > Thereafter, the **Programmes Committee** reviews the programme documentation to ensure that all QA procedures were followed. Once they are satisfied that all procedures have been met, and the programme reflects best practice in that field, they approve it for submission to QQI for validation. The QA Unit submits it to QQI through the QHelp portal to apply for validation.

- > QQI engage an Independent External Review (IER) Panel, to review the validation application, and to ensure that the programme and its curriculum meet the criteria outlined in QQI's validation policy.

### Programme Submission for Validation

- > Once the IER panel is satisfied with the programme, they recommend it to QQI for validation, and it is validated by QQI at the next meeting of its Programmes and Awards Executive Committee (PAEC).

### Procedures to ensure governance oversight of programme development



### DDLETB Programme Development Projects

Since the development of these procedures, DDLETB has engaged in two separate programme development projects using the new QQI validation policy and criteria, and its accompanying programme and module descriptor templates, and is currently engaged in co-validating several more programmes with SOLAS and other ETBs.

- > In 2019, a new programme leading to a minor award at **Level 6 in Garden and Parks Supervision** was developed and validated.



- > In 2020-2021, DDLETB led on the national development of two programmes leading to new major awards **at Levels 5 and 6**, in **Early Learning and Care**, on behalf of all 16 ETBs. See details in Case Study 6.
- > DDLETB is currently co-validating a Level 4 programme in Sustainability Awareness and two Level 3 modules intended for Family Learning initiatives.

## CASE STUDY 6: Shared Curriculum Development Project for Early Learning and Care

After a year-long shared development process, agreed by QQI and led by DDLETB on behalf of, and with the support of the 16 ETBs, two new Early Learning and Care programmes were validated by QQI in July 2021. These are the two-stage *Advanced Certificate in Early Learning and Care* and the stand-alone *Level 5 Certificate in Early Learning and Care*, leading to new QQI non-CAS professional awards. The new programmes reflect current best practice for the Irish Early Learning and Care sector.



Work started in September 2020 with nine writers from seven ETBs, on the planning, research, and writing of the shared curriculum for these programmes, with the invaluable support of the Further Education Support Service (FESS). The process involved consultation with over 300 respondents, both individuals and groups. This included ETB teachers, early learning and care practitioners, Higher Education representatives, parents and children. In addition to the shared curriculum, a suite of associated resources to support teachers, learners and professional practice placement supervisors were developed. These included the *Professional Practice Placement Handbook*, a *Professional Practice Placement Policy*, an *RPL toolkit*, and a *Sample Assessment Booklet*.

The shared curriculum and associated resources received very positive feedback from the validation panel, with panel members commenting that the materials were ‘excellent’ and ‘a joy to read’<sup>45</sup>, and that the process was an exemplar for programme development.

<sup>45</sup> Verbal feedback received from the External Validation Panel.

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## Collaborative Programme Development and Review

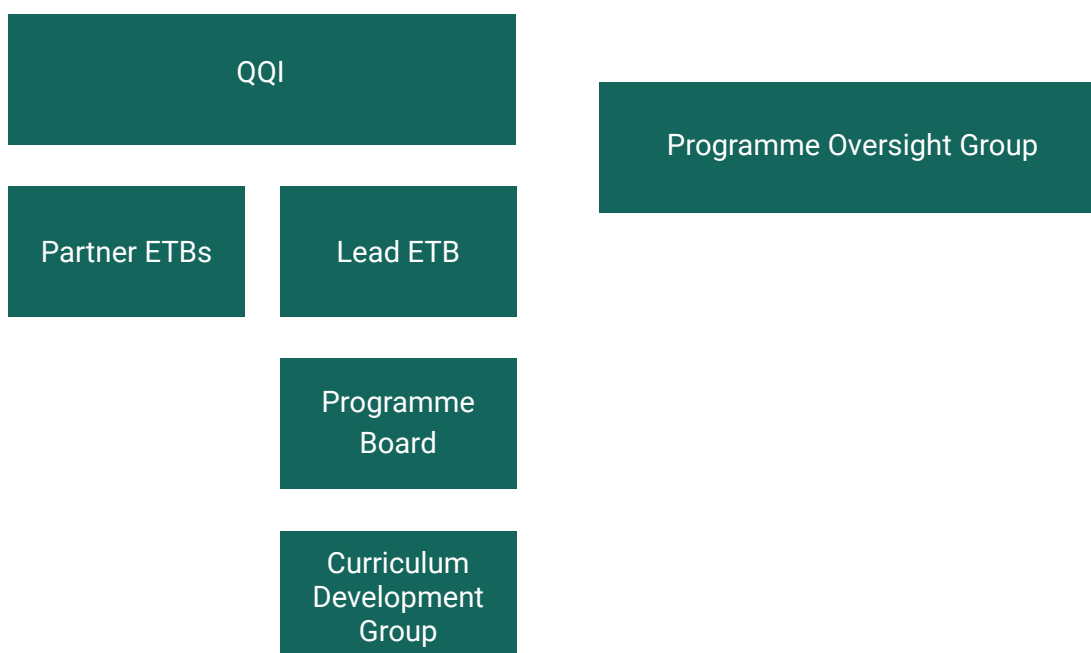
DDLETB led on the development of the two programmes in Early Learning and Care (ELC) (described above) as part of a pilot project on behalf of the 16 ETBs to explore a sustainable model of shared curriculum development and review<sup>46</sup>. This involved DDLETB leading the development of the shareable curriculum and applying for validation of that shareable curriculum, while the 15 other ETBs applied for differential validation.

The pilot project necessitated the design of governance systems to oversee the development and validation of the shareable curriculum, as well as the management of the shareable curriculum following validation. As part of this project, the ETB devised procedures to oversee the external evaluation of the programme documentation—an essential first step in moving towards ‘Devolved Responsibility’. Devolved Responsibility means that QQI gives the provider responsibility for conducting the external evaluation of the programme rather than undertaking it themselves. Following evaluation of this pilot, DDLETB will be engaging with QQI to explore the next steps towards Devolved Responsibility.

The significant features of the governance system for this programme development were the Programme Oversight Group, consisting of the Directors of FET for the 16 ETBs, which had oversight over the pilot project, and the ELC Programme Board which had oversight of the curriculum development and validation processes.

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### ELC development governance system



Following validation, the Programme Board, (consisting of subject matter experts, industry representatives, Higher Education and regulatory representatives) took on the role of ‘Custodian of the Curriculum’, to ensure that it would be regularly reviewed and remain up-to-date and fit-for-

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<sup>46</sup> “ETB pilot project to support and inform programme development and review, shared curricula and devolved responsibility”.

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purpose into the future. Other parties in this governance model included the Curriculum Development Group, consisting of the Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) who wrote the curriculum, and the partner ETBs who supported the project by releasing SMEs to work on the project, and applied for differential validation.

This pilot project is currently being evaluated. The learning from this and other programme development will inform sectoral work within the ETBs for the future of apprenticeships as per the *Action Plan for Apprenticeships 2021-2025* (DFHERIS, 2021).

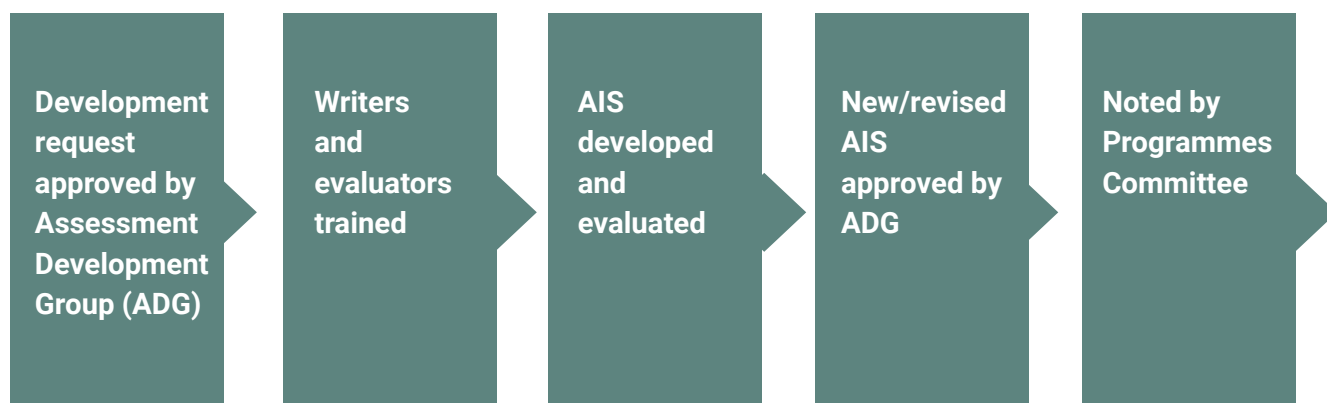
### **Development/Revision of Assessment Specifications**

Training centres use 'Assessment Instrument Specifications' (AISs) which were transferred from SOLAS to DDLETB and are used for the assessment of modules. These AISs are held centrally and used across all Training Centres to ensure consistency. They are updated as required<sup>47</sup> and governance procedures (click here to access) have been put into place for the revision of these specifications, and the development of new ones.

The Assessment Development Group (ADG) was formed to have oversight of the process; this is an example of a standing Programme Development Working group, comprising a member of the QA Unit and a management representative from each of the training centres. This group reports to the Programmes Committee. To date, 63 new or revised AISs have been developed and approved. The development procedure is outlined in the illustration below:

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#### **Assessment Instrument Specification Review and Development Process**



### **New course development**

In addition to developing new programmes for validation, DDLETB makes every effort to ensure that innovative new courses leading to existing programmes are continually updated to meet the needs of learners, employers, industry and all other external stakeholders.

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<sup>47</sup> SOLAS is the Coordinating Provider of the Standards Based Craft Apprenticeships, and as such is responsible for updating the curriculum, assessments and all documentation associated with those apprenticeships.

## Oversight of new course development

Centres ensure that proposed new courses are developed to meet labour market and community needs. Evidence of the research for this planning is submitted to the Course Approval Committee (CAC) as part of the new course approval application process. The CAC met four times in 2021 to approve new course provision and a total of 45 new courses were approved, a selection of which are outlined in Table 4.11.

**Table 4.11: A selection of innovative new courses approved in 2021**

Course title	Qualification
Sustainability and The Built Environment	Level 5: 5M5010 Construction Technology
EC-Council Certified Ethical Hacker	EC-Council Certified Ethical Hacker (Exam 312-50)
Microsoft Azure	Microsoft Azure Fundamentals Certification (AZ-900)
Activities of Living Patient Care	Level 5: 5N3707 Activities of Living Patient Care
Fasttrack to Information Technology (FIT) – Pre-Apprenticeship	City & Guilds 7540-12/13
Physical Education (PE) & Inclusive Education	Level 5: 5M5146 Sports, Recreation and Exercise
CILEX (The Chartered Institute of Legal Executives) Professional Qualification (CPQ)	CILEX Professional Qualification (CPQ) The chartered Institute of Legal Executives
Certificate in Facilities Services Principles	Level 2: Institute of Workplace and Facilities Management (IWFM)
Retail Sales Training – Chemist Warehouse Ireland	Level 4: 4N1183 Retail Sales Techniques; 4N1185 Retail Payment Procedures; 4N1989 Customer Service; 4N1169 Team Working
Podcasting and Presenting for Digital Media	Level 5: 5M18518 Media Production
Bicycle Mechanic & Electric Bike Technician	City & Guilds – 3902
Certificate in Leadership and Management	Level 4 Institute of Leadership and Management
Pre-University UX/UI Design (UXD)(User Experience/User Interface Design)	Level 5: 5M5048 Creative Media
PCAP & PCPP Python Programming	Python Institute PCAP & PCPP1
Level 2 Award in Awareness of Dementia & Certificate in Dementia Care	City & Guilds 3565
Retrofitting Traineeship	City & Guilds 6713, 6708, 6165, 6574

## 4.5.2 Evaluation

### **Programme Development**

DDLETB has engaged in new programme development of major and minor awards, both collaboratively and on its own behalf. Documentation is available for centres to request the development of new programmes and Assessment Instrument Specifications and should be included in the updated QA Manual.

### **Stakeholder Consultation in Course Design**

Centres undertake regular reviews to ensure that the courses they offer (and the programmes delivered on those courses) remain relevant to local needs. As part of the preparation for this self-evaluation, centres were surveyed to find out how they undertook that review. Responses included monitoring national data including from the Skills and Labour Market Research Unit (SLMRU) and OECD. In addition, centres engaged with a variety of stakeholders, as outlined in Table 4.12 below.

**Table 4.12 Stakeholders consulted in course review and design**

Employers
Chambers of Commerce
Department of Social Protection (DSP)
Local authorities
Regulatory bodies (e.g. Road Safety Authority (RSA), Private Security Authority (PSA), Commissioners for Energy Regulation)
Representative bodies (e.g. Construction Industry Federation (CIF), Connect Electrical Trade Union)
Local community partners and agencies
Learners
Local schools
Feedback from awarding bodies such as ITEC (International Therapy Examination Council).

This commitment to ensuring that employers' needs are met, and that they are included in the development of new programmes was corroborated by employers who, when surveyed, commented:



*“DDLETB have offered to organise tailored courses to meet our needs in any way, shape and form,”*

and

*“The DDLETB contact is always asking us, ‘What do you need, what do you want’, and he’ll go and look into it.”*

Case Studies 7 and 8 provide an example of an innovative new initiative developed in collaboration with an employer.

## CASE STUDY 7: Microsoft Data Center Academy Programme

In 2019, Microsoft partnered with DDLETB and Collen Construction to develop a Data Center Academy Programme. Together with a dual provision school which is located in an area bordering on the unemployment blackspot of Clondalkin-Rowlagh, they created a 5-rack, fully functional, mini-scale data center. As a local employer, Microsoft called this:

“a workforce development program that aims to create a diverse and localized talent pool of skilled, technical workers in the communities in which we operate data centers.” (Microsoft)

In collaboration with the college, Microsoft donated decommissioned hardware and network devices to facilitate hands-on learning, and a datacenter-oriented curriculum was designed as a traineeship with five pillars: Hardware, Curriculum, Mentorship and Work Experience. Trainees can achieve CompTIA A+, CompTIA Server+ and QQI certification at level 5 and 6.

To date, on completion of the course, graduates have gained paid internships and full-time employment in companies such as Microsoft, and other IT companies.

This data centre lab which has been established in DDLETB's college is the first Microsoft supported lab built outside the US. This EU project has since expanded to the Netherlands, Sweden and Spain and the DC Academy in Clondalkin is now part of the European Datacenter Academy Partners currently numbering seven DC Academies and still growing!



## CASE STUDY 8: Leadership Training for the Hospice Care Sector

One of DDLETB's training centres saw the opportunity during lockdown to expand training for Hospice and Healthcare sector employees, by moving to online delivery.

The Head of Human Resources in Our Lady's Hospice & Care Services acknowledged the Training Centre's clear commitment to developing healthcare leaders for the future through the QQI Level 6 Team Leadership programme, despite the constraints of lockdown.



*"Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, [the] Training Centre continued to deliver the programmes they promised to deliver. Our staff received high quality, needs-driven training by subject experts in the fields of healthcare and management."*

The first leadership programme was delivered to 15 employees onsite in Harold's Cross Hospice, During lockdown, the course moved online. This opened up the opportunity for employees from other health and hospice settings to access this training offer.

A total of 92 employees from workplaces all over the region completed the second leadership programme under Skills to Advance; the Level 6 Team Leadership modules are currently being delivered to another 47 employees in the sector, with a further 50 due to commence QQI Level 6 in Project Management and Train the Trainer courses. The Training Centre is further planning to deliver Supervisory Management, Activities of Daily Living Care and a non-clinical Traineeship for the hospice.

*Click here to read about one learner who completed the Healthcare traineeship to become a frontline worker during the COVID-19 pandemic. Her story has been identified as a best-practice example for the European Pillar of Social Rights to show how EU-funded social projects are changing people's lives.*



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### 4.5.3 Programme Development: Effective Practice Identified

- > DDLETB has substantial expertise in programme development, both of minor awards, and latterly of major awards with the development of the Early Learning and Care programmes.
- > Staff members have undertaken the Postgraduate Certificate in Programme Design & Validation in Further Education & Training from NUI Maynooth. This will build capacity to develop new programmes to address cutting edge advances in industry and reflect best practice teaching, learning and assessment.
- > There are robust procedures in place to ensure oversight of new programme development and delivery.
- > There is significant experience of collaborative programme development with other ETBs and employers, to meet local needs and national priorities.
- > When surveyed, centres indicated that they engaged with a wide range of stakeholders to ensure that the courses they offer are relevant to local needs. This is evidenced in the number of new courses approved in 2021, in response to these needs.
- > There are quality assured processes in place to ensure that programmes, modules and Assessment Instrument Specifications can be reviewed and amended within QQI's parameters.

### 4.5.4 Programme Development: Areas for Improvement

- > Most of the QQI Common Award Standards (CAS) awards need to be updated, and DDLETB will need to respond to those changes to ensure programmes continue to be relevant and up to date.
- > While DDLETB has developed governance and quality assured procedures for programme development and review, it was noted in the surveys that these processes could be more agile.
- > Following the experience of Emergency Remote Teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic, there is an increased interest in validating programmes for blended learning. DDLETB will continue to engage with QQI at national level to develop a Blended Learning Policy and approach.
- > DDLETB has developed significant curriculum expertise but this needs to be enhanced to support the level of future programme development.
- > DDLETB will evaluate the collaborative validation pilot and agree on next steps.



## 4.5.5 Conclusion

The QQI Core QA Guidelines ask that governance structures are in place for the oversight of programme development, and that programmes are designed with the involvement of learners and other stakeholders. The review provides good evidence that stakeholder consultation is occurring and that the governance systems for programme development are also in place and operational.

Centres are using the available procedures as much as possible to ensure that programmes remain up-to-date and relevant to their stakeholders needs. Issues remain, in relation to the scale of programme development and review that is required in order to update programmes and the staffing levels that would be required to achieve this review. The demand for blended learning and the need to convert programmes for delivery using this delivery mode will increase pressure in this area. Discussions have commenced with QQI to explore a sustainable approach to converting programmes to a blended mode, and this avenue warrants further consideration.

### **Potential Future Enhancements:**

- > Explore options to enable efficient programme development and review, ensuring content is up to date and in line with industry requirements.
- > Continue to work with QQI to explore a model to convert existing programmes to a blended mode of delivery with development of appropriate policies.
- > Evaluate the Collaborative Validation pilot (“ETB pilot project to support and inform programme development and review, shared curricula and devolved responsibility”) and consider next steps.

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## 4.6 Access, Transfer and Progression

### The Policy Context

QQI's *Policy and criteria for access, transfer and progression in relation to learners for providers of further and higher education and training* (2015) seeks to ensure that there are fair and consistent entry arrangements in place for learners, that there is a network of transfer and progression routes available to learners, and that accurate and reliable information is available regarding access, transfer and progression opportunities.

#### 4.6.1 The Current Context

##### **Access and Admissions Procedures**

The DDLETB *Statement of Strategy 2017-2021*, identifies 'Equality' as one of its core values. To this end, and to support fair access procedures for learners, one of the very first collaborative pieces of work undertaken following the amalgamation of the three legacy organisations, was the development of an equality-proofed Admissions Policy, in a project supported by the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission. The policy seeks to ensure that all learners who apply for, or are referred on to, a course in DDLETB, are treated with dignity and respect as outlined in the Equal Status Acts of 2000-2018.<sup>48</sup> DDLETB is committed to ensuring that these principles apply at every stage of a learner's engagement, from the time they first enquire about a course, to when they complete the course and progress on to the next stage of their journey.

##### **Accessing FET Courses**

Potential learners can access FET courses directly from centres or through the online *Further Education and Training Course Hub*. They can also be referred to courses by the Department of Social Protection (DSP) Intreo.

##### **The role of the Guidance, Information and Recruitment Services**

When applying directly, learners may be supported by the various FET Guidance, Information and Recruitment services.

By providing access to a quality, free, impartial, confidential and professional guidance counselling service, the Adult Education Guidance and Information Services (AEGIS) plays a critical role in supporting learners in the community to access courses in the Further Education and Training services. In line with the DDLETB admissions policy, the Information Service (part of AEGIS) provides information on education, careers, skills, the job market and plays a key role in supporting a diverse range of learners to access FET opportunities.

Recruitment Services also play an important role in supporting learners to access FET courses, particularly in the training centres, where they also organise social media campaigns, information days with DEASP, and promotional videos.

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<sup>48</sup> According to the Equal Status Acts of 2000-2018, the nine grounds under which discrimination is prohibited are race, gender, disability, religion, age, sexual orientation, civil status, family status or membership of the Traveller community.

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Finally, the Guidance Counsellor or Course Coordinators in Further Education Colleges and schools support learners to apply for courses within the centres.

### **Further Education and Training Course Hub**

Learners may also access courses through the *Further Education and Training Course Hub* (FETCH). This is a website providing details of FET courses delivered in ETBs in Ireland; learners can find courses and register for them through that website, or else they can engage directly with a centre and be supported to register on the FETCH site when they engage directly with a centre. See Case Study 9 for details of how learners can be supported through the online registration process.

## **CASE STUDY 9: Supporting learners through registration and induction**

The COVID-19 lockdown was problematic for certain groups of learners who did not necessarily have the language or literacy skills to register by themselves on the FETCH website. To address these challenges, one of the Adult Education Services piloted longer induction sessions for ESOL learners during the lockdown, which allowed ESOL recruitment to continue. In this pilot project, a tutor worked with a small learner group over 3-4 sessions, to help them register on FETCH, assess their levels, set them up on Google Classrooms and demonstrate its use. Once ready, the learners were moved into a class at the appropriate level to commence work with their regular tutor.

In this way, these learners were supported to navigate a potential barrier to participation, and successfully engage with their chosen course.

### ***Supporting Successful Participation in FET Courses***

All FET courses are delivered by professionals who are committed to the successful participation of learners. They provide encouragement and feedback aimed at supporting active participation throughout the programme. Where there are particular issues such as in relation to attendance or participation etc., students are referred to the course co-ordinators/programme managers who try to identify issues of concern and further encourage participation (see Case Study 10 for an example of how learners may be supported). Learners who experience significant obstacles to participation are referred where possible to guidance counsellors or to the DDLETB Psychological Support Services as appropriate.

## CASE STUDY 10: Student Liaison Officer

One of the Adult Education Services has created a pilot role of 'Student Liaison Officer', whose responsibility is to create a learning environment where the participants can realise their full potential while engaging in their course.

The role of the Student Liaison Officer is to:

- > Support students in disclosing learning difficulties and sensitive information and providing information on reasonable accommodation if they wish to avail of it.
- > Build and maintain positive relationships between AES staff and students by delivering clear information sessions at regular intervals throughout the programme and ensuring students understand the code of conduct, disciplinary, grievance procedures etc.
- > Agree personal learning goals/objectives with learners.
- > Share learning goals with the Programme Coordinator/tutor so that they understand what is important to each learner in their group.
- > Liaise with students about their progression.
- > Make existing facilities accessible to learners such as access to WI-FI and laptops and provide IT support.

All certified programmes have published access requirements/target learner profiles for the programme, but additional supports may be needed to ensure that learners are placed in the right course for them and have the capacity to succeed. For example:

- > Adult Education Services undertake a **Key Skills Assessment** to assess a learner's literacy, numeracy, digital skills, and need for ESOL support.
- > Further education centres typically conduct interviews or advisory meetings, which serve the dual function of informing learners about the course and ensuring that they have the capacity to participate successfully in the courses.
- > Youthreach learners are assessed for their literacy and numeracy skills, which informs the level on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) at which they will engage.
- > In Training Centres, learners may be referred on to a specific course by the DSP, or may self-refer, and a screening process identifies the need for reasonable accommodations. Support for apprentices is also available, as described in Case Study 32.

## Retention of learners

The initiatives outlined above to support learners' successful participation have been very successful, as is evidenced in the course retention rates. The retention rate in both 2019 and 2020 was 91% overall.

## Recognition of Prior Learning

Recognition of prior learning (RPL) occurs when a learner applies for recognition of their former experiential or certified learning, either for access on to a course, or for certification purposes.

DDLETB does not as yet have a formal RPL policy which applies to all programme delivery, but an RPL policy specifically for the new Early Learning and Care programme (see Section 4.5.1 above) has been developed and the ETB has been piloting an RPL project with the Defence Forces. The learning from this project will inform future RPL policy development, and an RPL Committee is in place to further this work. See Case Study 11 for more information regarding this RPL project.

## CASE STUDY 11: Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL): the Tobar project



Between 2017 and 2020, DDLETB took part in *Tobar*, a national project in the Recognition of Prior Learning, involving the Defence Forces (DF) and ten ETBs. The aim of the project was to provide a pathway to potential certification for DF staff members who had extensive on-the-job learning and experience but no formal

accreditation for it. The project was supported by a DDLETB QA Officer and a local steering group. The Adult Education and Guidance Service provided essential support to the RPL applicants, as did the mentors who supported the applicants in preparing portfolios of evidence for assessment. Subject-matter experts assessed and graded the portfolios. The project provided a fertile learning ground to inform RPL policy and practice in DDLETB.

Three iterations of the project took place, with 18 DF staff achieving a total of 65 QQI minor awards between them.

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Currently, in DDLETB, experiential learning may be recognised for access for those learners who do not meet the published access requirements of a course, while some certified learning may be recognised for exemption purposes as approved by QQI. As the coordinating provider, SOLAS handles RPL for the off-the-job elements of the Standards Based Craft Apprenticeships.

### **Transfer and progression**

DDLETB supports learners to transfer and progress<sup>49</sup> on to other courses both internally within and across its own services, and externally, with other providers of education and training.

Again, the Adult Education Guidance and Information Service (AEGIS) as well as the Guidance Counsellors in FET Colleges/Schools play a key role in ensuring FET learners are aware of the transfer and progression options available to them in the DDLETB catchment area. AEGIS provides information on careers, skills and the job market while the guidance counsellors provide a high quality, free, impartial, confidential and professional service to FET learners which helps them to make an informed decision on their transfer and progression options on completion of their FET course. Community programmes (Specialist Training Providers and Community Training Centres) offer progression from NFQ Level 3 to 4, while career planning is embedded in training centre mainstream programmes.



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<sup>49</sup> Transfer refers to a learner moving on to a course at the same NFQ level to the one they are currently on, while progression refers to a learner moving on to a course at a higher NFQ level to the one they are currently on.

## CASE STUDY 12: Supporting English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) Learners to Access Healthcare Courses

One of the Further Education centres identified large numbers of ESOL students seeking access to courses in the Healthcare field, some of whom did not have the required level of English to pursue a qualification in Nursing Studies, Social Care and other Healthcare courses, or to work in the field following completion of their course.

Following consultation with the DDLETB Programmes Committee, the centre developed an ESOL course which included a QQI Level 4 Healthcare module. This course provides ESOL students with the knowledge, language and skills needed to participate successfully in a Healthcare programme at a higher level and thus to improve their job prospects. The QQI NFQ Level 4 Healthcare module serves as an introduction to the language of Healthcare with the focus on considering the different aspects of caring for a client. This focussed learning opens opportunities for ESOL students to progress to a Healthcare-related Level 5 programme.

On completion of this course, and having acquired the necessary language skills, learners have since progressed to QQI Level 5 courses in Nursing Studies and Medical Administration where they then acquired the required technical knowledge, skill and competence to work in the Healthcare sector.

Some instances of regional progression pathways across services exist, for example facilitating learners to progress from an NFQ Level 4 course in one service (e.g. Youthreach or Adult Education), to a Level 5 course in another service (e.g. a FE College or Training Centre). See Case Study 12 for an example of access and progression routes within a centre.

DDLETB gathers the self-declared progression outcomes within four weeks of a learner completing a course. Where known, the most common outcome is progression to another FET course, this was 61% in 2020. For sample purposes, DDLETB analysed all learners who finished courses associated with General Learning or Employability Skills at level 3 in 2017 to map their progression to another course within DDLETB. Of the sampled learners, 59% progressed to another FET course within DDLETB. For all sampled learners, over 50% progressed beyond NFQ Level 3 or to Industry Awards. With respect to progression to Higher Education, research conducted by a DDLETB College in 2021, found that 60% of learners who completed their course applied to the Central Applications Office (CAO) and 61% of those applicants accepted a CAO offer.

It is acknowledged that many learners will not have progressed into employment after four weeks of completing the course. However, longer term outcomes are being gathered by SOLAS in partnership with the Central Statistics Office (CSO), where information from PLSS is linked with other datasets including Revenue's P35 form, Department of Social Protection and the Higher Education Authority to establish the outcomes of the learner in terms of progression in education and/or gaining employment over time.

A number of Further Education centres have Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) in place with Higher Education Institutes (HEIs), to facilitate learners to progress into specific courses. Many centres provide details of progression opportunities on their websites or publish them in their brochures. See Case Study 13 for an example of how learners may be supported financially to progress into Higher Education.

### **CASE STUDY 13: South Dublin County Council / TU Dublin - Tallaght Access Scholarship**

Since 2015, the local Adult Guidance Service Guidance Co-ordinator has partnered with TUD (Tallaght) and South Dublin County Council to offer an Access Scholarship to a successful DDLETB Adult Education Student. The student must be registered and/or have applied via CAO to the first year of a Level 6, 7, or 8 of a full-time programme in TUD Tallaght, and have achieved a full QQI Level 4 or 5 Award. The scholarship amount is €2,500 in Year 1, and €2,500 on successful progression to Year 2. The maximum award is for two years.

This scholarship has provided DDLETB learners with a cushion from unexpected and unplanned expenses, allowing them to manage their finances and participate more fully in the life and community of university. This opportunity is significant in encouraging participation in DDLETB Adult Education Centre programmes and it is used effectively in driving attainment and encouraging retention among adult learners. It also helps address the concerns of some learners who feel they may not be able to finance their study.

The development of this bursary has been a collaborative approach with the students' well-being at the core of the process. To date, DDLETB and TUD Tallaght have afforded many adult learners this opportunity. All of the successful applicants have graduated in various disciplines, such as Business, Marketing Creative Media and Social Studies.

#### **Progression to Employment**

DDLETB aims to provide learners with the knowledge, skills and competence, to progress to employment, and achieve their goals. Case Study 14 is an example of how a learner progressed from a course into her dream job.





## CASE STUDY 14: Progressing into the Caring Professions

A learner from one of the Training Centres described the significance of the course she took, in helping her to understand the needs of those that she would go on to work with.



*"I signed up for the course of Intellectual Disability and Social Health Care. Our teacher ...had such knowledge of Intellectual Disability and Social Health Care, offering her ... expertise [based on her years of work] as a nurse for intellectual disability. The course content ...[reflected] her experience of the human being and their world. I do feel it is an education that could be offered [anyone who is] going to be part of a caring workforce in the future.*

*This training offers an insight to a world of vulnerability that a lot of us really are unaware of, [with] a depth of insight [on] the impact of confusion and fear [on] our elderly, people with disabilities, and additional needs. The teacher taught the ... course [emphasising] the dignity and respect a person so vulnerable deserves within their community, promoting the care services for independent living and how we can encourage independence through our role as a carer in our work and communities.*

*Never give up on learning, no matter how [difficult] it may seem."*

In line with the investment priorities set out in the ESF's *Programme for Employment, Inclusion and Learning (PEIL)*, DDLETB has a responsibility to focus on supports for the unemployed, and in particular on the long-term unemployed. A range of further training courses have been provided to meet this requirement including, for example, Specific Skills Training (SST), Traineeships and specific PLC courses designed with a labour market focus. **Skills to Compete** is an initiative which emerged in response to potential redundancies due to the COVID-19 pandemic and Brexit, and is intended to make up-skilling and re-skilling courses more attractive and accessible to potential learners.

According to the Evaluation of the Specific Skills Training report (SOLAS, 2020) published in February 2020, almost half of the learners who completed the Specific Skills Training programme had progressed to employment. The same report concluded that a large majority of employers (85%) stated that they agreed or strongly agreed that SST had helped to provide learners with employment. They also deemed there to be benefits in terms of boosting self-esteem, provision of formal qualifications and boosting entrepreneurial skills, amongst others.

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In the recent Evaluation of PLC Programme Provision (SOLAS, 2018), over one-third of leavers from PLC courses entered into employment. Since the report was published in 2018, many PLC courses in DDLETB have been designed specifically with a labour market focus across a wide variety of fields including Business, Software Programming and Accountancy. The partnerships between colleges and employers were identified as a strength in delivering courses which were designed to address skills gaps and changing labour market conditions.

In addition to supporting learners to progress into employment, learners are also supported to set up their own businesses, should that be their goal. Modules such as *Start Your Own Business*, and other business-oriented modules are available as part of many courses, and some learners can be provided with practical supports in setting up their businesses. Case Study 15 is an example of how learners were supported in setting up their own business.

### **CASE STUDY 15: Supporting Learner Entrepreneurship**

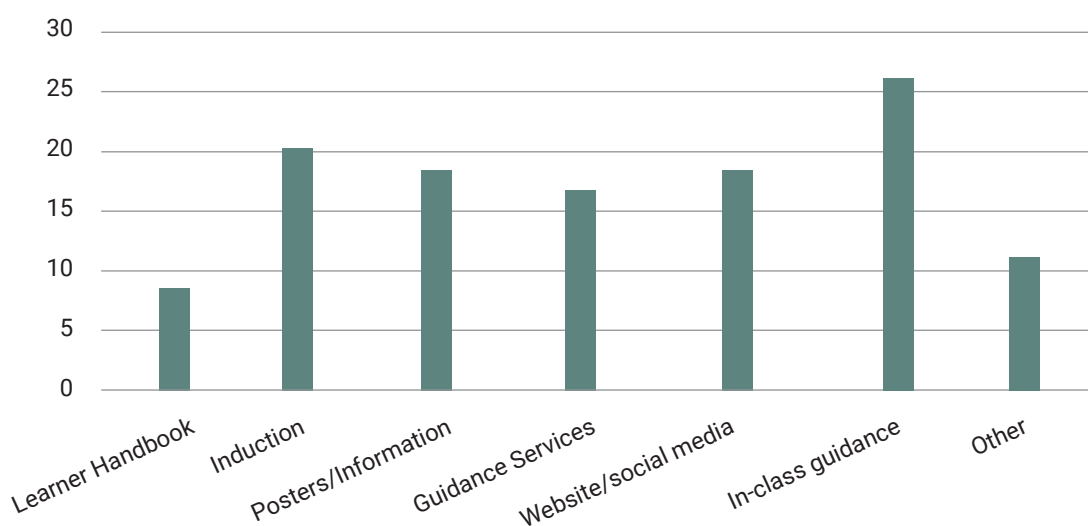
One of DDLETB's training centres has set up a 'Business Box', which offers entrepreneurially minded learners a space from which to work, should they wish to set up their own business. This is promoted to learners as part of the end-of-course feedback process. In one case, following successful completion of the Local National and Tour Guiding Programme, four learners formed a co-op and used the Business Box facility to market their services and to conduct their brainstorming sessions. They also availed of the printing service to print their flyers to advertise their Tour Guiding Business.



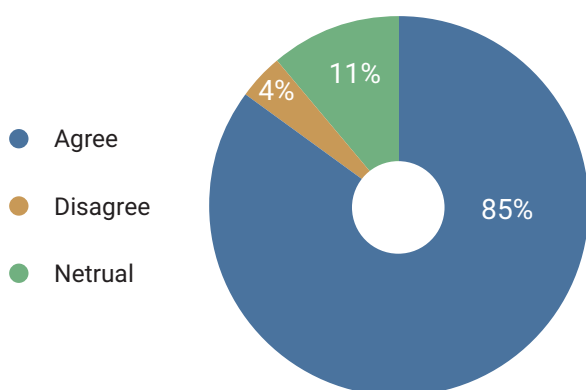
#### 4.6.2 Evaluation

Learners must be made aware of the Access, Transfer and Progression opportunities that are available to them. In the survey undertaken to prepare for this self-evaluation, centres reported that learners are informed about progression opportunities through a variety of means (see graph). The guidance services in FET colleges/schools and centres play an important role in facilitating learners to access information about transfer and progression opportunities. Where access to guidance and information services is limited, information is provided through in-class guidance, as indicated in this survey.

**Information on Transfer and Progression Opportunities (n=29)**



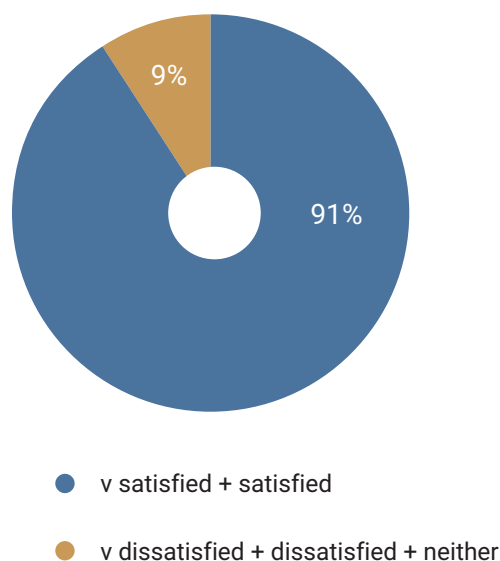
**My course prepared me well for the next steps in my career or education (n=845)**



In the AONTAS Learner Forum, it was noted that some learners had commented that more information regarding progression opportunities would be helpful. However, in the summer survey of 2021, 85% of learners agreed with the statement that the course had prepared them well for the next steps in their career or education (see chart). Nonetheless, consideration should be given to ensuring that progression opportunities are clearly communicated.

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#### Learner admissions and recruitment satisfaction rates (n=828)



The success of DDLETB’s admissions and recruitment procedures is evidenced by the fact that when surveyed, 91% of learners stated that they were very satisfied or satisfied with their experience of recruitment,<sup>50</sup> and induction (see chart). Furthermore, learners are accessing information about potential courses through a range of sources and being appropriately placed once they access the service. The appropriateness of learners’ placement is evidenced by the fact that 58% of learners achieved a distinction in 2020—above the national average of 53%.<sup>51</sup>

#### 4.6.3 Access, Transfer and Progression: Effective Practice Identified

- > DDLETB’s FET provision is flexible and includes full time, part time and online options to all learners. Access procedures are well-embedded, and they support learners who wish to engage in a programme of education and learning.
- > Supports for learners, including Guidance Counsellors, Recruitment Services and the Adult Education Guidance and Information Service, play a key role in ensuring that learners are supported to access FET courses that suit their needs. There are also considerable supports in place which enable transfer and progression to FE courses at the NFQ next level, Higher Education Institutions and employment.
- > DDLETB has been successful in RPL through its work on the *Tobar* pilot project. With the roll-out of an RPL policy for the new ELC programme, further valuable learning is being gained, which will inform the development of an ETB-wide RPL policy.
- > Information regarding transfer and progression opportunities are published in a variety of sources such as the Internet, course brochures and learner handbooks, and learners are further supported in identifying progression opportunities by the guidance services where these are available.

#### 4.6.4 Access, Transfer and Progression: Areas for Improvement

- > The equality-proofed Admissions policy is in place but is now due to be reviewed.
- > In the staff survey, several centres requested a common DDLETB-wide approach to developing a learner handbook, with a common approach to providing information regarding access, transfer and progression opportunities. Given the vital importance of

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<sup>50</sup> AONTAS Learner Survey, 2021.

<sup>51</sup> Comparison of QQI report of DDLETB certification data with Annual Analysis of Awards made by QQI 2020,

providing consistent, clear information to learners, a DDLETB-wide learner handbook could be considered.

- > The development of clear, access, transfer and progression pathways are a key priority for DDLETB to ensure clear information for learners.
- > Utilising Programme Learner Support System (PLSS) data and support systems to gather verifiable data with respect to access transfer and progression, is an area that requires further consideration. This work will be supported by SOLAS' partnership with the CSO to establish the outcomes of the learner in terms of progressing in education and/or gaining employment over time.

## 4.6.5 Conclusion

The QQI *Policy and criteria for access, transfer and progression in relation to learners for providers of further and higher education and training (2015)*, states that entry arrangements should be clear, fair and transparent. Furthermore, learners and prospective learners should receive comprehensive information on the possibilities for access, transfer and progression in a clear, straightforward and consistent manner.

This review has shown that an equality-proofed Admissions Policy exists, but that it needs to be reviewed as part of the development of an overall Access Transfer and Progression Policy. However, despite the need to review the Admissions Policy, evidence shows that learners are being appropriately placed onto their course, as evidenced in the high levels of achievement in learner certification as outlined in Section 4.1 and the high retention rates outlined above.

Information regarding transfer and progression opportunities into further/higher education are available, but not communicated consistently across all the services, possibly due to the inconsistent availability of guidance across the services once learners are placed on their course. DDLETB's engagement in the various "Skills" initiatives supports progression into employment, although the reporting on rates of progression from FE to HE or employment is inconsistent, as currently FET services lack the capacity to follow up on all FET learners who have completed their course and progressed to HE or to employment. Finally, it will be important to support progression pathways to foster inclusion, develop skills and progress learners.

### **Potential Future Enhancements:**

- > Develop an Access, Transfer and Progression Policy to include review of equality-proofed Admissions policy and handbook, and RPL.
- > Communicate clear access transfer and progression pathways in order to support learners to engage with FET and then progress to work, further education and training or higher education.
- > Enhance the system to gather learner data on progression, while supporting SOLAS in their national project undertaken in partnership with the CSO, to establish learner outcomes in terms of progression in education and to employment.

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## 4.7 Integrity and Approval of Learner Results

### 4.7.1 The Current Context

DDLETB is committed to ensuring the integrity of learner results, and has developed quality assured governance procedures to ensure that integrity.

#### Centre-Level Governance Procedures

DDLETB takes the authenticity of learner evidence extremely seriously. In order to ensure that learners understand the importance of academic integrity, they are informed about their responsibilities in this regard in a manner which is appropriate to their course, and the NFQ level at which they are studying. This typically happens at induction or another appropriate point in the course. All learners must include a statement of authenticity when submitting their assignments, and in addition, many centres use software applications such as *Turnitin* or *Urkundt* to check for evidence of plagiarism.

At centre level, following the submission of learners' assessments, the integrity of learner results is assured through verification, authentication and approval procedures, and these procedures additionally provide valuable feedback to the governance systems, centres and staff, as part of the cycle of continuous improvement to which DDLETB is committed.

In order to support these procedures, new common Internal Verification Guidelines, External Authentication Guidelines and Results Approval Panel Guidelines were developed for use across all services (see Section 4.3.1 above), and a suite of videos was developed to support centres in the use of the new documentation. These were launched in March 2020, but due to the abruptness of the first COVID-19 lockdown, they were only implemented widely in the summer assessments of 2021.

#### Internal Verification (IV)

The purpose of the IV processes is to ensure that:

- > assessment procedures have been applied consistently across all assessment activities
- > learning has been assessed using the techniques and instruments as indicated in the validated programme
- > assessment results are documented and recorded as per DDLETB procedures
- > assessment results are computed and transferred accurately.

Consistency in the IV processes across the ETB is ensured through the use of the common documentation which has been developed (see Section 4.3.1 above), and the training provided by the QA Unit for those undertaking the IV process.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Note: Apprenticeships are governed by the QA arrangements of the relevant coordinating provider, and therefore do not follow DDLETB procedures for IV, EA or Results Approval.

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There are, however, some variations as to **who** undertakes the IV processes, as dictated by staffing implications. The IV process could thus variously be undertaken by centre QA staff, centre managers/deputies or teaching staff. In the case of contracted training providers, community training centres, local training initiatives and specialist training providers, the IV process is undertaken by the local staff, and monitored by training centre staff.

In many cases, the IV process takes place immediately before the external authentication, but in some instances, a 'pre-IV' takes place earlier, in order to address any missing documentation etc. as early as possible. See Case Study 16 for an example of how the IV process can be embedded throughout the entire duration of a course.

### **CASE STUDY 16: Internal Verification as a Supportive Relationship**

A DDLETB FE college has promoted the concept of the Internal Verification process as an on-going, supportive relationship between teacher and Internal Verifier. Teachers are given their IV partner at the beginning of the academic year. They are encouraged to link with their partner throughout the year to support each other in compiling, storing and sorting documents and evidence required for the IV process. These relationships are supported by the QA Unit through CPD, infographics and videos which explain how to complete IV in a supportive manner. The local QA team lead is also available throughout the year to meet with IV partners to discuss any queries or questions that may arise. The IV partnership comes to a close in early May, when both partners complete each other's IV using the online forms and storage system developed by the QA team in anticipation of the arrival of the external authenticator. Feedback from the IV process goes back to the coordinators, and this is used to complete documentation for the EA.

This approach exemplifies the concept of the Internal Verifier as a 'critical friend', and is evidence that the principles of Internal Verification—the commitment to ensuring that all assessment procedures are followed—can be embedded throughout the duration of the course rather than being simply a task to be completed before the arrival of the External Authenticator.

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## **External Authentication(EA)**

### **Frequency**

The purpose of the external authentication process for QQI awards is to provide independent confirmation of fair and consistent assessment of learners in line with QQI requirements to ensure the consistency of assessment results with national standards. Centres must ensure that individual modules are authenticated at least every two years, while some element of each major/special purpose/supplemental award is externally authenticated at least once per annum.

### **EA Panel**

DDLETB has a panel of approved External Authenticators (EAs) from which centres may select an EA with the appropriate subject matter expertise to authenticate their learners' portfolios of assessment.

This External Authentication (EA) panel also has a sub-panel of EAs for the Youthreach service who work with the Regional Coordinator and QA Unit to further enhance capacity in that service over time. This panel has been in place for a year and has already given rise to several highly successful quality enhancement initiatives such as the Youthreach QA Coordinators' Community of Practice. A similar panel of EAs with childcare expertise has been identified to support the roll-out of the new Early Learning and Care programme.

### **External Authentication of Apprenticeships**

External authentication for the 2016+ apprenticeships is managed by the relevant Coordinating Provider. As the Coordinating Provider, SOLAS manage the EA process for the Craft Apprenticeships. They select the groups to be externally authenticated in a given assessment cycle. Once external authentication has occurred, SOLAS receive the report, the Training Standards Officer is given an opportunity to comment, and if no issues arise, the report is approved by the SOLAS Quality Manager, and a final copy returned to the Training Centre. All apprenticeship courses are considered at the Training Centre RAP.

For non-QQI awards, external examining/authentication is managed where appropriate according to the QA guidelines of that awarding body.





### Supporting remote authentication

In order to ensure the quality assured move to remote authentication during COVID-19, digital file management training for the authentication process was delivered in a collaborative project between the Digital Team, the IT Department and the QA unit.

- > **9** training sessions and **3** support clinics took place over a three-week period in April 2021
- > **203** FET educators /practitioners attended training
- > **23** FET managers / QA Coordinators attended a clinic to support oversight requirements for accessing digital learner evidence during the entire authentication process including learner appeals
- > **116** EAs attended training in 2 different workshops

### COVID-19 Amendments to the IV and EA Processes

The move to Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT) due to the COVID-19 lockdowns necessitated a parallel move for verification and authentication processes. In order to ensure that the ETB could continue to stand over the integrity of all learner results, the QA Unit developed Contingency Guidelines, including ones for conducting remote IV and EA processes. These were approved by the Quality Council and distributed to centres. Additionally, the QA Unit, in conjunction with the Digital Learning Team, developed training for staff around the storage of digital assessment material, and provided similar training for EAs. In this way, verification and authentication still occurred and the ETB was able to stand over the integrity of learner results, despite the considerable disruption caused by COVID-19.

### Results Approval Panel (RAP)

The purpose of the RAP, which usually consists of the centre manager, QA staff and other relevant staff, is to consider the findings of Internal Verification and External Authentication reports. This allows the centre, and through them the ETB, to stand over the integrity of learner results, approve those results, and identify existing good practice and areas for future improvement.

As this is an essential governance function, the QA Unit organised a 'RAP Conference' in March 2020, to support centres in understanding that governance responsibility. This training was instrumental in the success of DDLETB's move to remote verification and authentication. For more information, see Case Study 3 in Section 4.2.1 above.

### QQI Certification in 2021

**Major awards: 1,789**  
**Minor awards: 8,144**  
**Special purpose awards 57**

**Results EAd: 8,830**  
**Appeals: 68**  
**Successful appeals: 11**

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Following RAP approval, results are submitted to QCI through the QBS (Quality Business System) or the RCCRS (Results Capture and Certification Request System) in the case of the Training Centres. Following the meeting of the RAP, feedback is given to staff, in order to promote a culture of continuous improvement.

### Appeals

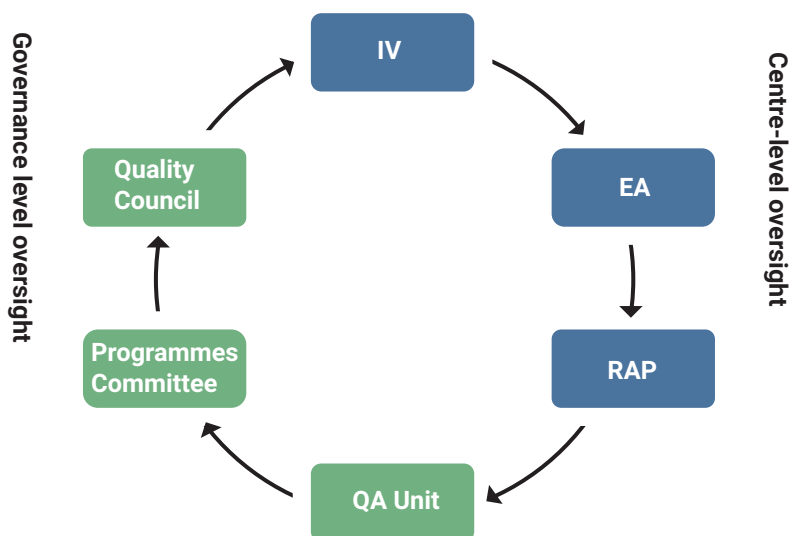
DDLETB processes learner assessment appeals for each of the six submissions periods in line with its Assessment Results Appeals Handbook. Appeals are managed by the QA Unit for all services, and due to the larger number of appeals to be processed in the June certification period in advance of the CAO deadline, those appeals are handled centrally, with a panel of Appeals Examiners coming to a centre to review all appealed scripts over a couple of days. This allows the QA Unit to gather direct feedback about issues which may be arising on the ground and is a rich source of information for the unit. Appeals for the other certification periods are handled by the QA Unit on a case-by-case basis.

### Governance Oversight of Learner Results

Once all verification, authentication, results approval, and appeals processes have been undertaken, all IV/EA and RAP reports are forwarded to the Quality Unit. Here, they are reviewed, collated, and anonymised. They are then presented to the Programmes Committee for consideration. This gives the committee the opportunity to identify future improvements and suggest new QA requirements or professional development needs. A report summarising their findings is forwarded to the Quality Council for consideration at their next meeting. This collated and anonymised data is also fed back to centres, so that learning from the assessment processes can be shared across all services. See the illustration which shows the governance and centre-level oversight of learner results and the feedback loop embedded in those processes.

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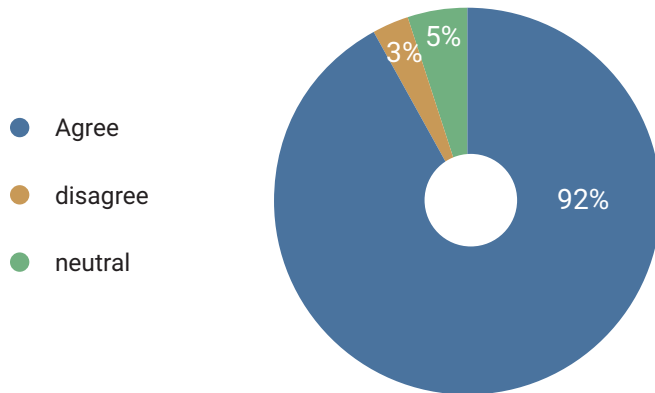
#### ***Oversight of Learner Results and Feedback of learning***



### 4.7.2 Evaluation

In order to ascertain whether learners were informed about their responsibilities regarding academic integrity, in the summer of 2021, learners were asked to respond to the statement: ***I was prepared by my teacher/instructor to complete assessments/exams in line with the principles of academic integrity, i.e. honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility.***

Prepared for academic integrity (n=828)



In total, 92% of learners agreed or strongly agreed with this statement, suggesting that the central importance of academic integrity was conveyed to them despite the challenges of Emergency Remote Teaching.

When centres were asked to rate (out of a possible 5) how effective their processes for approving learner results were, the average score was **4.5**— indicating a high level of confidence. This was echoed by some of the comments from EAs in the June 2021 certification period:



*“Most centres have shown dramatic improvements over the time I have been visiting them.”*

*“Excellent [authentication processes], rigorous, systematic and very comprehensive.”*

*“I’m extremely happy with the policies, procedures and developments that are made on a continual basis to improve standards.”*

*“I found the centres were very open to feedback and welcomed it. The staff were happy to engage in discussion and I was happy to share suggestions and most were equally happy to seek and receive suggestions.”*

While there will always be areas for improvement, particularly in an organisation as large as DDLETB, it is particularly encouraging to note that centres welcome feedback as part of a cycle of continuous improvement.

### 4.7.3 Integrity and Approval of Learner Results: Effective Practice Identified

- > Processes are fully embedded in FET colleges/centres/schools to ensure the integrity and approval of learner results including Internal Verification (IV), External Authentication (EA) and Result Appeal Process (RAP) procedures. They have been in use for several years and are supported by recently revised documentation and training provided by the QA Unit, aimed at ensuring consistency across FET.
- > The Youthreach EA panel, although a recent development, has already proven to be very successful. It allows a team of EAs to engage with the Regional Youthreach Coordinator and the QA Unit to identify strengths and areas of improvement across all 11 centres. Supports can then be put into place, and their implementation and success tracked over several years. A similar panel is being developed to support the implementation of the new ELC programme. This will be particularly useful in ensuring consistency of assessment and standards across the different centres.

### 4.7.4 Integrity and Approval of Learner Results: Areas for Improvement

- > The project to pilot Youthreach and ELC EA panels should be reviewed, and similar thematic reviews of other award areas could be considered.
- > Governance oversight of all IV, EA and RAP documentation can be challenging due to the volume of such reports generated across DDLETB's FET centres. Simplified reporting mechanisms should be developed to manage this process. This would ensure that feedback from centres is fully utilised to ensure continuous improvement and the further enhancement of a culture of quality.

## 4.7.5 Conclusion

The QCI *Quality Assuring Assessment Guidelines for Providers* specifies that providers should have documented procedures for Internal Verification (IV) and External Authentication (EA), Results Approval Panels (RAPs) and appeals, in order to “ensure fairness, consistency and validity of assessment and of the outcome of assessment.” (QCI, 2013, p. 24).

This review has shown that those procedures are in place, and for the most part they are functioning well, with a high degree of confidence in the systems, from both centres and EAs. However, there are challenges in providing high-level information to DDLETB governance units in a timely fashion, and simplified reporting mechanisms should be explored.

#### Potential Future Enhancements:

- > Review the outcomes of pilot thematic EA panels to evaluate if the intended purpose of enhanced consistency of learner results was met, with the potential for mainstreaming this initiative.
- > Develop a simplified reporting system to facilitate the oversight and analysis of all IV, EA and RAP documentation.

## 4.8 Information and Data Management

### 4.8.1 The Current Context

DDLETB is committed to ensuring that reliable information and data is available to support informed decision-making, and that all data is processed in compliance with data protection legislation.

#### General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)

DDLETB complies with GDPR and the Data Protection Acts 1988-2018 with respect to the processing of personal data, including its collection, storage, organisation and retention. Following the introduction of GDPR regulations, all DDLETB staff were required to complete GDPR training. Additionally, an online Data Awareness Training programme was developed in 2021, which all staff were required to complete. To ensure the secure storage of learner records and assessment materials, the DDLETB Corporate Services department developed a Document Retention Schedule, to which all centres adhere.

#### Data Management Systems

DDLETB uses a wide range of data management systems and platforms to manage and evaluate the data used for key administrative and operational functions. Some of these are newly developed systems, which greatly support the ETB in its current data reporting responsibilities, others are inherited from SOLAS and the former VECs and yet others are third party systems which may have limited linkages with national FET systems. The range of data management systems in use are outlined in Table 4.13, and a few of the ones which are most commonly used to support delivery of provision are described in greater detail below.

**Table 4.13 DDLETB data management systems**

System category	System name
Learner management systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>&gt; PLSS (Programme Learner Support System)</li><li>&gt; FETCH (<a href="http://www.fetchcourses.ie">www.fetchcourses.ie</a>)</li><li>&gt; Apprenticeship Client Services Systems</li><li>&gt; MIT eEnroll</li><li>&gt; VSWare</li><li>&gt; Client Services System (CSS)</li><li>&gt; Guidance Service Database</li></ul>
Information sharing/management and reporting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>&gt; DDLETB QAHub/<a href="http://www.CloudETB.ie">www.CloudETB.ie</a></li><li>&gt; eCohesion</li><li>&gt; FARR</li><li>&gt; MIS</li><li>&gt; Tableau</li></ul>

System category	System name
Certification and validation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; QBS (Quality Business System)</li> <li>&gt; RCCRS (Results Capture and Certification Request System)</li> <li>&gt; QQI QHub</li> </ul>
Virtual learning environments (VLEs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Moodle</li> <li>&gt; MS Teams</li> <li>&gt; Google Classroom</li> <li>&gt; Edmodo</li> </ul>
Financial management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Purchase to Pay (P2P)</li> <li>&gt; SUN Accounts</li> <li>&gt; Time and Attendance Clocking System (TACS)</li> <li>&gt; PeopleXD</li> <li>&gt; SAP</li> <li>&gt; Supplier Relations Management (SRM)</li> </ul>
Human resource management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; CoreHR</li> <li>&gt; Part Time Tutor (PTT) System</li> </ul>

### **Programme and Learner Support System**

In use since 2017, the Programme and Learner Support System (PLSS) was developed as the integrated and coordinated mechanism for the achievement of Strategic Goal 4 of the Further Education and Training Strategy 2014-2019 (SOLAS, 2014), which was to implement a new planning and funding model for further education and training. Now fully embedded, PLSS has become the primary learner management and reporting tool in DDLETB, managing course information, learner records and providing key data on learner and course inputs, outputs and outcomes which are required for making returns to SOLAS, the Department of Education and Skills (DES), the Department of Further Education, Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, (DFEHERIS), the European Social Fund (ESF) as well as for informing key planning decisions. PLSS consists of the:

- > National Programme Database (NPD), which is the system framework for all national and local FET awards for use in scheduling courses or requesting certification. The NPD also includes non-accredited 'programmes' used widely in adult literacy, community education and ESOL courses.
- > National Course Calendar (NCC), which facilitates the scheduling of courses. Course listings and information in the NCC can be transferred to the FETCH (Further Education and Training Course Hub) website ([www.fetchcourses.ie](http://www.fetchcourses.ie)), the Department of Social Protection case management system (BOMi) and the CAO, as well as to other websites

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such as [www.dublintrainingcentres.ie](http://www.dublintrainingcentres.ie) and [www.qualifax.ie](http://www.qualifax.ie). The [www.fetchcourses](http://www.fetchcourses) site allows applicants to search, view and apply for courses online.

- > National Learner Database (NLDB), which stores all learner data and provides an overview of the learner journey through FET.
- > PLSS reports which provide an accessible way to interrogate all data stored in the above databases.

Other than for learner management (e.g. managing applications, contacting applicants and learners, finishing learners), data from both the NCC and Learner Database is used for a range of purposes such as the creation of data reports for DDLETB management to inform strategy and planning, as well as for reporting on FET learner activity on an annual basis via the Funding Allocation Requests and Reporting System (FARR), the SOLAS Year-End File, e-Cohesion and the October Returns. DDLETB has specialists in PLSS within the Strategy and Planning Unit, whose expertise is used to provide training in data management and analysis, as well as in applications such as Tableau, a data analytics software package which allows data to be visualised and securely shared.

### **Quality Business System (QBS) & Results Capture and Certification Request System (RCCRS)**

The QBS is used for uploading learner results to QQI and storing those results in perpetuity; this can be done manually or using PLSS. The RCCRS is the system used by training centres to capture and store results before transfer to QQI or other awarding bodies.

### **Apprenticeship Client Services System**

The Apprenticeship Client Services system is used to track the apprentice's progression both on and off the job (assessment results and employment history) from their initial registration throughout their seven phases to completion of their craft certification. This system is owned and managed by SOLAS.

### **Office 365**

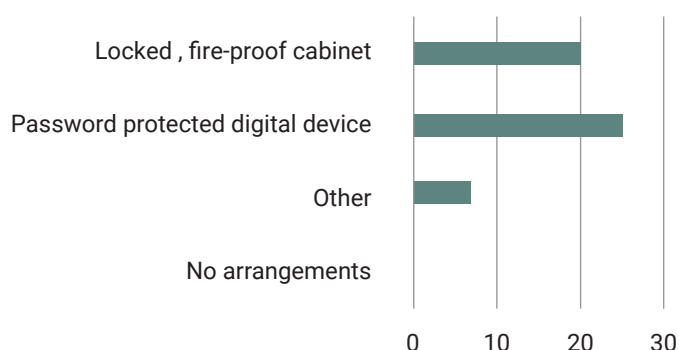
The Office 365 suite is used widely across the ETB for storing, managing and sharing data through the use of applications such as Outlook and SharePoint. Since the COVID-19 lockdowns, MS Teams has become an essential tool in facilitating online learning and meetings. Other apps, such as MS Forms and Sway have been used extensively during this time.

### **Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs)**

A range of VLEs are used across the various FET centres, such as MS Teams, Moodle, Google Classrooms and Edmodo, which allow learners to engage remotely with their courses. Following a learner survey in 2020, centres have been encouraged to adopt a single VLE per centre to ensure that learners are not asked to engage with a number of VLEs, and this approach has largely been successful.

## 4.8.2 Evaluation

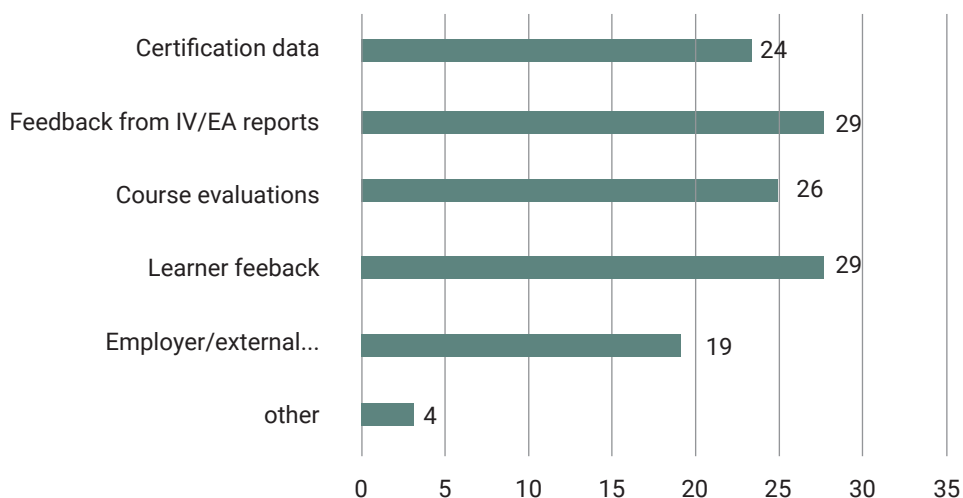
### Arrangements to Ensure Data is Secure (n=29)



Centres were asked what arrangements they had in place to ensure that data gathered in their centre was secure. All centres reported having arrangements in place, such as locked, fire-proof cabinet and password protected digital devices, while other responses referred to the secure storage of data by contracted training providers.

Centres were further asked what data they used to inform decisions. In addition to data stored in PLSS, centres reported using a range of different types of data to make evidence-based decisions regarding existing course provision (see graph below). This information was used to review and enhance courses, develop learner supports, make programme amendments and recommend staff CPD. Planning for new courses used similar data sources but also included the use of data from sources such as the Central Statistics Office (CSO) and the SOLAS Skills and Labour Market Research Unit (SLMRU) for example, as well as other national and EU sources. From the variety of sources cited, it is apparent that data is a driver of knowledge within DDLETB and is used to inform planning and delivery.

### Data used to make decisions on existing programme provision (n=29)



The move to digital learner registration using [www.fetchcourses.ie](http://www.fetchcourses.ie) accelerated following the outbreak of COVID-19. This is working well in some cases, as the learner has access to a record of all their SOLAS funded FET interventions; it offers improved protection and transparency of personal data in line with the Public Service Data Strategy 2019-2023 and reduces administrative input and paper storage. In 2019, 12% of learners applied for their courses using



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www.fetchcourses.ie; in 2020 this was 21% and for 2021, it was 27%. However, learners with low levels of educational attainment and IT skills find it difficult to register for a course via FETCH. Where the application process had started elsewhere, e.g. through a DSP referral or being referred via a friend or family member, the learner was facilitated to set up a FETCH account to complete their registration. In 2019, 31% of learners had/have a FETCH account, as compared to 42% of learners in 2020, and 47% of learners in 2021.

### ***Using Multiple Data Systems for Analysis***

As data systems evolved, so did business processes and there is now a need to examine those processes, highlight and replicate good practice and to develop a consistent approach across the services. In some cases, the different data systems use different metrics/definitions, making it difficult to use them together to undertake a comprehensive, coherent and holistic analysis of data. For example, the QBS measures learner certification rates while the PLSS measures beneficiaries.

### **4.8.3 Information and Data Management: Effective Practice Identified**

- > The newly formed Strategy and Planning Unit plays an important role in ensuring the smooth management of data and information in DDLETB. The team provides support, training and guidance on all aspects of learner data management on PLSS and FARR, specialising in its use for strategic planning and evidence-based decision-making.
- > The unit uses data from the system to inform decision making, and to report on the planned and actual DDLETB activities to SOLAS and the DDLETB Board. The presence of this unit has greatly enhanced the reliability of DDLETB's data and quality indicators.
- > Data is used to inform strategic planning on an area basis annually, to ensure that provision reflects the needs of the geographical area.
- > The centre survey conducted as part of this self-evaluation process indicated high levels of awareness of GDPR, and staff training around its requirements with regards to data handling. Most centres indicated that their staff availed of GDPR training, such as that organised by DDLETB.
- > Data sharing agreements are in place with many providers, such as apprenticeship coordinating providers, and centres reported using password protection, encryption and other security measures when sharing learner data with other providers.

### **4.8.4 Information and Data Management: Areas for Improvement**

- > In order to address the challenges raised by the use of multiple data systems outlined in Table 4.6 above, a working group should be established to consider how best to streamline data, so that it can be used more efficiently to support informed decision making.
- > Some gaps remain in the data management systems. For example, there is currently no learner data management and certification system nationally for the consortia-led apprenticeships. This is being addressed by SOLAS and the National Apprenticeship Office.

- > Learners' QQI results are uploaded on the Quality Business System (QBS) and the RCCRS (Results Capture and Certification Request System), and certification reports supplied by QQI are available. The further analysis of this data, in conjunction with other data, could help to enhance informed decision making by the Quality and Strategy and Planning units as well as the FET Management Team.

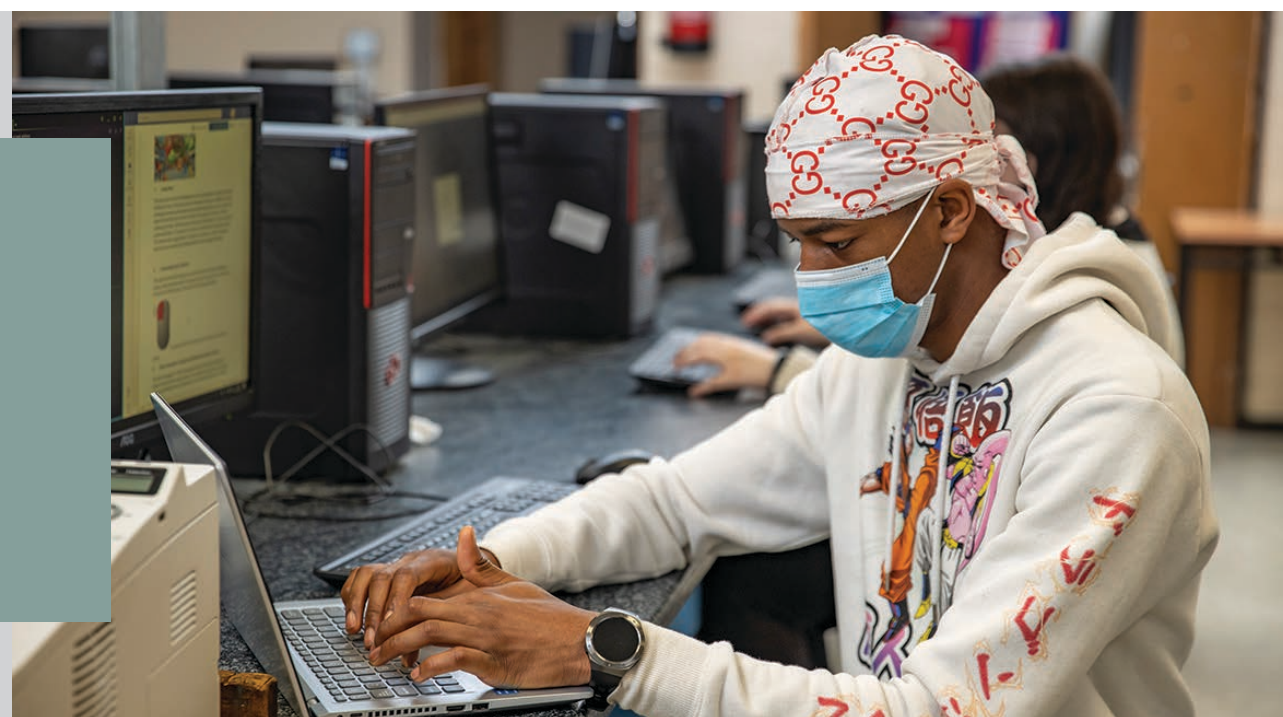
## 4.8.5 Conclusion

The QQI Core QA Guidelines ask that reliable information and data are used to generate reports which can be used for self-monitoring and planning purposes, and to support informed decision-making.

This review has shown that locally generated data is being used insofar as is possible, to inform evidence-based decision making. However, there remains an ongoing problem in using data as effectively as possible both due to the multiplicity of systems, not all of which communicate with each other, and the lack of a national road map for systems development nationally.

### Potential Future Enhancements:

- > Develop a data management working group to streamline data analysis to support planning and informed decision making.
- > Build and enhance the role of the FET support units subject to the sanction of additional staff to facilitate this enhanced data analysis on behalf of the FET Management Team.



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## 4.9 Public Information and Communications

### 4.9.1 The Current Context

DDLETB uses a variety of communication channels to inform potential learners and other stakeholders about DDLETB and the range of provision that it has to offer. These include the DDLETB and centre-specific websites, social media, newsletters and eZines, brochures, and a variety of other communication methods.

DDLETB also makes good use of [www.fetchcourses.ie](http://www.fetchcourses.ie). As outlined in Section 4.8.2 above, 27% of learners in 2021 applied for their course using this website. Of the courses delivered by DDLETB in 2021, 62% were listed on [www.fetchcourses.ie](http://www.fetchcourses.ie), although targeted courses, such as Skills to Advance, Community Education or Adult Literacy, which targets specific learner groups, were not listed on the site.

#### **Websites and Social Media**

DDLETB has a corporate website ([www.ddletb.ie](http://www.ddletb.ie)), which includes information about the ETB, and provides links to all of its services and centres. This website also uses a feed from [www.fetchcourses.ie](http://www.fetchcourses.ie) to provide a dynamic listing of FET courses open for applications. In addition, most centres have their own websites, with information about the courses they offer, progression opportunities, eligibility criteria and other relevant information such as learner supports. The three training centres have developed a common approach to branding, and publicise their provision through the [www.dublintrainingcentres.ie](http://www.dublintrainingcentres.ie) site.

In addition, most centres have a social media presence on platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and YouTube, where they provide information about the centre and service, new courses and initiatives, learner successes and even provided remote learning opportunities during the COVID-19 lockdown (see Case Study 1 in Chapter 3). The Strategy and Planning Unit supports DDLETB's FET presence on the corporate social media platforms.

When surveyed, all centres that had a website, reported that they had identified a person, team or external service that had responsibility for moderating website content. See Case Study 17 for an example of how one service manages its online presence. In response to the increasing use of social media by the various centres and services, a DDLETB social media working group, led by the IT Department, has recently been established with the aim of improving DDLETB's social media presence, and has started work on the development of a social media strategy for the ETB.

#### **Quality Assurance (QA) Website**

As part of the re-engagement with QQI, a QA website was developed, in order to publish QA policies and procedures. This site is currently under re-development, and in its new iteration, will be directly linked to the new QA SharePoint. This will ensure that the same versions of QA policies and procedures will be available both to ETB staff and to the public, and will be instantly updated, should any changes be made. This work will be complete by summer 2022.

## CASE STUDY 17: Youthreach Marketing and Development Facilitator

The DDLETB Youthreach Service has appointed a Youthreach Marketing and Development Facilitator to oversee all eleven Youthreach centres' individual social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter & Instagram) and operate DDLETB Youthreach's social media platforms Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube and Snapchat.

The Marketing and Development Facilitator is responsible for promoting Youthreach and its centres through the creation of promotional flyers, brochures, posters and videos. All promotional videos can be viewed on the DDLETB Youthreach YouTube channel and all centres' promotional brochures are linked to each centre's name and details on the DDLETB's website.

As part of their promotional remit, the facilitator organises three annual road shows to showcase Youthreach (Education Show, TY Show and Zeminar), and contributes articles to the educational magazines associated with these shows as well as contributing articles to the European Social Fund (ESF) and DDLETB newsletters. Other activities include supporting Youthreach centres to take part in all ESF competitions and promoting any events or competitions that Youthreach centres take part in such as poetry, art, music, science, maths, Junk Kouture and competitions of a civic nature. All such events are promoted, and winners are celebrated using social media and all other platforms. Please see here for a selection of articles published in the European Social Fund Newsletter, 2020

### Other Communications Channels

In addition to the use of websites and social media, other more traditional methods of providing information are also used by ETB centres. Some communications channels used are outlined in Table 4.14.

**Table 4.14 Communications Channels**

Communications Channels
Open days & centre visits
Brochures
Outreach (e.g. to schools)
Business breakfasts
eZines and newsletters
Local community engagement.

All programme information for potential learners is provided in plain language which explains what the programme expects of learners and what learners can expect from the programme.

See Case Study 18 for an example of DDLETB's engagement with a local community.

## CASE STUDY 18: Our Balbriggan Loves Learning Festival

Balbriggan is the youngest and one of the most ethnically diverse towns in Ireland (Census, 2016). However, the growth of the local economy has not kept pace with population growth, and thus the *Our Balbriggan Rejuvenation Plan 2019-2025 (2019)* was developed to “create positive change and build a prosperous, vibrant, inclusive town that is united, ambitious and committed.” Amongst the goals identified to achieve that change, was the establishment of an annual Education, Training and Skills Festival, which has become the “*Our Balbriggan Loves Learning Festival*”.

DDLETB chairs the Education, Skills and Training Pillar of the Leadership Group for the Rejuvenation Plan, as well as the Festival sub-group. This sub-group consists of local and statutory agencies and volunteers and works closely with *Our Balbriggan* and Fingal County Council to develop the *Our Balbriggan Loves Learning Festival*.

The inaugural Festival was postponed in 2020 due to COVID-19 but took place online in April 2021. The Festival focused on the themes of enterprise, community and digital learning, and offered a range of engaging online events to help employers and members of the Balbriggan community learn about the services available in Balbriggan that will help them up-skill their business, boost employability skills, improve digital skills or expand their learning in the community.

A series of learning showcases/videos and live online virtual events took place via platforms such as the *Our Balbriggan* website, Eventbrite, Facebook Live and a YouTube Channel. Over 100 online contributions were made by DDLETB, its partner agencies and the organisations and volunteers who live or work in the Balbriggan community.

The online festival generated great interest in 2021, and it is anticipated that the 2022 *Our Balbriggan Loves Learning Festival* will be a hybrid model consisting of both live face-to-face events and online events.

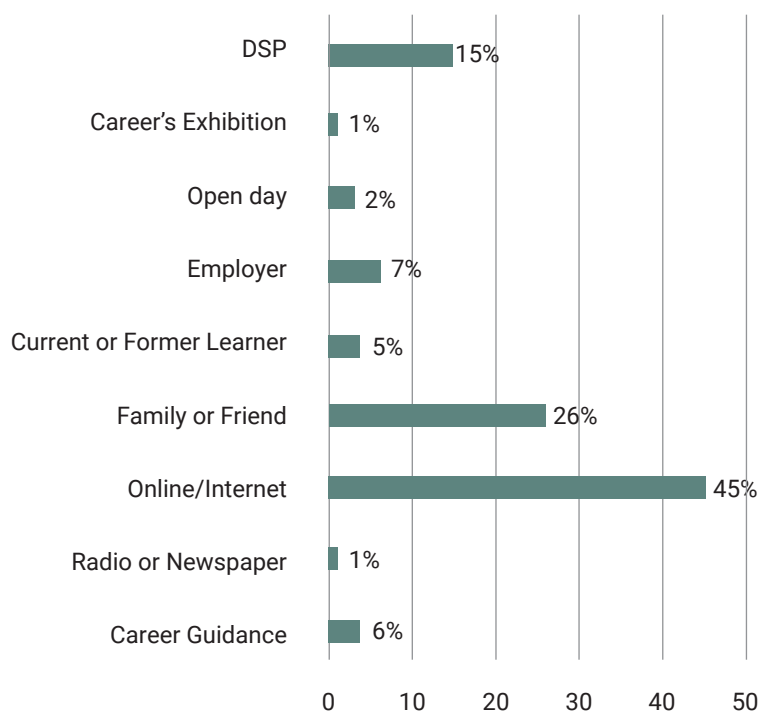
### 4.9.2 Evaluation

In the AONTAS survey, learners were asked how they heard about their course, and 45% said that they had heard about it online or through the internet (see graph), while a further 26% had heard about it from family or a friend. This highlights the importance of newer technologies such as websites and social media in communicating to potential learners.

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<sup>53</sup> Our Balbriggan Rejuvenation Plan 2019-2025, p. 6.

### How Did You Hear About Your Course?



Furthermore, when surveyed, **89% of learners said that they were very satisfied or satisfied with the DDLETB or centre website.**

While it is welcome that so many learners are accessing information about DDLETB from websites and other digital sources, it must be remembered that these may become an unintentional barrier to participation for other learners. As one centre manager commented:



*"We are conscious of the digital divide in relation to learners and people's limited skills in accessing information via a website or social media platform. Factors such as age, appropriate devices, lack of WiFi, literacy skills and English language skills etc. can impact on individuals accessing the correct information.... Other trusted methods of engagement such as coffee mornings, information days or 'Bring a friend' events did support bringing new learners into the service, however these are on hold due to COVID. These need to be revisited to ensure we are reaching as many prospective learners as possible."*

#### 4.9.3 Public Information and Communications: Effective Practice Identified

- > The extensive use of the [www.fetchcourses.ie](http://www.fetchcourses.ie) site has enabled the ETB to reach a wide audience and receive digital learner applications in real time, thus proving to be an important tool in overcoming one of the potential barriers to participation.
- > This review has highlighted the extensive use of a range of public information channels, particularly websites and social media, by all DDLETB services and centres, with the Strategy and Planning Unit supporting DDLETB's FET social media presence.
- > An ETB-level social media working group has been established in order to develop guidelines to support this social media activity.

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#### 4.9.4 Public Information and Communications: Areas for Improvement

- > Relying heavily on digital communication systems has the potential to create a barrier to participation. Therefore, a wide variety of communications channels must be used to engage all learner profiles.
- > QA policies and procedures are published on the public-facing website. This site is currently unavailable pending the final roll-out of the QA Sharepoint, to which it will be linked. This is due to be resolved by the summer of 2022.

#### 4.9.5 Conclusion

The QQI Core QA Guidelines indicate that there should be policies and procedure in place to ensure that published information is accurate, up-to-date and easily accessible. They also expect that quality assurance policies and procedures are published.

This review has shown that there is good public information available about the courses and services that DDLETB provides. There is centre-level oversight of how that information is communicated, and a DDLETB social media working group has been established which will provide further guidelines.

The website which will provide public access to QA policies and procedures is currently under re-development. Work on this site needs to be finalised as a matter of urgency, so that as QA policies and procedures are developed, they can be made available to the public.

##### **Potential Future Enhancements:**

- > The social media working group is developing a social media policy, to include a social media strategy.
- > The QA Unit will finalise the QA website by summer 2022, which will ensure that all QA policies and procedures are available to the public.

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## 4.10 Reflections on the Governance and Management of Quality in DDLETB

This chapter explored all aspects of quality in DDLETB's FET provision. It considered the governance and management of its QA System; it considered the extent to which that system supports the ETB's mission and strategy, and reflected on the governance which manages that QA system and the way in which it is documented. It further explored the quality assurance underpinning a range of processes such as staff recruitment and development; programme development; access, transfer and progression; authentication processes; the management of information and data, as well as processes for managing public information and communication.

The review showed that the **QA system supports DDLETB's mission and strategic goals**, and that there is a strong commitment to the enhancement of a culture of quality across all services and centres.

There is a **documented system of governance** in place, with clearly separated responsibilities. However, a full review of that governance system is currently being undertaken in order to review the roles of some of its governance units.

The **documentation of Quality Assurance policies and procedures** is well underway. A range of common QA policies and procedures have been developed, such as Assessment Procedure Handbooks, Internal Verification, External Authentication and Result Approval Panel documentation, as well as extensive guidelines and procedures to address the COVID contingencies required over the past two years. Work on the overarching QA Manual will now recommence.

An evaluation of **staff recruitment, development and management** showed that recruitment processes are in line with Human Resource (HR) policies. There is a strong commitment to professional development, both at organisational level and at staff level, and an extensive programme of professional development opportunities are available. However, support guidelines need to be completed, to ensure that all staff are clearly informed as to the supports that are available to them. Finally, the evaluation demonstrated that staff are both given information about developments in the ETB which are of relevance to them, and solicited for their views.

DDLETB has engaged extensively in **programme development and its approval and submission for validation**. The evaluation showed that governance structures are in place for the oversight of programme development, both in DDLETB, and collaboratively with other organisations. The evaluation further showed that extensive consultation with external stakeholders is occurring, both in the development of new programmes, and in the development of innovative new courses and review of existing courses to ensure that DDLETB's provision remains up-to-date and meets the needs of its learners, external stakeholders, and the wider society. Further work needs to be done to ensure that this can be managed in a responsive and agile manner, and to further engage in developing DDLETB's capacity for future programme development by engaging with QQI to move towards 'Devolved Responsibility' for the validation of programmes.



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The evaluation of DDLETB's approach to **access, transfer and progression** showed that an Admissions Policy is in place, and that transfer and progression opportunities are communicated to learners, although clear guidelines would be helpful to support this communication. DDLETB has engaged extensively in a range of initiatives, such as Skills to Advance, to support progression into employment, although reporting on rates of progression from Further Education to Higher Education or employment is currently inconsistent, due to challenges in collecting the data.

DDLETB is committed to ensuring the **integrity of learner results**, and the evaluation undertaken here showed that quality assured systems are in place to verify the authenticity of those results. Feedback from the authentication processes of QQI awards are used to further enhance quality delivery, and is considered at ETB level, although non-QQI awards are currently not considered at ETB level, and this will need to be addressed in the future.

DDLETB has a variety of **information and data management systems** to support the evaluation of data for key administrative and operational functions, although PLSS has become the primary learner management and reporting tool within the ETB. The evaluation showed that locally generated data is being used to inform evidence-based decision making, but that further work could be undertaken to streamline the analysis of data.

Finally, this evaluation has shown that DDLETB uses a range of **public information and communications channels**, and that centres with websites or social media have a designated person/team to oversee what is published on those sites. A social media working group has been established to provide further guidelines. The website which will provide public access to QA policies and procedures is currently under re-development, and will be finalised in the summer of 2022.

## Conclusion

### Potential Future Enhancements:

- > complete a common Quality Assurance Manual with associated policies and procedures.
- > implement the findings of the governance review.
- > develop a Professional Development plan for FET to include support guidelines .
- > engage with QQI to move towards Devolved Responsibility for the validation of programmes.
- > include the reporting of non-QQI certification at ETB level.
- > develop a data management and analysis working group to streamline data analysis.
- > finalise the development of the QA website.

# **5 TEACHING, LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT**

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# Overview

This chapter explores teaching, learning and assessment in DDLETB. It considers the environment which learners experience when they engage on a course; this includes not just the physical environment, but also the quality of the experience for the learner both in centre and while on work placements. It considers the evidence for a process of continuous enhancement in teaching and learning. Finally, the chapter explores the assessment of learners, as well as the supports that may be needed to ensure that learners can successfully participate in their chosen course, reach their potential and achieve their goals.

## 5.1 The Teaching and Learning Environment

### 5.1.1. The Current Context

DDLETB's commitment to teaching and learning was reflected in the *Statement of Strategy* which has the tagline "Learn, Achieve, Succeed". Strategic priorities in the current DDLETB Statement of Strategy include providing excellent teaching and learning for all learners and ensuring positive learning experiences and environments with suitable resources and premises.

Substantial resources go into recruiting and developing staff and supporting their professional development, acquiring teaching and learning resources and equipment, as well as maintaining and adding to the existing FET infrastructure in order to enable excellent teaching and learning for all.

The Organisation Support and Development (OSD) Director and the OSD team (including the Financial Services Department, HR Department, Buildings Services Department, and ICT Department) work in collaboration with the Director of FET and the FET team to ensure that teaching and learning in DDLETB is sufficiently resourced to deliver on DDLETB's strategic priorities.

#### ***Teaching and Learning Environment: Physical Infrastructure***

As outlined in the Provider Profile, FET in DDLETB is delivered over a large geographical area with 40 locations in the catchment area. As a result, FET programmes and services are delivered in a wide range of facilities including purpose-built sites, converted/ repurposed facilities, second level schools, buildings that are leased/rented by DDLETB as well as community centres and locations which are owned and managed by community and other organisations.

The physical environment in which FET provision is delivered varies considerably. Accordingly, maintaining and upgrading all centres/schools and colleges to the required standard can be challenging. All major building maintenance/repair and renovation is overseen by DDLETB's Building Services Unit and local managers, and every effort is made to ensure buildings are maintained to a high standard and are compliant with current safety, health and welfare at work legislation. The Buildings Services team link with both SOLAS and DFHERIS in order to get approval for capital projects and to draw down funding for maintenance and repair projects. Case Study 19 is an example of recent building projects to meet learner demand.

Included in the strategic framework for FET<sup>54</sup> in the future is the evolution of FET facilities and provision into a distinct and integrated college or campus. Depending on the identified needs of the area, this will require the consolidation of existing provision within a campus structure offering clear access, transfer and progressions pathways, flexible learning opportunities and consistent learner supports. In other areas, where FET is under-delivered compared to the demographics of the area, this may involve the development of a new flagship integrated FET location. A plan is currently being developed which will guide DDLETB in that regard.

## CASE STUDY 19: Development of Teaching and Learning Facilities for FET Learners

DDLETB's Strategic Performance Agreement with SOLAS acknowledged that most of DDLETB's FET provision is delivered in locations where it owns buildings. This has resulted in a concentration of provision in the Dún Laoghaire/Rathdown area which does not reflect the demographic profile of the area, as Fingal County has shown growth of more than twice that of the state overall and the County Council area has the third highest population in the country. The fact that provision to date in Fingal has lagged behind other areas, combined with the population explosion in the Fingal area over the past decade means there is likely to be untapped potential for the north-east to contribute more to the achievement of targets set in future Performance Agreements with SOLAS.

A decision was made to increase FET provision in Fingal, and in 2018, a new premises was identified as a potential FET centre in Balbriggan. After substantial investment, a state-of-the-art new FET centre, Castlemill Education Centre, was opened in Balbriggan. The centre is exceptionally well equipped, with two IT suites and twelve spacious classrooms.

*[Link to video tour of Castlemill Education Centre](#)*

In 2019, a business case was developed, proposing the further re-alignment of resources and facilities to the north-east of the county in a way that would reflect the demographic profile of the area and increase FET provision in order to meet the needs of this diverse and fast-growing community into the future.

A second potential FET facility was identified, and in 2020, funding was approved for the development of a new facility in the north-east of the county. The new FET facility for Swords, was slightly delayed by COVID-19 but opened in autumn 2021. This centre is also exceptionally well equipped, with two IT suites and five spacious classrooms and plans for further development of the third floor.

*[Link to video tour of Burgundy House Education Centre, Swords](#)*

These developments have more than doubled FET capacity in the north-east of the county, and the teaching and learning environment for FET learners has greatly improved as a result.

<sup>54</sup> Future FET: Transforming Learning: National FET Strategy 2020-2024.

In line with the *Action Plan for Apprenticeship (DFHERIS, 2021)*, DDLETB is currently engaging with SOLAS to expand the ETB's Craft Apprenticeship provision by upgrading and expanding existing facilities including Electrical, Plumbing and Carpentry & Joinery workshops in the three Training centres and the PLC college where this is delivered (see Case Study 20).

## CASE STUDY 20: Specialist Facilities for Craft Apprentices

**Example 1:** The training centres have developed purpose-built training facilities for a number of craft apprenticeships. These include a range of workshops with state-of-the-art equipment which are used to simulate the real life environment that an apprentice would experience with their employer.

Workshops for Phase 2 apprenticeship training are available in a number of areas including:

- > Electrical
- > Electrical Instrumentation
- > Motor Mechanic
- > Construction Plant fitting
- > Carpentry & Joinery
- > Wood Manufacturing and Finishing



Each apprenticeship has its own dedicated workshop with equipment that the apprentices are required to be trained on, and achieve competency in, to enable them to work in their respective trade.

**Example 2:** One FE college delivers phases 4 and 6 of the Craft Apprenticeship in Carpentry and Joinery, as well as programmes in Craft, Design and Construction. This is the only FE college delivering these phases on the East Coast. To facilitate the learners to acquire the relevant skills, the college is equipped with four specialist workshops and one specialist machine shop. Learners can further avail of:

- > State-of-the-art laser cutting facility
- > Industrial standard 3D printers
- > State-of-the-art Renewable Technologies area including wind turbine, solar panels, photovoltaic cells, heat pump and air-to-water heat exchange unit.

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### **Teaching and Learning Environment: Facilities and Resources**

Most vocational programmes have specific resource requirements, and DDLETB is committed to ensuring that learners have access to state-of-the-art facilities which allow them to gain the specific skills relevant to their chosen vocational area.

Where QQI award specifications dictate special equipment or resources as part of their specific validation requirements, these are all monitored as part of the course approval process.

Table 5.1 outlines some of the fully-equipped facilities available in FET centres.

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**Table 5.1 Facilities available in FET Centres**

Craft workshops
Welding workshops.
Nursing/hospital ward simulation rooms
Data centre and IT suites
Beauty & holistic therapy and hairdressing salons
Animal grooming studio
Pharmacy sales simulation suites
Fitness and dance studio and gyms
Photography, film and TV studios
Art, ceramics and professional animation studio
Radio & podcast station
Science laboratories
Horticultural sites



### **ICT Infrastructure**

Significant resources have gone into ensuring that all FET colleges and centres have excellent IT facilities which are available for learners' use, in line with acceptable usage policies. The ICT infrastructure is overseen by the ICT department who have responsibility for upgrades and procurement of IT equipment. Since the outbreak of COVID-19, a digital device loan scheme has been operational, in order to ensure that learners are not negatively impacted by a digital divide.

### **Technology Enhanced Learning in DDLETB**

DDLETB has long been committed to the promotion of Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL); following the publication of the SOLAS *Strategy for Technology Enhanced Learning 2016-2019* (SOLAS, 2016), the ETB published its own *TEL Action Plan 2017-2019*. Actions included the building of staff capacity through Professional Development (PD), expanding the ICT infrastructure, and the development of a TEL hub (see Case Study 21). In the years following the publication of the Action Plan, DDLETB hosted four TEL conferences, featuring national and international speakers, and developed two TEL hubs. The ETB's early commitment to Technology Enhanced Learning paid dividends when the COVID-19 pandemic hit; the existence of the TEL Hubs allowed the Digital Learning Team to quickly roll out an extremely comprehensive PD programme to staff and learners to facilitate the transition to Emergency Remote Teaching in March 2020. Since then, much of the teaching, learning and assessment has taken place in virtual learning environments, such as Teams, Moodle etc.

## CASE STUDY 21: TEL Hub

In 2018, Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL) Hubs were set-up in a training centre and an FE college as part of the response to the SOLAS Strategy for Technology Enhanced Learning 2016-2019 (2016), and the DDLETB Statement of Strategy, 2017-2021. The vision of the unit was to assist DDLETB staff to develop the skills to integrate technology into their everyday classroom activities. When the unit started in 2018, a Technology Enhanced Learning traineeship was developed to support staff to explore collaborative ways of working with learners in the classroom. The Hub included a studio and a classroom where staff could try out new technologies.

In 2020, when the country went into lockdown, the TEL Hub was an integral part of the DDLETB emergency response to remote teaching and learning across all its services. Workshops were delivered for all teaching and instructing staff through platforms such as Microsoft Teams and Moodle etc. Since then, nearly 800 sessions have been delivered over MS Teams or Teams Live, to support the remote delivery of learning and the creation and management of content on a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE). The Digital Learning Team also worked with the QA Unit to ensure the continuity of assessment during COVID-19, and delivered workshops to External Authenticators to facilitate the authentication processes, which included support in accessing digital learner evidence.

### ***Teaching and Learning Experience: Methodologies***

DDLETB offers a wide range of provision: part-time and full-time, uncertified courses as well as certified courses from a variety of awarding bodies, from NFQ Levels 2-6. This range of provision reflects the diversity of learners across DDLETB (see Section 9 of the *Provider Profile* “The Learner Profile”). Given the level of diversity, it is only appropriate that the methodologies that learners experience in the classroom are appropriate to their needs.

In its *Statement of Strategy*, DDLETB has identified as a strategic action that it will “develop teaching and learning strategies and resources to promote autonomous learning, collaborative learning and content creation with the assistance of technology by our learners” (p. 20). The methodologies employed by teachers/tutors/instructors are learner-centred, and varied, depending on a number of factors, including the learner profile, the level of the course, the contact time available, duration of the course, etc. Staff are encouraged to develop their capacity to deliver in a learner-centred manner, e.g. through professional development workshops, undertaking further educational qualifications, and availing of good practice guidelines, such as those developed by ETBs nationally and available through the ETBI digital library.

Demand for more blended and flexible provision has increased in recent years and the capacity to engage in remote teaching has developed significantly since 2020 due to the need to engage learners during the pandemic. The findings in Chapter 3 indicate that there is some interest in retaining a degree of blended learning into the future and in appropriate settings.

When planning classes, the ratio of directed versus self-directed learning is based on the

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guidelines in the programme descriptors, but within those guidelines, there is potential for the hours to vary depending on the learner profile, funding stream, accrediting body etc. Equally, class sizes vary across FET, with 1:1 and small group provision for vulnerable learners such as those in the Adult Education Service or with specialist training providers, and larger groups for learners at higher levels of the National Framework of Qualifications.

### ***Inclusive Teaching and Learning: Fostering Inclusion***

A priority in the national FET strategy “*Future FET Transforming Learning*” is the development and application of good practice guides and toolkits for inclusive practice across the FET system, the use of literacy teaching methodologies, and adopting a universal design for learning (UDL) approach in shaping its future provision. In line with this priority DDLETB, in partnership with ETBI and others, has commenced the process of developing the capacity of FET staff to apply a UDL approach across FET. For more on DDLETB’s support of UDL, see Case Study 22.

## **CASE STUDY 22: Universal Design for Learning**

In order to promote its commitment to ensuring a high quality, appropriate learning experience for all learners, DDLETB has given staff the opportunity to gain a Digital Badge in Universal Design for Learning (UDL), and when surveyed, 16 centres indicated that they are supporting that approach in their centre. A number of staff members have now gained a facilitator’s badge in UDL, and DDLETB is hoping to roll this approach out more widely in the coming year. Universal design benefits a wide range of learners with varying learning styles, preferences, and abilities, and allows each learner to achieve to the full of their potential. As one manager commented:



*“Over the last five years [we] have introduced Universal Design for Learning as part of our pedagogical philosophy. Student inclusion and empowerment hold a space that is integral to our core values as a college. Eleven of our teachers have trained in UDL with an additional four training at present. This has resulted in a number of pedagogical shifts in both our teaching and assessment of courses.... We plan to develop our UDL journey in the future using the UDL for FET Guidance and Resource Hub as part of college CPD, planning and course development.”*

### ***Teaching and Learning Resources***

DDLETB is committed to ensuring that staff have access to appropriate subject matter teaching resources and best practice guidelines etc. to support them in their engagement with learners. The appropriateness and sufficiency of these resources is monitored at centre level, typically through the mid- and end-of-course evaluations, and by DDLETB in its end-of-year surveys of centres, staff, and learners. The appropriateness of this approach is supported by the overall satisfaction levels of learners as reflected in their feedback (see “*Gathering Learner Feedback*” below). DDLETB has also been actively involved in the development of resources to be shared nationally through the ETBI Digital Library, and of maths supports developed for the national apprenticeships (see Case Study 29 on the Study Skills Unit). Finally, a ‘Remote Learning Community Team’ in MS Teams was created to share resources, tips and updates throughout the lockdown period.



## 5.1.2 Evaluation

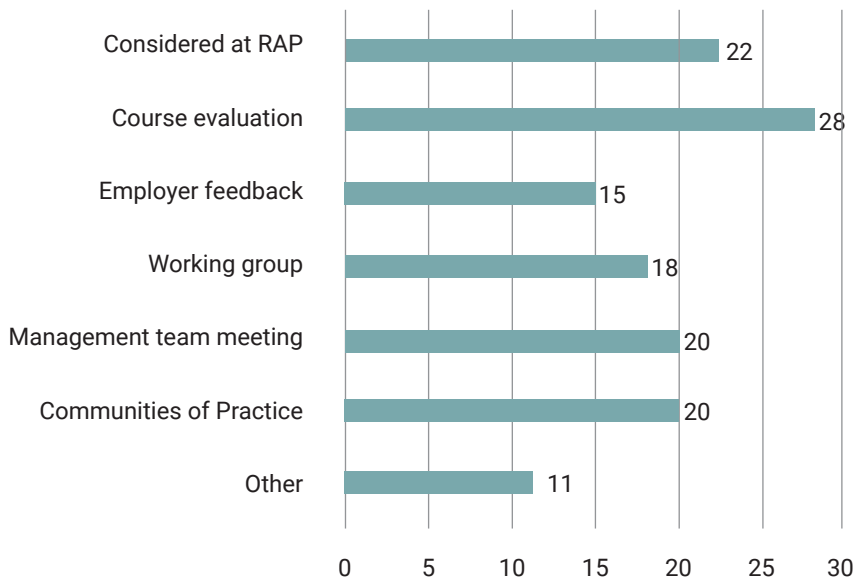
### Ensuring the Quality of the Learning Experience

Centres were surveyed in relation to how they ensured the quality of the learning experience in their centres and the following responses were received.

Centres were asked:

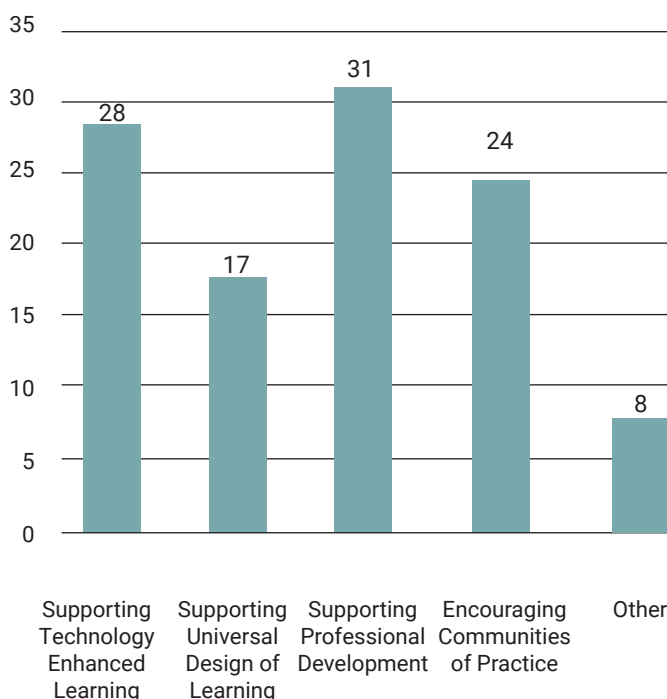
**How do you review *modes of delivery and pedagogical methods* at your centre/service to ensure they meet the needs of the learner?**

#### Review of modes of delivery (n=31)



It is interesting to note the relatively even spread of responses in the use of the more common review tools. This suggests that centres use a variety of methods to review modes and methods of delivery. It is also encouraging to note the use of the Results Approval Panel to review pedagogical delivery, and this should be encouraged into the future. Case Study 23 provides an example of the different ways in which one centre reviews its practices.

#### Methods to enhance teaching and learning (n=31)



In a follow-up question, centres were asked:

**How do you aim for the continuous enhancement of teaching and learning in your centre?**

Again, it is clear from the most common responses, that centres use a range of methods to support staff to enhance their teaching and learning. Other responses included the use of a Centre Evaluation and Implementation Plan, and the sharing of all Internal Verification and External Authentication feedback among staff. The responses to this question highlighted the absolute commitment in centres to enhancing teaching and learning, in order to deepen the quality of the learning experience. As one centre manager commented:



*“We maintain an ethos that promotes learner-centred education, values critical reflection and fosters personal and professional development for learners and staff. Continuous engagement with communities of practice allows for integration of modules within programmes to provide a holistic learning environment.”*

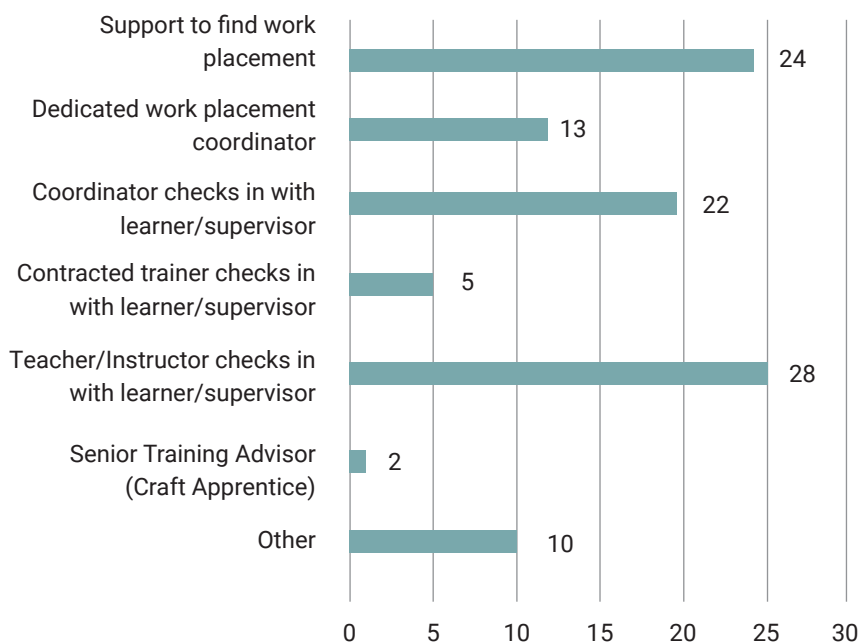
## CASE STUDY 23: Reflection in Action, Reflection on Action

A DDLETB Further Education college reviews its provision using both formal and informal ‘reflection in action’ and ‘reflection on action’ means. Throughout the year, learners are encouraged to give feedback to their teachers and coordinators regarding course delivery and pedagogical methods. This feedback is used as part of the mid- and end-of-year review process. In addition to this, class surveys are distributed and analysed, and a formal end-of-year review takes place in which semi-structured student focus groups are conducted in each class, informing coordinators with details on how to plan for the upcoming year.

Teachers take part in what they call ‘chew and chat’ sessions, organised by the local QA team, in which delivery and pedagogical processes are discussed with the aim of developing best practice guides for the college.

Work experience teachers engage with employers to gain vital insight into how the learning outcomes delivered in class have translated into a workplace environment. This again provides information on what to improve and enhance in each class.

### Supports to Safeguard Learners’ Well-Being on Work Placement (n=31)



### Supporting the learner on Work Placement

While it is essential that learners experience a quality learning environment when they are in their centre, it is equally important that they experience a safe, quality learning environment while on work placement. Therefore, centres were asked:

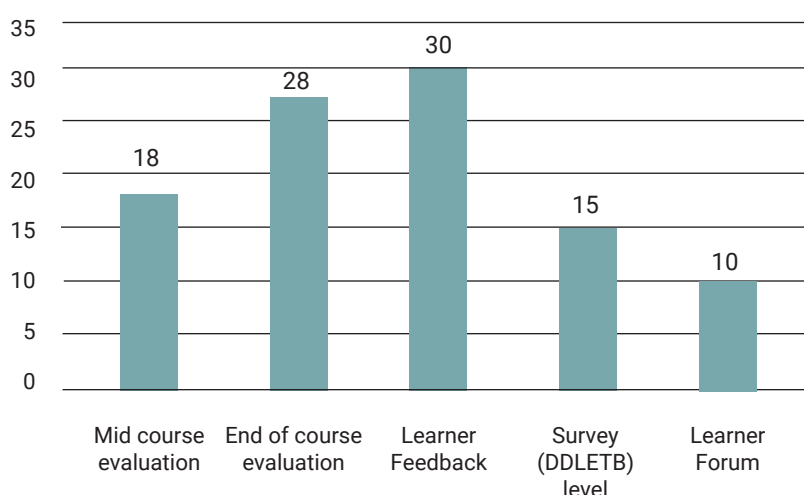
***What supports do you have in place at your centre/service, to safeguard learners’ well-being while out on work placement?***

While it is clear from the responses that the most common approach was to have the teacher/tutor/instructor check in with the learner and supervisor, all centres reported having systems in place to support learners. Other methods mentioned included the involvement of a Student Liaison Officer, and the use of a panel of trusted employers. Within apprenticeships, Authorised Officers (AOs) visit each company twice a year to ensure that apprentices are receiving the required level of training and support throughout their apprenticeship. Case Study 32 shows how an AO can support apprentices, while Case Study 27 provides an example of how learners can be supported while on practice placement as part of the Early Learning and Care programme. When asked about possible improvements to work placement supports for learners, some respondents suggested that the appointment of a DDLETB-wide Work Placement Coordinator might provide consistency of support across the different services.

### **Capturing the learner voice**

DDLETB has many first-rate facilities, but whether learning takes place in a state-of-the-art workshop, an outreach class in a community room, or any one of DDLETB's other locations and centres, the commitment to ensuring that the learners' needs are met remains the same. Therefore, in preparation for this report, centres were surveyed and asked:

**Methods to enhance the quality of the learner experience (n=31)**



### **What methods are used at your centre/service to monitor and enhance the quality of the learner experience?**

Some of the more popular responses are shown here. The findings show that a range of different methods are used to ensure that the learner's voice is captured in order to identify how the quality of their experience can be enhanced. For an example of how learner feedback is acted upon, see Case Study 24.

### **Student Councils**

FE colleges, as well as some other centres, have student councils where learners can discuss issues of concern and raise them with college management. Other ETB services, especially those which offer a range of provision types including as short-duration courses, have a less standardised approach to learner representation. However, **all** centres have implemented systems, such as suggestion boxes and other learner feedback opportunities, to ensure that the learner voice is heard.

### **Student Society**

The DDLETB FE Colleges and centres operate a common Student Society, which allows learners from different centres to meet, and enjoy the college society experience. The Society organises events and competitions between colleges such as quizzes, bowling competitions, fun-runs at Halloween & Christmas, sand sculpture competitions and other activities.

## **CASE STUDY 24: Acting Upon Learner Feedback**

One of the FE colleges distributes student surveys towards the end of each academic year to evaluate the college performance. Responses are reviewed to identify possible improvements to the learner experience. As the COVID-19 pandemic evolved, the college considered how best to capture the new experiences of teaching and learning during this phenomenon. Discussions informed the decision to facilitate a short semi-structured focus group session with each class cohort to capture qualitative information to enhance the survey answers. One of the questions asked of each group was “As a group, what is the one thing that affected your learning during COVID-19? Topics that arose among the discussions included: “Finding the motivation to stay with the work and submitting assignments on time with so much going on; Missing the social aspects of learning; Not making friends so easily.”

In response to this, the college decided to set up a new college team, namely the “Wellbeing and Resilience Team” comprised of the Deputy Principal, Guidance Counsellor and a coordinator. This has proved invaluable as they send out a monthly calendar of events, including online yoga, the Seven Habits of Resilience, study skills, well-being events, community mentoring etc.

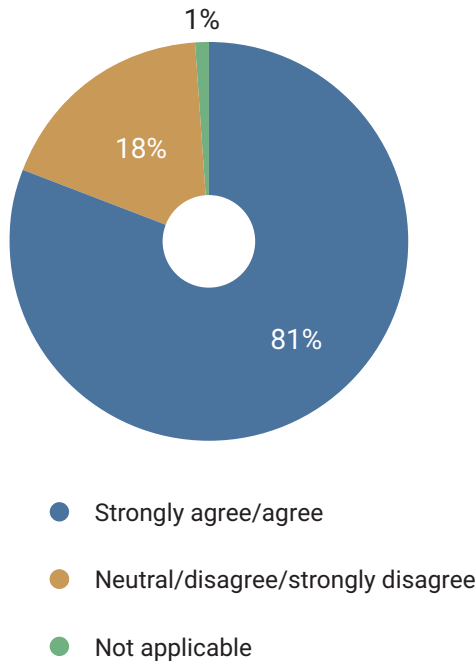
### **Gathering Learner Feedback**

DDLETB engaged with AONTAS in 2019 and 2021 to organise a Learner Forum. The Forum did not take place in 2020, due to the outbreak of COVID-19, but instead DDLETB undertook surveys in the summers of 2020 and 2021. Learners engaged well with all of these initiatives, as is shown in Table 5.2.

**Table 5.2: Response Rates to Learner Surveys**

Autumn 2019	AONTAS Learner Forum	110 respondents
Summer 2020	DDLETB learner survey	453 respondents
Summer 2021	DDLETB learner survey	845 respondents
Autumn 2021	AONTAS Learner Forum	85 respondents
	AONTAS Learner Survey	662 respondents

***I had lots of opportunity to interact with my teachers/instructors (n=845)***

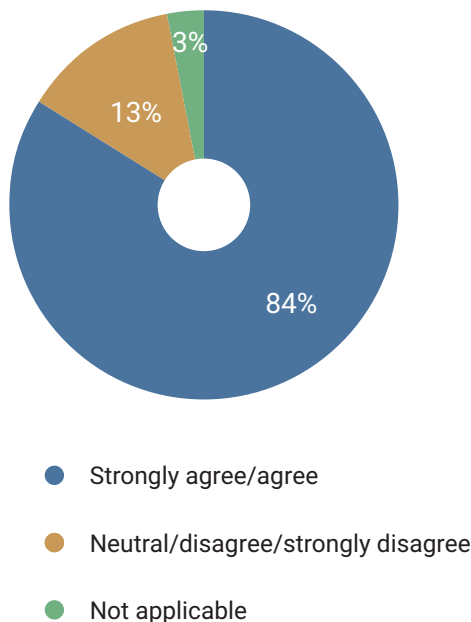


Understandably, the surveys and Learner Forum in 2020 and 2021 were heavily dominated by the impact of COVID-19 on the learning experience. Following the sudden, total lockdown of March 2020, from September 2020 onwards, most teaching and training was delivered remotely, although practical skills training was prioritised for in-centre delivery. COVID-19 notwithstanding, it is clear that learners were able to have a meaningful learning experience. In the summer of 2021, when asked if they had opportunities to interact with their teachers/instructors, 81% strongly agreed or agreed, despite the fact that much teaching/training had been conducted remotely. One learner at the AONTAS Learner Forum commented:



*"We have excellent tutors; they answer every question and give the emotional support we need to excel."*

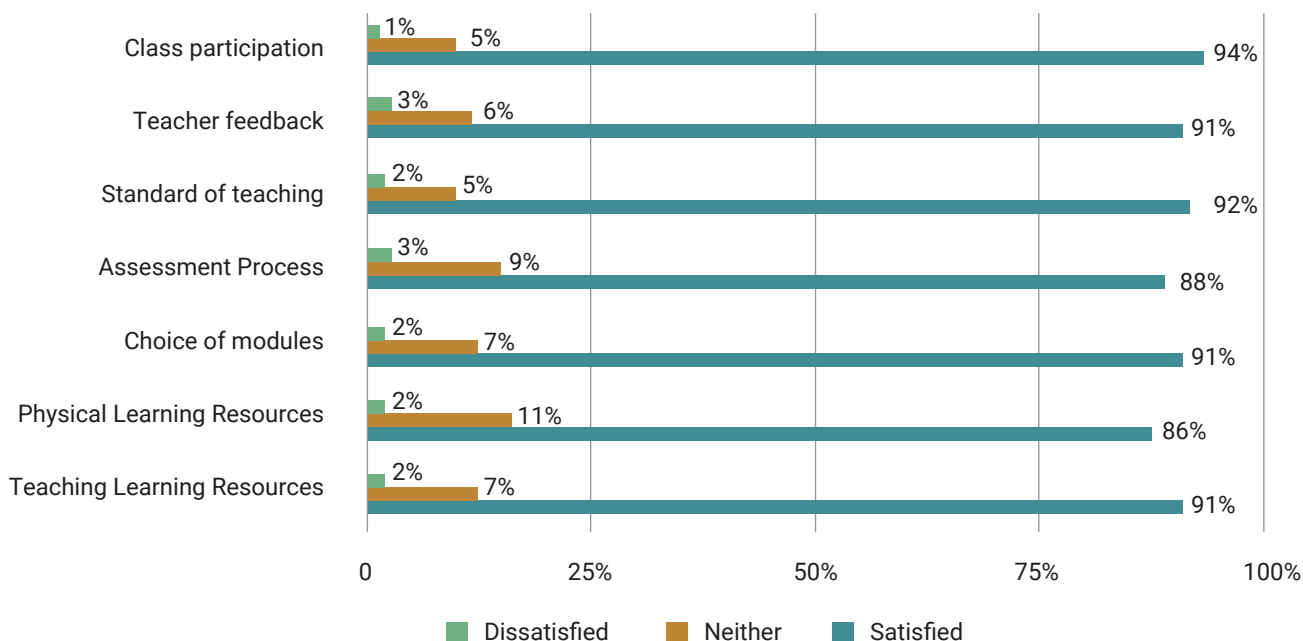
***I had access to the equipment needed to do my course (n=845)***



Equally, when asked in the same survey if they had access to the equipment they needed, 84% of learners strongly agreed or agreed, despite the fact that much teaching/training had occurred remotely. This positive result reflects the efforts made to ensure that practical skills training was prioritised for in-centre delivery where possible. It also highlights the exceptional efforts of the IT Department in rolling out the Digital Device Loan Scheme (see Chapter 3), and the Digital Learning Team in supporting staff and learners to make the transition to remote learning where this occurred.

The AONTAS Learner Forum sought feedback regarding the learning environment that learners experienced, and the findings, which are shown below, indicate very high levels of learner satisfaction with their overall learning experience. Respondents included learners from all levels and all services, as well as apprentices and learners undertaking courses through second providers.

**Satisfaction with Regards to Participation, Communication, Assessment and Centre Resources<sup>55</sup>**



**Erasmus + Projects**

DDLETB has engaged in European projects and the Erasmus + programme for many years, and a number of centres have engaged in both staff and learner mobility projects in that time. These initiatives are supported by the Erasmus+ sub-committee of the FE Network principals, deputy principals and FE Coordinators. This sub-committee was convened to share best practices and documents to support Erasmus+ project management. An Office 365 Sharepoint was created to collaborate and share materials such as templates for budget planning and minutes etc. Two centres have recently achieved Erasmus Accreditation status which will further develop their capacity to engage in Erasmus projects. A list of DDLETB centres engaged in Erasmus projects is available here.

**5.1.3 Learning Environment: Effective Practices Identified**

- > This review has shown that considerable thought is given to using teaching methodologies appropriate to the needs of the adult learner profile, and a growing number of staff have been trained in the Universal Design for Learning. There is an institutional commitment to expanding this further.

<sup>55</sup> For ease of reading, the responses “Very Satisfied” and “Satisfied” have been aggregated to “Satisfied”, while the responses for “Dissatisfied” and “Very Dissatisfied” have been aggregated to “Dissatisfied” and then rounded to the nearest whole number.

- 
- > The quality of the learner experience is monitored by all FET centres/schools and colleges and by DDLETB. A significant number of learners responded to surveys and a large percentage of learners reported enjoying excellent digital and vocationally specific resources.
  - > All learners are covered by insurance while on work placement, and all centres reported employing some additional system of overseeing and safeguarding learner's well-being while out on placement; the example of the Early Learning and Care Professional Practice Placements outlined in Case Study 24 is an example which could provide useful learning for other programmes.
  - > Despite the impact that COVID-19 has had on the delivery of education and training, learner feedback indicated high levels of satisfaction.

#### 5.1.4 Learning Environment: Areas for Improvement

- > While there is good evidence of the use of learner satisfaction rates and feedback to improve teaching and learning and quality of overall provision, guidelines could be developed to ensure the consistent analysis of learner feedback across all centres.
- > Centres are currently using a range of methods to support staff in enhancing their teaching and learning practice, and the development of guidelines for centres should encourage a more consistent approach. Greater use of Results Approval Panels to enhance teaching and methodologies should be encouraged, and this could be included in a future Teaching and Learning Policy.
- > While it is welcome that all centres have put systems in place to support learners on a day-to-day basis while on work placement, good practice guidelines could help to maintain consistency and ensure that all learners are adequately supported and protected.
- > While learners have access to a forum within their centres where they can address issues of concern to them, it is important to ensure that they all have the same opportunity to have their voices heard.
- > A continued focus on capital investment in facilities is critical for the future of FET.



## 5.1.5 Conclusion

The QQI Core QA Guidelines ask that the learning environment (teaching and learning resources, infrastructure and facilities) are appropriate for all contexts in which learning occurs. This review has shown that, where appropriate, learners can avail of excellent specialist resources to allow them to master their specific vocational skills. The quality of the learning environment and experience is monitored in all contexts, including on work placement, to ensure that there is equality in the supports that are offered to learners, as required in legislation.

### **Potential Future Enhancements:**

- > Develop a strategy to enable the continuous improvement of teaching methodologies and resources based on a Teaching and Learning Policy and accompanying guidelines.
- > Develop a DDLETB Learner Forum to enable learners to give feedback on the quality of their learning experience in further education and training. This will contribute to the continuous improvement of the FET teaching and learning environment.
- > Prioritise capital projects and funding with SOLAS.

## 5.2 Assessment of Learners

DDLETB is committed to the delivery of high-quality education and training programmes, with quality assured provision and high levels of achievement and certification by learners, as outlined in its Statement of Strategy. Central to the delivery of high-quality education and training, are assessment processes which are transparent, fair, valid, reliable, and consistent for all learners.<sup>56</sup>

### 5.2.1 The Current Context

Assessment is considered an essential part of an effective teaching and learning process in DDLETB, and a range of systems have been put in place to ensure consistency of assessment across all services and centres.

#### ***Considerations in the Assessment of Learners***

##### **Security of Assessment**

In the centralised system used in Training Centres, the Training Standards Office controls the security process by preparing the test packs based on a request from instructors. The assessment instruments are only in possession of the instructor during the test period.

In other centres, such as Further Education (FE) colleges and centres, Adult Education Centres and Youthreach, assessments are stored on password encrypted devices or locked, fireproof cabinets. Assessments for Craft Standards Based Apprenticeship programmes, both on and off-the job, are centrally designed, stored, and reviewed by SOLAS, and assessments for 2016+ apprenticeships are organised by the relevant Coordinating Provider.

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<sup>56</sup> For more on the principles of assessment, see Quality Assuring Assessment, Guidelines for Providers (QQI, 2013).



## Consistency of Assessment

Training Centres have a centralised approach to assessment managed by the Training Standards Officers, which ensures that all learners are assessed consistently. The Assessment Instrument Specifications used in the Training Centres were transferred from SOLAS to DDLETB as part of their validated programmes.

FE colleges and centres, Adult Education and Youthreach for the most part use locally devised assessments, issued to learners in briefs, which are developed by each teacher/tutor for their class. This facilitates the development of innovative assessments which are relevant to the learner's context, while still allowing the learner to evidence the learning outcomes (see Case Study 25). In many cases, assessments are developed jointly by assessors delivering the same modules within a centre or are reviewed by a programme coordinator to ensure consistency of assessment.

## CASE STUDY 25: Creating a Comic Book to Meet Level 2 Learning Outcomes



The Adult Education Services offer accredited and unaccredited provision to adults with intellectual disabilities at Levels 2 and 3. One group who were embarking on a Level 2 programme, discovered a shared interest in Marvel films, and decided to jointly create a comic book. This would allow them to meet the Level 2 learning outcomes in a creative and diverse way, while engaging in an activity they all enjoyed.

The learners brought in magazines and worked on a story board to support the comic book strip. It was a collaborative effort where, through words and imagery, everyone was encouraged to contribute. The tutor used the comic book idea to develop a sense of well-being and safety amongst the learners, creating confidence in their individual learning abilities and personal growth.

Learning outcomes were integrated between the different modules and the learners worked on different types of writing, including research, journaling, and reflection. They used reading strategies to research narratives and ideas. They brainstormed to create posters and collages, had discussions, formed opinions, listened to others, and considered non-verbal communication. The learners kept a weekly written and visual reflective journal to specifically meet the criteria and learning outcomes. They used technology to research ideas, images etc. and used relevant texts for reading purposes. They completed story boards, created posters and mind maps while evidencing group work and individual participation.

Through this activity, which they had identified themselves, learners addressed the learning outcomes for the Level 2 award, while collaborating together in their shared love of Marvel films to develop their own comic book.

Excerpts from the tutor's reflective journal are available [here](#).

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### **Assessment Information to Learners**

Learners are informed about how and why they are assessed: this happens both as part of the induction process, and through the assessment briefs that are issued to learners with each assessment. This provides learners with all relevant information regarding the assessment, including marking criteria and assessment deadlines. Brief templates are available to support consistency and transparency, and the Internal Verification process monitors to ensure that they have been issued to learners. When surveyed, staff also reported informing learners repeatedly about their assessments verbally during induction and in class, as well as in written format through learner handbooks and emails etc.

### **Supporting Innovation in Assessment**

The QA Unit offers Professional Development (PD) workshops, both developed locally and in conjunction with the Further Education and Support Services (FESS)<sup>57</sup>, in developing assignments, briefs and marking schemes at the appropriate level of the National Framework of Qualifications for specific learner groups.

Teachers, tutors and instructors are also strongly encouraged to engage in other professional development opportunities to up-skill in innovative teaching, learning and assessment methodologies. See Case Study 26 for an example of an innovative approach to assessment for ePortfolios that one teacher explored, as part of her studies for a Diploma in Technology Enhanced Learning.

## **CASE STUDY 26: Researching Innovative Assessment Techniques for ePortfolios**

A Horticulture teacher in an FE College decided to research the use of Book Creator as an innovative approach for learners to complete their assignments and develop an ePortfolio.

Learners were provided with step-by-step video guides in the technical aspects of creating an eBook, so that they could focus on evidencing their mastery of the horticultural learning outcomes. One learner's eBook assignment is available here, published with their permission.

The findings of the research showed that this assessment technique suited some learners better than others and may be better suited for use later in the year. The study concluded that the choice of assessment format should always be flexible as long as it fulfils the brief's criteria. The teacher's research methodology and conclusions are available here.

Interestingly, the teacher concluded that they would use Book Creator for their own content creation, thus again highlighting the significance of professional development and research in ensuring that DDLETB continues to offer innovative teaching, learning and assessment opportunities to its learners.

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<sup>57</sup> The Further Education Support Service (FESS) operates nationally through the Education and Training Boards to provide professional development and other QA supports to Department of Education and Skills/SOLAS funded centres which are registered with QQI.

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### **Assessment of Learners on Work Placement**

Most learners undertaking QQI certification at NFQ Levels 4-6 will complete work placement as part of their compulsory Work Experience module.<sup>58</sup> Work placements provide learners with the opportunity to develop their skills, integrate knowledge and practise their chosen vocational area, and as such, they are hugely beneficial. However, the marks for professional competences evidenced in the work placement are worth 40% of the overall mark, based largely on a report completed by the Work Placement Supervisor. This is a sizeable proportion of the overall marks which are determined by someone who may not have training in assessing learning and could potentially undermine efforts to ensure consistency of assessment. To address this issue, DDLETB led the national re-development of the Work Experience modules from NFQ Levels 4-6 in 2018, with revised marks and tighter guidelines to facilitate greater consistency of assessment. See Case Study 27 for an example of how the challenge of work placement assessment has been addressed in the ELC programme.

### **CASE STUDY 27: Early Learning and Care (ELC) Professional Practice Placement**

Professional practice placement is considered vital for Early Learning and Care learners, to ensure that they become skilled Early Years professionals. As such, it is essential that assessment of this placement is undertaken by appropriately qualified professionals. The practice placement process is thus monitored by the Professional Practice Placement Monitor, who oversees the entire process, and monitors the well-being of the learner while on placement. When going out on placement, learners work with a suitably qualified staff member of the ELC service who supervises the learner while they are on placement.

In order to assess the two practice placements, the monitor and the supervisor/s participate in two tripartite meetings, in consultation with the learner, to review the learner's progress and to make a joint evaluation of the learner's competencies. Thus, the assessment judgement itself is made by the monitor who is trained in assessing, but with input from the supervisor who has witnessed the learner on placement.

### **Assessment in Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)**

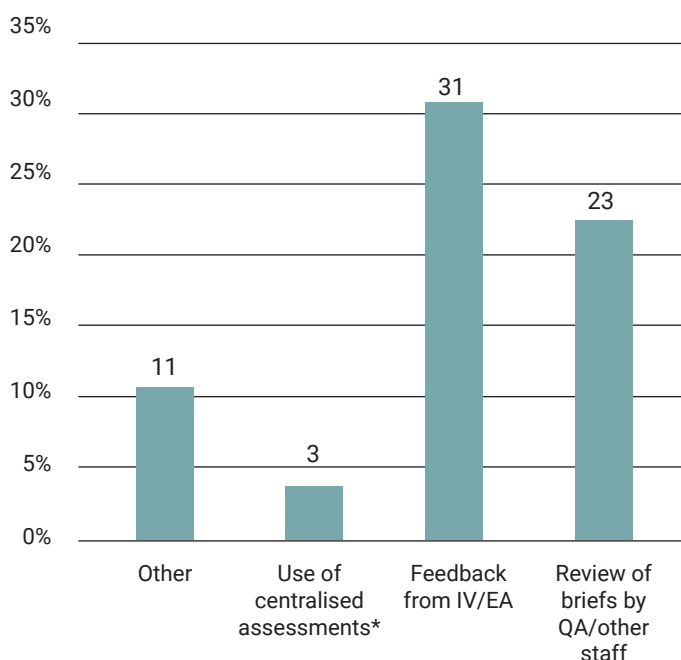
DDLETB has been engaging in the TOBAR RPL project with the Defence Forces (see Case Study 11, in Chapter 4). In this pilot project, mentors collaborated to identify a common approach to the assessment of learner portfolios and a coordinator was appointed to ensure overall consistency of assessment.

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<sup>58</sup> Although Work Experience is a compulsory module for most QQI awards, alternative contingency arrangements were agreed with QQI to facilitate those learners who were unable to get any work placements due to COVID-19 restrictions. Those contingency arrangements are largely due to expire in August 2022.

## 5.2.2 Evaluation

### How is Consistency of Assessment Achieved? (n=31)



### Consistency of Assessment

In preparation for this report, centres were asked how they ensured consistency of assessment in their centres. Centralised assessments were used by the Training Centres. All centres relied on feedback from the Internal Verification/External Authentication processes, which was used in a process of continuous improvement, while 23 of the 31 centres had a process to review briefs, either by QA staff or at departmental level. Other methods for ensuring consistency of assessment mentioned were the use of standardised brief templates, the use of grading criteria guidelines, and the use of communities of practice and collaboration between teachers delivering the same components. These methods allow for innovation, while supporting consistency in assessment.

### Security of Assessments

Centres were further asked how they ensured the integrity and security of assessment instruments and learner records. Centres reported providing lockable storage, staff briefings on the security of assessments, as well as using secure digital platforms, reflecting the move of most centres to Emergency Remote Teaching in the past year.

### Roll-out of Assessment Procedure Handbooks

While there are differing approaches to the use of centralised versus localised assessments, the roll-out of the common Assessment Procedures handbooks in September 2019 has supported a consistent approach to assessment across all centres<sup>59</sup>. Feedback from staff in preparation for this report suggested that there was a demand for more procedures to be developed across all services, and this will be undertaken as part of the overall development of the new QA Manual.

### Feedback to learners

The use of formative and summative feedback is considered an essential part of the assessment process, as outlined in QQI's *Quality Assuring Assessment Guidelines for Providers (2013)*. All learners receive timely formative and summative feedback on their assignments, which is monitored as part of the Internal Verification process and there are currently several different feedback templates/approaches available across the centres. Professional Development workshops on feedback are offered regularly by the QA Unit, and staff are encouraged to attend these, as well as engaging in other professional development opportunities to experience and

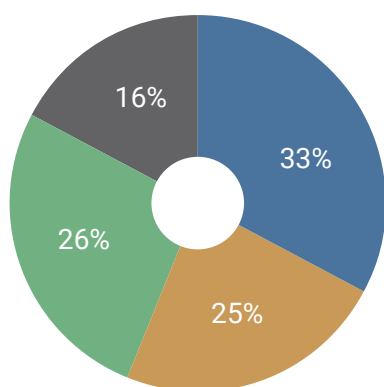
<sup>59</sup> The assessment procedures which have been developed and rolled out to date are: *Reasonable Accommodation, Assessment Deadlines, Examinations, Assessment Malpractice, Assessment Process Appeals, Assessment Results Appeals, and Secure Storage*.

explore innovative feedback methodologies. See details here of how one teacher researched new technologies for giving feedback to learners.

### Authentication of Assessment

All QQI assessment, whether it takes place in centre, or on work placement, is internally verified and externally authenticated as per DDLETB policies and procedures. As part of the assessment process, tutor packs are submitted along with learner portfolios, and the Internal Verification (IV) and External Authentication (EA) processes monitor to ensure that assessments have been planned, that the procedures outlined above have been followed, and that the learning outcomes have been assessed appropriately.

#### Feedback to Staff Following Authentication (n=31)



- Individual verbal feedback
- Individual written feedback
- Collated feedback
- Not at all
- Other

Reports are generated from the IV and EA processes, which highlight areas for improvement as well as good practice identified. These reports are considered by the Results Approval Panel (RAP) who, as part of their overall review of certification, identify areas for future improvement. The concept of continuous improvement is particularly important. Therefore, feedback from the IV and EA reports is given to teachers/tutors/instructors, so as to complete a cycle of continuous enhancement. This feedback is variously given as individual feedback for an individual staff member, or collated feedback from the entire centre. Some centres use staff meetings to discuss feedback.

All reports are forwarded to the QA Unit where they are collated and anonymised, to be considered by the relevant governance groups. This collated feedback is also circulated to all centres so as to share the learning from across the entire ETB. For more details, see Section 4.7 above, "Integrity and Approval of Learner Results". All non-QQI assessment must comply with relevant assessment criteria and processes of that awarding body, and is currently managed at centre level, and in line with the awarding body criteria.

#### Amendment of Assessments Due to COVID-19

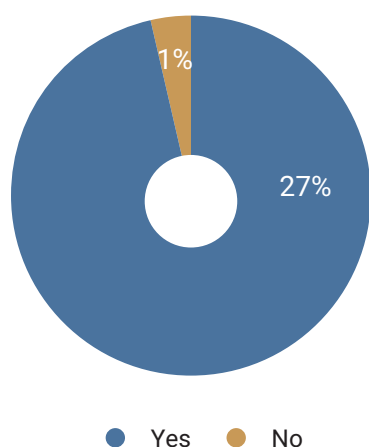
COVID-19 restrictions from March 2020 onwards meant that many centres were closed, and many assessments (mostly exams but some skills demonstrations, where appropriate) needed to be reconsidered. As recommended in the QQI COVID-19 Contingency Guidelines, DDLETB made the decision not to permit fully online exams for QQI certification, as appropriate quality assurance mechanisms, such as proctoring, were not in place. Instead, these assessments were converted to alternative assignments, and governance procedures were put in place, as part of the DDLETB Contingency Guidelines, to oversee the process. Following the June 2020 certification period, it

was felt that more support was needed in order to maintain standards. Therefore, from September 2020, training on developing amended assessments was organised, guidelines and a toolkit were developed, and the QA Unit continued to review amended assessments as per the agreed governance procedures. The assessment of practical skills took place in centre insofar as was possible, with appropriate safety measures in place.

To monitor the success of this approach, External Authenticators were surveyed in June 2021, following the certification period, to assess whether standards had been maintained. They were asked:

***Did you find that this year's learner evidence reflected similar academic standards as previous years? (n=28)***

**Academic standard maintained? (n=28)**



Twenty-seven out of the 28 respondents agreed that the evidence reflected a similar standard as previous years. When asked to comment further, the following feedback was given:

“Standard was excellent and results excellent in line with National Standards. The teaching staff spent more time preparing and going that “extra mile” for the learners due to Covid-19. This was very evident and successful. They are to be commended.”

“Yes indeed. All preparation and training was exemplary. The email support was hugely evident and beneficial. All staff extremely approachable and most helpful.”

While further work may be needed to fine-tune remote external authentication and ePortfolios, it would appear that academic standards in assessment were maintained despite the challenges imposed by COVID-19.

### **5.2.3 Assessment of Learners: Effective Practice Identified**

- > The roll-out of the common Assessment Procedures handbooks in September 2019 has supported a consistent approach to assessment across all centres.
- > Learners are informed about their assessments in written format through briefs which are monitored through the Internal Verification process, and this is backed up with verbal information which is provided in class. Centres have systems in place to ensure the integrity and security of assessment instruments, and where centralised assessments are used, their security is managed by named personnel.
- > The standard of assessment is high, with practitioners engaging in professional development opportunities to identify innovative approaches to assessment and feedback. Evidence from External Authenticators would suggest that despite some

assessment techniques, such as exams or skills demonstrations being amended during the COVID-19 lockdowns, academic standards were maintained.

- > The revised *Work Experience* modules and guidelines have gone some way to ensuring the consistency of assessment which occurs on work placement. The approach to assessing professional practice placement in the new Early Learning Care programmes may provide useful learning which could inform other programmes in the future.

#### 5.2.4 Assessment of Learners: Areas for Improvement

- > An overarching Assessment Policy should be developed to encompass the dual systems in place with regards to centralised and locally devised systems. This should be developed as part of the new Quality Assurance Manual and should include guidelines for a common approach to feedback to learners across DDLETB.
- > Further assessment procedures and guidelines should be developed to support the consistency of assessment within centres, to include the promotion of communities of practice.
- > Feedback from this self-evaluation process revealed a wide range of highly innovative assessment methodologies in use. These should be shared, possibly through a series of best practice seminars or other PD opportunities, to ensure that all learners can benefit from the most appropriate and innovative methodologies.

#### 5.2.5 Conclusion

The QCI *Core QA Guidelines* expect that assessment is fair and consistent, takes account of existing knowledge about assessment processes, and provides feedback to providers and learners.

This review has shown that learners in DDLETB are provided with clear and transparent information about their assignments in briefs, that processes are in place to ensure consistency of assessment, and that where centralised assessments are used, systems are in place to ensure their security and integrity. Feedback mechanisms are in place and monitored but are currently not standardised across DDLETB FET. Finally, this review has highlighted a commitment to professional development, both organisationally and by individual staff members, to ensure that the most up-to-date methodologies are used in teaching, learning and assessment.

##### **Potential Future Enhancements:**

- > Develop an Assessment Policy and guidelines to ensure consistency of assessment procedures across FET.
- > Best practice, innovative teaching and assessment methodologies to continue to be identified and disseminated.

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## 5.3 Supports for Learners

The DDLETB Statement of Strategy, 2017-2021, identifies the provision of “High quality education and training programmes” and “High quality experience for learners”, as strategic goals. The availability of learner supports are key to DDLETB achieving those goals.

### ***Context for Learner Supports in FET***

The level of support required by FET learners varies considerably depending on a number of factors, including the learner profile. As can be seen from Section 9 of the *Provider Profile*, the FET learner profile is varied and includes priority cohorts who can be experiencing intergenerational and multiple barriers to participation. These include the long-term unemployed, members of the traveller community, learners with disabilities, early school leavers with very low level of educational attainment and those with little or no English language skills. Engaging, retaining and progressing priority cohorts such as these requires the provision of significant levels of support. The learner profile also includes learners who have higher levels of education attainment but who have been out of education for long time and who need support to re-skill as a result of redundancy e.g. due to the pandemic or Brexit. It can also include learners who are either unemployed or in employment, but who wish to update their skills in order to find employment, progress in the workplace or re-skill to avoid redundancy in the future.

To meet the needs of this diverse learner profile, FET provision is equally diverse. It ranges from non-accredited provision (aimed at social inclusion and building capacity to engage in lifelong learning and developing key skills in literacy, numeracy, digital skills and language), to accredited provision such as apprenticeships and Level 6 professional certificates. FET programmes are operated according to distinct operational guidelines and funding criteria, and over time this has led to inconsistencies in the level of learner supports provided across FET. DDLETB will continue to dedicate additional funding for supports through the funding mechanism of SOLAS, as the provision of consistent learner supports across all FET provision is a key priority identified in the national FET strategy “*Future FET: Transforming Learning*”.

### **5.1.3 The Current Context**

#### ***Learner Supports at Centre Level***

All learners are given the opportunity to disclose additional support needs when they register for a course, but anecdotal evidence suggests that many learners chose not to do so at that time, meaning that there is a risk that support needs are either not identified or reported, or that support systems must be put in place at a later stage. Other learners may have undiagnosed learning difficulties, and centres must then find ways to support and accommodate those learners.

#### ***Monitoring the Provision of Supports***

Learner satisfaction is monitored at centre level through learner feedback and end-of-course evaluations, while at DDLETB level, satisfaction is monitored through the learner survey and the AONTAS Learner Forum.



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### **Reasonable Accommodation**

A *Reasonable Accommodation Handbook* has been in use in all centres since 2019. A list of possible accommodations is provided in Table 5.3.

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**Table 5.3 Reasonable Accommodations that may be offered to learners**

Modified presentation of assignments/ examination papers, e.g. enlargements
Scribes/readers
Sign language interpreter
Rest breaks
Adaptive equipment/software
Use of assistive technology
Additional time
Separate room/space.

### **Disability Supports**

DDLETB welcomes applications from all learners, including those with disabilities, special educational needs and medical conditions. In FE colleges and centres, the guidance counsellors play a critical role in supporting learners to access courses, or seek additional supports for disabilities or other additional needs. In addition to the supports outlined above, learners in FE colleges and centres may also avail of SOLAS's 'Fund for Students with Disabilities' (FSD). In 2021, **828** learners on PLC courses in FE Colleges availed of the fund for learners with disabilities. Supports which are covered by the FSD are outlined in Table 5.4 below.

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**Table 5.4 Supports Available to Learners Through the FSD**

Assistive technology equipment and software
Non-medical personal assistants
Academic/learning support
Deaf supports
Transport support

Case Study 28 is an example of how learners are supported. While alternative funding mechanisms are available to provide learner supports in other services, it is acknowledged that there are inconsistencies in their availability, and this may be leading to the predominant use of reasonable accommodation noted in the survey on page 151 below. DDLETB will request funding through SOLAS on an annual basis in order to support a greater number of learners.

## CASE STUDY 28: Use of FDS Grant to Support Learner to Progress

A mature student in an FE college who studied Sports, Fitness & Exercise (QQI Level 5) and Personal Training, Strength and Conditioning (QQI Level 6), qualified for the FSD grant, as he had a disability. The fund provided the student with assistive technology, exam supports and academic learning support to assist with his physical challenges and learning difficulties.

The student regularly accessed the guidance service to discuss progression routes. The Guidance Counsellor worked with the student to plan and assist with his CAO application and preparation of the personal statement for advanced entry.

Through these supports, a committed teaching staff, and the student's motivation and determination, he achieved the required results and his goal of getting a place on the Sports and Exercise Management Course in UCD in 2021.

### ***Specialist Training Providers***

DDLETB supports Specialist Training Providers (STPs) in the provision of learner-focused training and related services, to assist individuals to enter or re-enter the labour market. STPs address the identified training needs of people with disabilities who are experiencing exclusion and labour market disadvantage.

The programmes aim to equip learners with personal, social, and work-related skills. Learners will progress to greater levels of independence, learn to manage their health and well-being, and be supported and encouraged to participate in their own communities, workplaces, and society. STPs typically provide programmes at NFQ Levels 3 and 4. The demand for these services has greatly increased because of the mental health issues resulting from the prolonged effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

### ***Guidance Information and Recruitment Service***

The Guidance, Information and Recruitment services support learners before, during and after their programme with DDLETB.

### ***Learner Well-being and Mental Health Supports***

While all staff have responsibility for the pastoral needs of the learners in their care, several centres have put more structured systems in place, variously known as the "Care Team", "Well-being Team" or "Student Support Team". Typically consisting of centre middle/senior management, guidance counsellors or other staff members, these teams meet regularly to identify, discuss, and provide any supports needed by learners in the centres. See Case Studies 29, 30 and 31 for examples of well-being and mental health supports which are available to learners.

## CASE STUDY 29: Adult Education Guidance Services

An older female learner attending classes in an Adult Education Centre was experiencing stress and anxiety, not related to her course but impacting on her ability to engage with it. The tutor was concerned for her well-being as well as boundary issues in terms of her role as tutor, and the information the learner was sharing. The learner was referred to the Guidance Service for personal counselling, and the counsellor worked with the learner over a period of six meetings to provide a safe space to explore thoughts and feelings and develop coping strategies to help manage anxieties better. Providing this separate space and additional support allowed the learner to use her time in class more effectively, and a discrete time to focus on her emotional well-being. This case can be typical of some of the more vulnerable learners attending classes who may be experiencing difficulties in the home and personal lives and may bring that into the learning space. An integrated guidance support service, and collaboration between tutors, coordinators and the guidance counsellor is essential to managing boundaries and enhancing the students' learning experiences.

## CASE STUDY 30: Approaches to Learner Care and Well-Being

**Example 1:** An FE college has developed a **Care Team**, comprising of the Principal, Deputy Principal, the staff member with responsibility for student welfare and the Guidance Counsellor. This team meets each week to discuss and provide any supports needed by students in the college.

**Example 2:** A Dual Provision school has developed a **Student Support Team** for its FET learners, in response to an identified need to provide additional, and formalize existing, supports for learners. The role of the team is to:

- > coordinate supports for learners
- > facilitate links to the community and non-school support services
- > facilitate learners with support needs to continue to access education
- > facilitate staff to support learners
- > ensure all staff are briefed on policies and procedures about student well-being and support
- > advise school management on the development and review of effective student support policies and structures.

These varying approaches to supporting learner well-being mean that learners can access the supports needed to successfully engage in their studies.

## CASE STUDY: 31 The Mental Health Champions project

The "**Mental Health Champions**" programme has been nominated in the Health and Wellbeing category for the AONTAS STAR Awards 2022!

This year long initiative entitled '*Recovery: Learning Together*' was designed to support the engagement in non-formal education, of people marginalised because of mental health distress. The programme provided a platform for participants to build on their capacity to develop their own bespoke recovery tools, and act as a pathway to further education and training opportunities.

This programme was designed and delivered in partnership with the Recovery College, DCU and the Community Education Facilitators (Adult Education Services) in Fingal. In total, 219 people including FET employees, community organisations and members of the community who were recovering from mental health challenges participated in this programme in 2020-2021. The initiative was supported by the Healthy Ireland Fund, DCU & DDLETB.

Within apprenticeships, Authorised Officers (AOs) support apprentices during their apprenticeship. Case Study 32 provides an example of this support.

## CASE STUDY 32: A day in the life of an Authorised Officer, going the extra mile to support apprentices

On a routine monitoring visit an Authorised Officer (AO) was approached by an apprentice due to commence his Phase 2 Motor Mechanic training. The apprentice was very anxious regarding his reading, his ability to recognise words and lack of concentration when reading. He was especially worried regarding technical language and terminology. He did not have an educational report from secondary school. His employer spoke highly of the apprentice in terms of his technical ability, reliability and commitment, and asked the AO if supports were available for the apprentice.

The AO arranged for the apprentice to meet with the DDLETB Guidance Counsellor, who completed a Learner Support Needs Assessment. The results showed the apprentice had a number of learning difficulties attributed to dyslexia. When this information was shared with the apprentice, he was delighted to get a better understanding of his learning support needs. A 'Road Map' was developed by the Guidance Counsellor and AO which set out goals to address the learning support needs. The AO secured a place for the apprentice in an Adult Learning Centre which agreed to provide reading tuition.

When the apprentice was called for Phase 2, the AO sourced theory notes to help him prepare for his reading classes. The Apprentice commenced his Phase 2 training with a greater understanding of his learning needs and had more confidence in himself. The AO also ensured that the apprentice had access to assistive technologies, as well as a reader and a scribe while attending his Phase 2 Training.

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### **Psychological Support Services**

Learners who may be struggling with mental health or more serious challenges to participation, may avail of the services of the Psychological Support Service (PSS). This service is available to learners as dictated by demand and the capacity of the PSS to meet that demand. A broad range of psychological supports are provided in response to requests submitted by schools/centres.

Interventions by the PSS include:

- > the provision of both direct and indirect support to students
- > the resolution of behavioural, motivational, emotional and cognitive difficulties of individuals, through assessment and therapeutic intervention
- > preventative work with target groups
- > professional support of teaching staff, e.g. consultation
- > in-service training in a range of areas
- > staff support.

Where there is a crisis within a centre, the service is available to respond and provide crisis support. However, the size of the service is insufficient to cope with the on-going demands that are placed upon it, and anecdotal evidence from all services would suggest that an increasing number of learners are presenting with mental health issues. This will present the need for enhanced services in the future.

### **Literacy, and numeracy supports**

The Adult Education Service provides literacy and numeracy supports in small groups or one-to-one tuition to adults with basic educational needs. These may include uncertified or certified classes at Levels 2 and 3 of the National Framework of Qualifications. In some cases, AES tutors will also provide literacy, numeracy, or study support skills to learners in other services. See Case Study 33 for an example of such support which is given to apprentices.

### **English Language Supports**

As can be seen from the *Provider Profile*, the population across the DDLETB catchment area is extremely diverse. According to research conducted on behalf of DDLETB Youthservices<sup>60</sup>, when considering cultural and ethnic background, 37% of all Black or Black Irish African and 30% of all Asian or Asian Irish Chinese in Ireland are resident in the DDLETB catchment area. This diversity has led to a consistently high demand for English Language provision and supports for those participating in FET programmes whose first language is not English.

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<sup>60</sup> Socio-economic profile of area and an analysis of current provision, 2018

## CASE STUDY 33: FET Study Skills Unit

The FET Study Skills Unit is an initiative involving the four Adult Education Services and the three Training Centres. The purpose of this initiative was to develop a model for the provision of study skills to Phase 2 apprentices to support them in the literacy/communications, numeracy/maths and/or general study skills needed to successfully complete their apprenticeship.

Since its inception, this initiative has grown substantially and currently is offered to over 50% of all Phase 2 apprentices in DDLETB across the three training centres. Excellent vocationally contextualised materials have been developed in the Electrical, Carpentry and Joinery and National Hairdressing apprenticeships, by AES tutors in collaboration with instructors. These materials have been shared nationally through the ETBI-led national 'Support to Apprentices' group and the electrical materials were recently published in partnership with ETBI.

Feedback on this project is extremely positive with demand for its services high. Apprentices and their instructors are vocal in their appreciation of the added value of this strategic support. This project also benefitted from a review commissioned through an external evaluator which assisted in identifying challenges within the system and areas for future development.

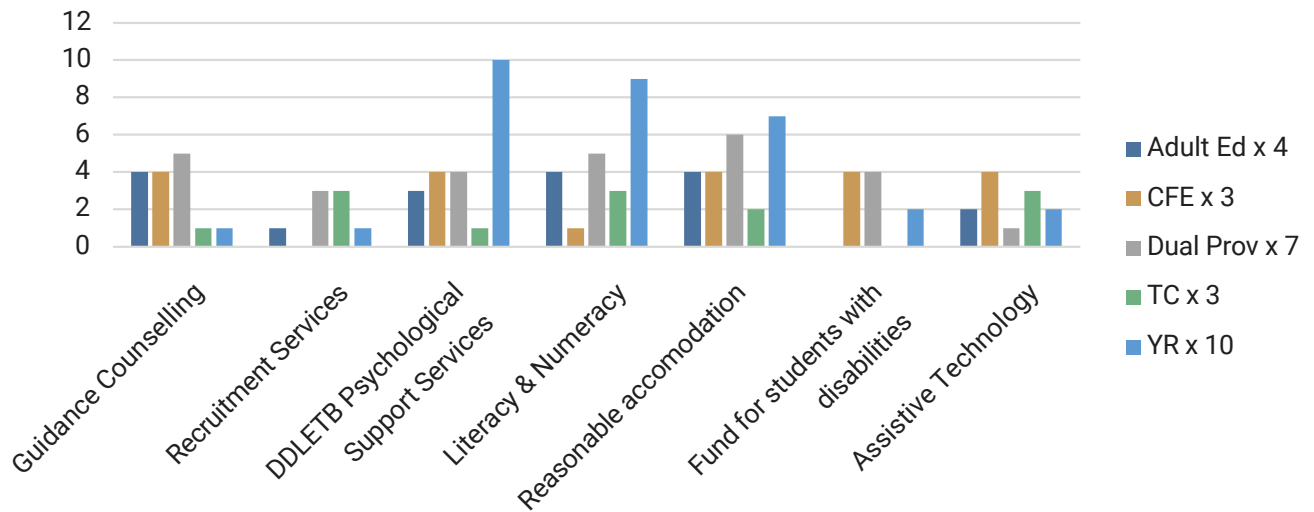
### ***Digital Supports***

Feedback from learners in the summer of 2020, following the first, sudden, COVID-19 lockdown indicated that not all learners had access to digital devices, and those that did, needed greater training in the use of digital tools if they were to engage competently in remote learning. Based on that feedback, centres revised induction programmes to ensure that learners had a solid foundation in the required digital tools from the outset of their course. Together with the Digital Device Loan Scheme, this has meant that more learners have been supported in using digital devices to engage fully in their learning. In addition, many learners participated in the Community Learning sessions which were streamed by the Digital Learning Team into homes and classrooms throughout the lockdowns.

### 5.3.2 Evaluation

In preparation for this report, centres were asked:

**What supports are available to meet the diverse needs of learners at your centre/service? (n=31)**



The most common responses are shown above, although other responses included language support, IT support, a Student Liaison Officer, and external supports such as Educational Welfare Officers and social workers. The findings show that all services provide a range of supports to all learners.

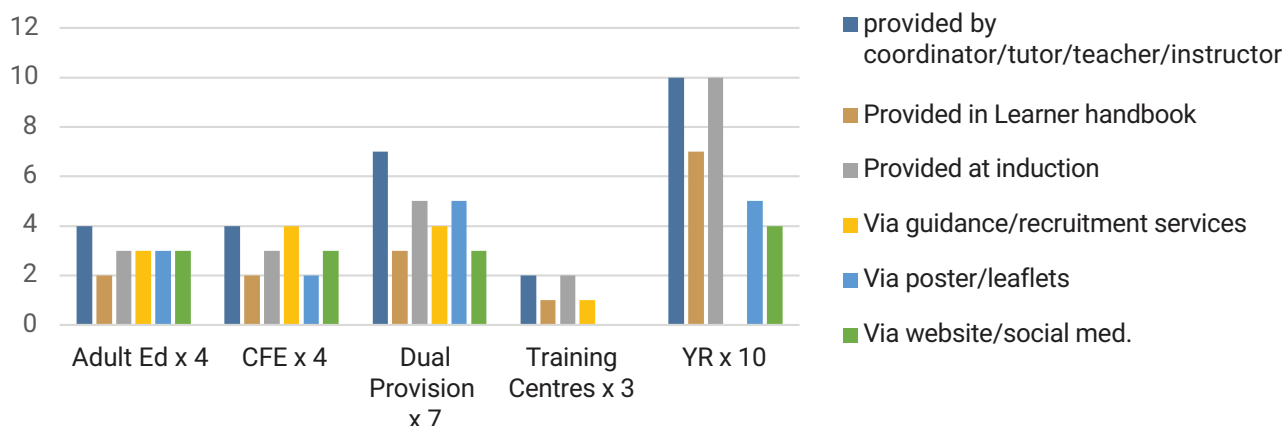
As a DDLETB learner representative commented,

*“...The college wanted you to have the best experience you could have...I felt like when I had a problem I was listened to, straightaway... The college gave me confidence because they had confidence in me. Being part of the Erasmus project last year really helped me as well...”*

In the responses to the survey above, 23 centres reported using reasonable accommodation, while 12 reported using assistive technology (a form of reasonable accommodation). This would suggest that many centres still use more traditional accommodations such as additional time, etc., although this is not necessarily true in training centres and FE colleges, where more, or an equal number of centres reported using assistive technology.

Centres were further asked:

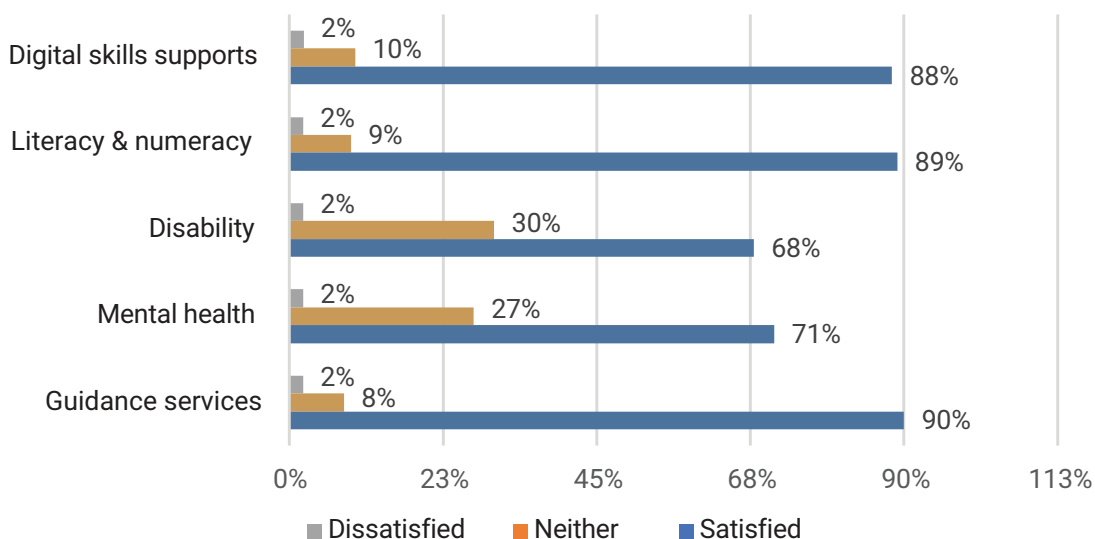
**How do you ensure that learners are aware of the existence of the above supports at your centre/service? (n=31)**



All centres use a variety of methods to inform learners about supports, thus increasing the likelihood that learners will be aware of available supports, and feel confident to ask for them. Feedback from learners on the supports available is sought as part of the course evaluation process.

**The Learner Perspective**

The AONTAS Learner Forum surveyed learners on some of the supports outlined above, and their satisfaction ratings are outlined below.





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In the survey, 68% and 71% respectively expressed satisfaction<sup>61</sup> with disability and mental health supports respectively. While it is recognised that the SOLAS Funding for Students with Disabilities is only available to Further Education learners, and the ETB is facing increasing numbers of learners presenting with mental health challenges, the findings would suggest that learners are satisfied overall with the supports they receive. This is reflected in some of the feedback from learners at the Forum:



*“The teachers here constantly check on us and ask how we’re doing and can they help as much as they can. There is a teacher here that comes in to help others with their writing or their use of English.”*

*“There was a lot of supports. I felt I could talk to my mentor about anything and every week we had the additional support of a psychologist.”*

### 5.3.3 Supports for Learners: Effective Practice Identified

- > The AONTAS Learner Forum indicates that overall, learners are satisfied with the supports that they are receiving.
- > The ETB’s response to addressing learners’ digital support needs following the first COVID-19 lockdown, was significant in terms of ensuring that learners could engage in a full year of Emergency Remote Teaching, and was supported by DDLETB’s long-standing commitment to the use of TEL.
- > The *Reasonable Accommodation Handbook* has been in place since 2019 and is now well embedded across all services and centres.
- > The availability of a range of support services is positive, and their impact is recognised by learners; this would support an expansion of these services to FET centres/schools and colleges who currently do not have access to these services.
- > Equally, the intervention of the Psychological Support Services in emergency or crisis situations is welcome, however, expansion of these services to reflect the size and scale of DDLETB would be welcome.
- > The Care/Wellbeing teams in place in certain centres is an interesting model, which could possibly be used in other centres.

### 5.3.4 Supports for Learners: Areas for Improvement

- > It is recognised that further consistency could be brought to the level of supports available to learners across DDLETB’s FET provision and this needs to be addressed through the development of best practice guidelines.

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<sup>61</sup> For ease of reading, the responses “Very Satisfied” and “Satisfied” have been aggregated to “Satisfied”, while the responses for “Dissatisfied” and “Very Dissatisfied” have been aggregated to “Dissatisfied” and then rounded to the nearest whole number.

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- > While the Reasonable Accommodations handbook is well embedded, it would be useful to undertake a review of it to ensure that it continues to provide the level of support that is needed.
  - > The digital skills needed by learners will continue to evolve, therefore the insights gained from the experience of COVID-19 (e.g. the importance of a technical induction and a digital device loan scheme), should be mainstreamed into the future.

### 5.3.5 Conclusion

This review has shown that there are a variety of supports available to learners, both academic and pastoral. Learners are informed of those supports, and surveyed regarding them, as per QQI guidelines. However, challenges remain in ensuring equality in the availability of supports, due to the dictates of external funding mechanisms.

#### **Potential Future Enhancements:**

- > Develop best practice guidelines around learner support and review the Reasonable Accommodations Handbook.
- > Include the learning from the COVID-19 experience into the future Teaching and Learning, as well as Assessment Policies.



# 6.1 Self-Evaluation, Monitoring and Review

This chapter considers the arrangements that DDLETB has in place for the self-evaluation, monitoring and review of its education and training provision, the Quality Assurance (QA) systems which underpin that provision, and the programmes through which it delivers it. Finally, this chapter will look at DDLETB’s external relationships, and consider how these are evaluated, monitored and reviewed.

DDLETB is committed to engaging in self-evaluation, monitoring and review to identify existing effective practices in order to maintain and build on them, while identifying areas for improvement and potential risks to DDLETB’s quality assured procedures.

## 6.1.1 The Current Context

### **Self-Evaluation in DDLETB: Executive Self-Evaluation Report**

In 2017, DDLETB undertook an Executive Self-Evaluation, in preparation for its reengagement process with QQI. This process evaluated DDLETB’s QA systems of the time against those of the then recently published *QQI Core Guidelines*. The findings of this self-evaluation process were published in an *Executive Self-Evaluation Report*, which allowed the ETB to explore its strengths, identify areas for improvement, and articulate, as an organisation, the approach to quality enhancement which it wished to adopt. This approach, and the initial goals which were identified as a means to achieve that quality enhancement, were published in that report as the first of a series of Quality Improvement Plans (QIPs). This QIP was submitted to QQI as part of DDLETB’s reengagement process, when QQI approved the ETB’s existing QA procedures. The Executive Self-Evaluation became DDLETB’s first formal engagement in its Quality Cycle with QQI (see illustration). Thereafter, annual QIPs were developed, approved by the Quality Council and submitted to QQI from 2018 until 2020. These informed the annual Quality Dialogue Meetings between DDLETB and QQI, where the achievement of those planned improvements was reviewed and discussed. Case Study 34 is an example of this process.

**The QQI Quality Cycle**



## CASE STUDY 34: Monitoring QA Enhancement Through the Quality Improvement Plan

As part of the Executive Self-Evaluation process, DDLETB identified the importance of adopting a foundational approach to the development of its evolving quality assurance processes. Therefore, it was decided that the first quality enhancement goal should be the development of a governance system for the management of FET QA, which would facilitate and support all future QA development. The evaluation further identified that improvements needed to be made to monitoring procedures. Finally, the report concluded that following the amalgamation of the two VECs and the three Training Centres, new procedures needed to be developed to ensure consistency of practice in assessment.

Therefore, the overarching goals identified in the first QIP were to:

- > enhance FET QA governance structures
- > improve course monitoring mechanisms and procedures
- > develop new policies and procedures to ensure consistency of practice.

By the time DDLETB met with QQI in the first Quality Dialogue meeting to review and monitor the achievement of the goals set in the Quality Improvement Plan, new QA governance structures had been developed and the governance units were meeting regularly; Internal Verification, External Authentication and Results Approval Panel reports were routinely being monitored at ETB level, and new assessment procedure handbooks were in the process of being developed.

### ***Inaugural Review Self-evaluation***

The self-evaluation process that is being undertaken here is the successor to that original Executive Self-Evaluation. It has considered the distance that DDLETB has travelled on its on-going journey of quality enhancement, and it has identified strengths and areas for improvement based on an analysis of the findings of a series of evaluation processes. QQI states that *“Self-evaluation is taken as an opportunity to engage in crucially important dialogue with stakeholders, including learners, employers, collaborative partners, and external experts.”*<sup>62</sup> Chapter 2 above, outlines the extent of the stakeholder engagement as part of this process; the range and number of stakeholders who were engaged as part of this self-evaluation are testament to the robust nature of the process that was undertaken. The findings of this *Self-Evaluation Report* and the External Review Panel will inform a new Quality Improvement Plan which will in turn be monitored; thus the Quality Cycle outlined above will continue in an ongoing process of continuous enhancement.

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<sup>62</sup> QQI Core QA Guidelines, 2016, p. 22.

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### ***Youthreach Centre Evaluation and Improvement Plans***

Each of the eleven DDLETB Youthreach centres undertake an annual Centre Evaluation and Improvement Plan (CEIP), which involves all staff and learners, and takes place over two days. As part of this process, the centre is evaluated against the 31 Quality Standards of the Youthreach Quality Framework,<sup>63</sup> areas for enhancement are identified, and an action plan is developed to address those areas of enhancement. The ensuing report is disseminated to the National Youthreach Coordinator, DDLETB and any named external stakeholder. The action plan is reviewed regularly at staff meetings and prior to the next CEIP evaluation.

### ***Centre-Level Self-Evaluations***

All centres engaged with great commitment to the self-evaluation process which was undertaken across all centres/services as part of this review. Furthermore, many centres undertake self-evaluations on a regular basis, either of the whole centre, or of particular elements of provision, while some centres are currently planning to undertake a Centre Evaluation and Improvement Plan (CEIP). However, it is recognised that a more standardised approach would ensure more oversight of centre evaluations.

### ***Internal Monitoring of Provision at Centre Level***

While self-evaluation has a broad focus and is carried out at specific intervals, QQI specifies that internal monitoring should be ongoing, and focus on specific indicators. DDLETB centres have a number of mechanisms in place to monitor their provision.

- > The Internal Verification (IV) and External Authentication (EA) processes provide essential internal monitoring functions with regards to the assessment and certification of programmes of education and training within a centre. The IV process monitors that all QA and administrative procedures relating to assessment (such as the totalling and recording of marks) have been correctly completed, while the EA process provides external confirmation that IV has been undertaken, and that the marks awarded are in line with national standards. Reports from these processes are reviewed and evaluated at centre level by the Results Approval Panel, which allows the senior management team and those with responsibility for QA in the centre to monitor QA errors and their remediation, as well as to identify areas of strength and those needing improvement.
- > The Results Approval Panel (RAP) process provides the opportunity to monitor a number of quality indicators, such as certification, appeals and QA procedural error rates, as well as to monitor the extent to which past actions identified for improvement have been implemented. In considering the issues raised in the IV and EA reports, the RAP has the opportunity to identify areas for local improvement or escalate issues to DDLETB level if they present a significant risk to DDLETB's quality assured provision. As such, the RAP plays an essential early warning role in the QA systems.
- > All centres monitor their provision by eliciting feedback from learners, which provides useful data on learner satisfaction rates, as well as on issues that may arise in the classroom but are not captured in IV or EA reports. This is done as part of the continuous Quality Improvement Cycle. Additionally, Programme Improvement Plans are used in some centres.

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<sup>63</sup> For an informal mapping of the Youthreach Quality Framework to QQI QA guidelines, click [here](#).

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### **Oversight of Internal Monitoring**

As outlined above, all Internal Verification, External Authentication and Results Approval Panel reports are forwarded to the QA Unit, including those of second providers. These are then monitored and reviewed by the appropriate governance unit, such as the Programmes Committee and Quality Council, who may make recommendations for QA or professional development initiatives to address any issues which have been noted. Case Study 35 is an example of how the findings from the monitoring process are acted upon. As part of this process, the outcomes of the appeals processes and overall certification rates are considered. Currently, only QQI-certified programmes are monitored by the DDLETB governance system. Non-QQI and uncertified courses are not included, although the AES are working in partnership with ETBI and ETBs nationally on a “Wider Benefits of Learning” pilot project, which aims to demonstrate the effectiveness of non-accredited programmes and distance travelled/progression by learners on non-accredited programmes

Finally, the Quality Unit also monitors QA non-conformance issues of a more substantive nature, which could present a potential risk to DDLETB’s quality assured processes. A log of such matters is kept, with a note of the issues and remedial actions taken, and these are reported to the Quality Council on an annual basis, or as required.

### **CASE STUDY 35: Acting Upon the Findings of the Monitoring Process**

In analysing the findings from the collated EA reports, the Programmes Committee noted that several EAs had flagged concerns around feedback to learners. Therefore, the Committee recommended that professional development workshops be developed and delivered to FET staff. This was done in conjunction with the Further Education Support Services (FESS). As a result of this initiative, staff were trained, a number of centres amended their approach to giving learner feedback, and the results were apparent in subsequent reports, with one EA commenting:



*“The feedback given to learners from across all levels and awards was superb—everyone appears to be singing from the same hymn sheet—very good ability to take on suggestions and then alter practices to employ them.”*

### **Evaluation of Strategic Performance Agreement with SOLAS**

The internal monitoring undertaken at centre and governance level is crucial in ensuring that DDLETB achieves the targets agreed with SOLAS. As outlined in the *Provider Profile*, in 2018, a Strategic Performance Agreement (SPA) was signed between SOLAS and DDLETB. This agreement set out targets for the ETB to achieve, including with respect to:

- > Learner participation rates
- > Learner completion and certification outcomes
- > Targeted sectors for provision

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These targets are monitored by the Strategy and Planning Unit and reported back to SOLAS annually.

An interim review of the SPA noted DDLETB's employer engagement initiatives and its collaboration with other stakeholders, as well as the richness of its literacy and numeracy provision and its approach to programme development.

### **6.1.2 Evaluation**

In preparation for this review, centres were surveyed, and asked to rate the effectiveness of their (centre-level) processes for self-evaluation, monitoring and review. The average response was **4** (where 5= very effective and 1= not effective). This would suggest that while centres are confident about their processes, they are aware of some need for improvement.

When asked for areas of improvement, responses included:

- > the development of a common self-evaluation checklist
- > the establishment of a DDLETB Learner Forum to improve feedback
- > the expansion of communities of practice to allow tutors to review courses collaboratively.

### **6.1.3 Self-Evaluation, Monitoring and Review: Effective Practice Identified**

- > The annual Quality improvement Plans provide an opportunity for DDLETB's evolving QA system to be planned, monitored and reviewed, with the annual Quality Dialogue Meeting with QQI providing an opportunity for a collaborative evaluation of progress. The Inaugural Review will now make that cycle more robust.
- > There is a commitment within DDLETB to ensuring that all voices are heard as part of the self-evaluation process. This is evidenced by the extensive consultation that was undertaken as part of the preparation for this Self-Evaluation Report.
- > Regular centre-level evaluations are taking place in Youthreach centres and other centres, while some centres are planning whole-centre evaluations, or evaluations of aspects of their provision.
- > Internal monitoring takes place at centre-level by the Results Approval Panel (RAP) through the analysis of Internal Verification (IV) and External Authentication (EA) reports. These act as early warning systems for possible QA issues, allowing centres to implement improvement processes or escalate more serious issues to governance level, where they are logged and addressed. Second providers are monitored at centre level.
- > Centres further monitor provision by gathering feedback from a range of sources including EAs, learners and external stakeholders.
- > Governance systems are in place for oversight of the monitoring processes, to ensure that the findings of those monitoring processes are acted upon appropriately, and to support



the reporting of data on quality indicators to SOLAS as required by the Strategic Performance Agreement.

#### 6.1.4 Self-Evaluation, Monitoring and Review: Areas for Improvement

- > There is a need for a Self-Evaluation, Monitoring and Review Policy to be developed, to include a review schedule and self-evaluation tool to support centres in this process.

### 6.1.5 Conclusion

*QQI Core QA Guidelines* expect providers to undertake self-evaluation, monitoring and review of their quality systems and provision, in order to identify effective practices and areas for improvement. This review has shown that DDLETB's evolving quality system is reviewed and evaluated on a regular basis through Quality Improvement Plans. Furthermore, most centres routinely complete an evaluation of their provision, in which they gather feedback from a range of sources. All centres routinely monitor their provision through the authentication processes. While reports on certification are reviewed centrally, that is not the case with all evaluations that are undertaken in the centres. The development of a Self-evaluation, Monitoring and Review Policy could help to address some of these issues.

#### Potential Future Enhancements:

- > Develop a Self-evaluation, Monitoring and Review Policy with associated documentation, in order to support consistency across all centres, to include all provision, both certified and uncertified.



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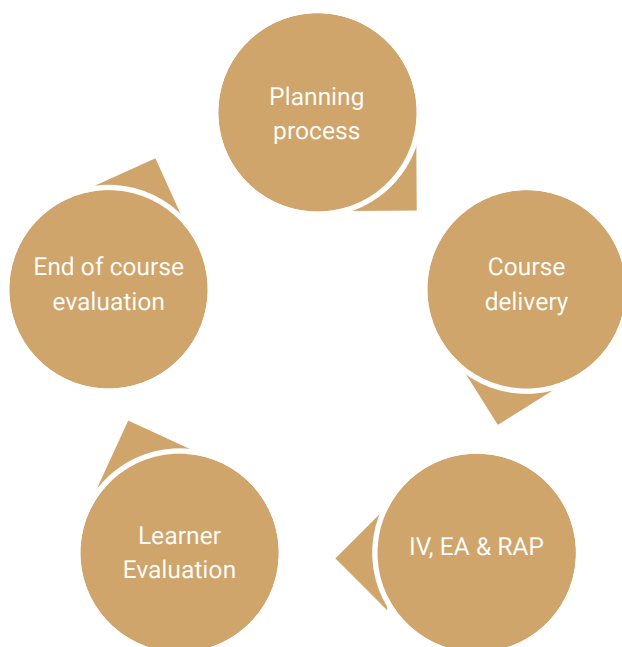
## 6.2 Programme Monitoring and Review

### 6.2.1 The Current Context

DDLETB is committed to monitoring and reviewing the programmes it delivers, and making amendments to the programme or delivery methods as appropriate, in order to ensure that these remain fit-for-purpose and appropriate to the needs of learners, employers and other stakeholders.

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#### **Monitoring, Review and Evaluation of Programme Delivery**



#### **Monitoring, Review and Evaluation of Programme Delivery**

The planning of provision is largely undertaken by centres, and monitored at ETB level. In their planning, centres are informed by feedback from a range of sources such as authentication reports, as well as learner and end of course evaluations. Planning is also informed by research such as that provided by SOLAS' Skills and Labour Market Research Unit (SLMRU), evaluations, such as those published by SOLAS, on PLC, Youthreach and Specific Skills Training provision and other published reports such as *"Barriers to Participation in FET (Martin, 2017)"*, *"Integrating Literacy and Numeracy (SOLAS, 2018)"* and *"Best Practice in Entrepreneurship Education in FET (Mooney et. al. 2016)"*. Having identified a new programme it wishes to deliver, a centre will apply to the Course Approval Committee to deliver it.

#### **Programme Monitoring**

All programmes leading to CAS awards are validated by QQI, and thereafter DDLETB's governance systems decide which centres may deliver those programmes. As part of the planning process, centres must apply for permission to deliver a DDLETB-validated programme, and in doing so, they must provide evidence that they have consulted with stakeholders regarding demand for the programme, that it addresses strategic national and DDLETB goals, that the research outlined above has been undertaken, and that the centre has the appropriate resources and staffing to deliver the programme. Approval is granted for three years. As part of the approval process, the QA Unit monitors to ensure that the centre is validated to deliver the programme, and the proposed programme, as delivered by the centre, meets the validation criteria. Once approved, centres are included in the QQI database for an approved location for that programme.

#### **Programme Review at Centre Level**

Once delivery has been approved by the Course Approvals Committee, delivery may commence. Following the completion of the course, the authentication and evaluation processes, as well as learner, staff and other stakeholder feedback can be considered as part of a programme review.

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## Review of Existing Programmes

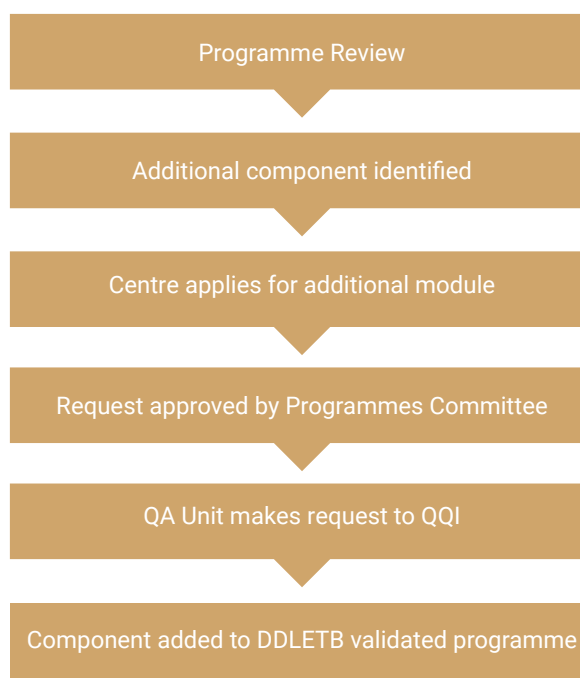
While many of the CAS programme modules and other programme materials were originally developed between 2008-2010 and now need to be updated, the QA Unit continues to make every effort to ensure that materials are kept up-to-date, and that programmes meet the needs of learners and are fit-for-purpose. Centres can ensure that programmes remain up-to-date by requesting additional modules to be added to a programme (requested through the Programmes Committee), requesting a module review, or requesting the development of an Assessment Instrument Specification. The former two processes are outlined below.

### Programme Amendment

As part of their course evaluations centres may identify the need to change the focus of the programme being delivered, through the inclusion of a new module/component to an existing programme. For example, a course leading to the General Studies 5M3114 programme can be given new relevance and focus by the addition of a new, relevant, vocationally specific component. Under QQI's Common Awards System (CAS), up to 20% of new components can be added to an existing award without needing to be revalidated. Centres who wish to request such a change must apply to the Programmes Committee, outlining a rationale for the amendment. If the change is approved by the Programmes Committee, the QA Unit notifies QQI, who add the new component to DDLETB's validated programme.

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### Additional Module Request Process



### Module Review

Many of the module descriptors based on the existing CAS awards were developed some time ago, and now need to be updated. Procedures have been put in place to do this, within the parameters of what is permitted within the validation guidelines. A request is made to the Programmes Committee through the QA Unit, providing evidence of the need for a review. Once the committee has agreed that a module review is justified, a Programme Development Working Group is convened to undertake the work. All staff delivering the module are involved in a consultation on the revised module, and when agreement has been reached, the final version is sent to the Programmes Committee for approval. See an illustration of the process below. Due to other developmental work currently being undertaken in the QA Unit, only essential module reviews have been undertaken recently.

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### Module Review process



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Assessment specifications may be revised using the procedures outlined in Section 4.5.1. Details of the quality assured processes governing the review of both modules and assessment specifications are available in Section 4.5.1. Case Study 36 provides examples of those processes.

### **CASE STUDY 36: Reviewing Modules and Assessments Following an Evaluation**

#### **Example 1:**

Feedback from the EA process indicated the need to review the Level 4 Customer Service 4N1989 module to ensure that the indicative content allowed the learners to achieve the learning outcomes in the most vocationally appropriate manner possible and that the assessment guidelines would allow the learners to demonstrate achievement of those outcomes. As the module was delivered across a number of centres, a working group was formed, the indicative content and assessment guidelines were reviewed, and all centres delivering the module participated in the consultation process. The revised version was approved and circulated to all centres for delivery.

#### **Example 2:**

The Assessment Development Working Group undertook a review of all Communications Assessment Instrument Specifications at NFQ Levels 3-6. It was noted that the communications technologies referenced in the assessments were out of date, and no longer relevant to the learner's current needs in the work place. Therefore, the assessments were amended to allow learners to evidence achievement of the learning outcomes using relevant and up-to-date communications technologies, and approved through the governance processes outlined in Section 4.5.1 above.

#### ***Review of award specifications and programmes at national level***

DDLETB is actively engaged in the review of awards at national level where this is occurring. For example, the ETB is represented on:

- > the QQI Reference Group for the Development of Broad Standards at NFQ Levels 1-4
- > Standards Advisory Groups at NFQ Levels 1-4 for new awards in the following fields of learning: Core, ICT, ESOL, Horticulture
- > Early Learning and Care Standards Advisory Group
- > ETB/QQI Collaborative Validation Working Group.

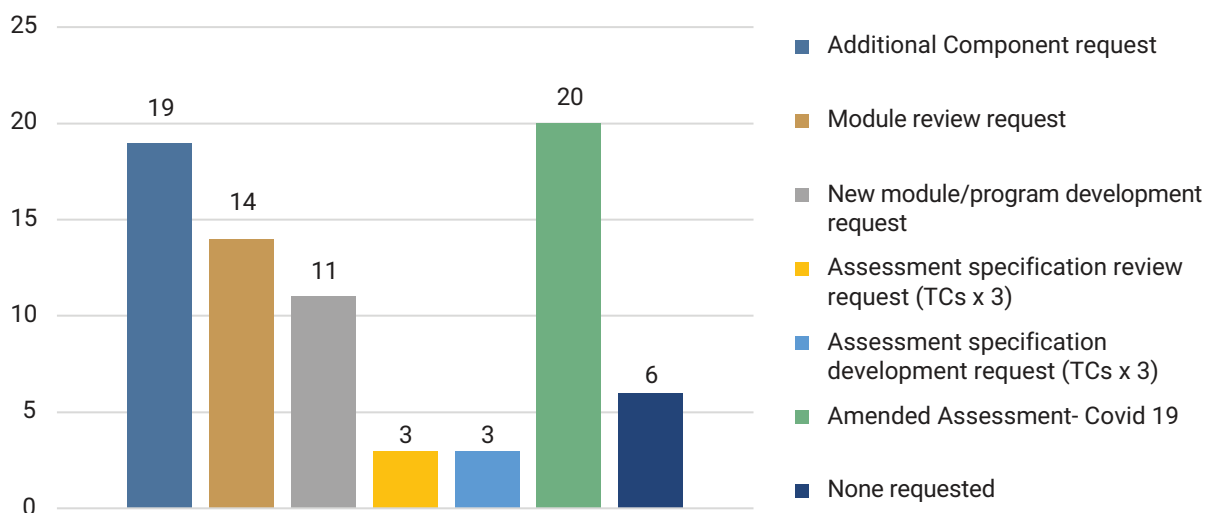
Furthermore, DDLETB has led nationally on the:

- > review, development and re-validation of the Digital Media Production programme on behalf of the 16 ETBs in 2017 and 2021.
- > review of the Work Experience modules and Work Experience Assessment Specification Instruments at Levels 3-6 on behalf of the 16 ETBs.

### 6.2.2 Evaluation

DDLETB colleges and centres regularly review their courses to ensure that the programmes delivered on those courses remain relevant and fit-for-purpose. They have a variety of means at their disposal to support them to do so, such as the addition of a new module to an existing programme (for example, to adjust the vocational focus of a programme), or through a module review. In preparation for this review, centres were surveyed to identify which of the mechanisms at their disposal they had used. As is indicated by the graph below, the most commonly requested method was for the amendment of assessments due to COVID-19, followed by additional component requests. Some module review requests were made and undertaken, but as outlined above, only essential module reviews have been undertaken recently due to other developmental work being undertaken by the QA Unit.

***Which of the following mechanisms have you used to ensure that the ETB programmes delivered on your courses remain relevant and fit-for-purpose? (n=29)***



### 6.2.3 Programme Monitoring and Review: Effective Practice Identified

- > Programme reviews are taking place in centres as part of the course evaluation as outlined in Section 4.5.1. These reviews include feedback from External Authenticators, learners, staff and external stakeholders.
- > Governance processes are in place to consider and approve the findings of the programme reviews, such as the need for new programme development, or module/assessment review.

- > New programme development is occurring, and modules and assessment specifications are being reviewed.
- > DDLETB is very engaged at a national level in the review and development of QQI awards, in order to ensure that the programmes leading to those awards can be kept as up-to-date and fit-for-purpose as possible.

#### 6.2.4 Programme Monitoring and Review: Areas for Improvement

- > The review of DDLETB programmes is currently undertaken as issues are identified in EA reports or end-of-course evaluations. In that case, the issue is reported back to the Quality Unit, considered by the Programmes Committee, and, if deemed appropriate, a review is undertaken. The majority of QQI CAS awards are due for review, and the Directors of FET in the 16 ETBs are currently exploring how to re-develop programmes leading to those major awards in collaboration with QQI. Therefore, this may not be the most appropriate time to undertake full reviews of all programmes leading to those awards. However, in the interim, DDLETB should continue to identify those programmes most in need of updating and prioritise them for review to the extent that is permitted under the QQI guidelines.
- > Any systematic review of programmes requires extensive curriculum development expertise. While the QA Unit has gained this expertise, such a review would require considerable additional resources. DDLETB should consider establishing a dedicated curriculum development resource to support the development of new, and continued review of existing, programmes to ensure that it can continue to deliver cutting edge programmes into the future.

#### 6.2.5 Conclusion

QQI expects that programmes are regularly reviewed to ensure that they remain up-to-date, fit-for-purpose and relevant to the needs of learners and other stakeholders. This review has shown that existing systems such as EA reports and end-of-course evaluations have the capacity to identify required programme amendments such as the addition of components, or module/assessment specification reviews. The appropriate governance procedures are in place to oversee and approve all reviews and amendments.

However, the nature of these programme reviews is currently somewhat reactive; the establishment of a dedicated curriculum development resource could provide the capacity to ensure that programme review could be scheduled and undertaken systematically at an ETB level, within the limits of what is permissible under QQI validation guidelines.

##### **Potential Future Enhancements:**

- > Consider the establishment of a dedicated curriculum development resource.
- > Prioritise programmes most in need of immediate review and develop an interim review schedule.

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## 6.3 Oversight, Monitoring, and Review of Relationships with External/Third parties

### 6.3.1 The Current Context

DDLETB engages with a wide range of external stakeholders in order to ensure that the programmes of education and training that it offers are appropriate to the needs of its learners and facilitate their progression into education and employment. These relationships are subject to monitoring at centre level and oversight at governance level. Monitoring reviews incorporate financial reviews, training delivery reviews and an analysis of stakeholder feedback. Key performance indicators such as learner numbers, retention, and certification all provide key information for the review process. A risk assessment and management approach to assigning resources to the day-to-day monitoring of service provision is implemented.

#### *Peer Relationships Within the Education and Training Community*

##### **Community Education Provision**

The Adult Education Services (AES) in DDLETB have a long history of engagement with a wide range of community and voluntary groups to support the provision of relevant programmes of education and training to learners in their own communities (see Appendix 3 of the *Provider Profile* for some examples of community partners). Typically, a local needs analysis is carried out by community partners in consultation with the Community Education Facilitator (CEF). The community partner submits an application form for classes which is reviewed and approved by the CEF and the Adult Education Officer in line with the FET Strategy. On approval of the application, a Service Level Agreement (SLA) is sent to the community partner for signature prior to the commencement of classes. In this way, the ETB oversees the suitability of the relationship with the community partner. These programmes may be either certified or uncertified, but where they are certified, they are managed under DDLETB's QA system, with the internal verification/external authentication processes monitored by the relevant AES service, and included in the governance oversight of all certification.

##### **Second Providers**

The DDLETB training centres support the delivery of training in the community through their engagement with Community Training Centres (CTCs), Local Training Initiatives (LTIs) Specialist Training Providers (STPs) and Justice Workshops. For a list of organisations supported by these programmes, see Section 11 of the *Provider Profile*. Delivery of these programmes is governed by contracts in the case of Community Training Providers. Contracted Training Providers engage with DDLETB through the Contracted Training Framework, through which their suitability is established. Training Centres have agreed monitoring schedules in place with providers who are delivering on their behalf, such as Contracted Training Providers, Community Training Centres (CTCs), Specialist Training Providers (STPs), Local Training Providers (LTPS) and Justice Workshops. Community Training Centres and Specialist Training Providers are required to submit an annual Business Plan. The submissions are discussed with the individual providers, with clarifications, and any required amendments agreed, prior to budget approval. Adherence to DDLETB QA Policies and Procedures is an integral part of the contractual arrangements. Community Development Officers monitor the providers at regular intervals.

In the case of Local Training Initiatives, an application process is in a place, whereby a community group identifies the need within the community, for delivery of a programme and makes an application directly to the Training Centre for funding. Community Development Officers monitor the delivery of Local Training Initiatives.

DDLETB is responsible for ensuring that STPs deliver targeted and appropriate programmes that are relevant to the needs of people with disabilities, thereby affording maximum opportunities for people with disabilities to attain employment and/or progression. Specifically, DDLETB monitors the following four aspects of training. These include:

- > learner numbers
- > training delivery
- > training outcomes
- > certification of training.

### Coordinating and Collaborating Provider Relationships

DDLETB is a Collaborating Provider in a number of apprenticeships. These apprenticeships are all managed under the QA of the Coordinating Provider, as listed in Table 6.1. The nature of the Coordinating/Collaborating Provider relationship, and the roles and responsibilities of each party are outlined in the Quality Assurance Procedures for the apprenticeship as validated by QQI, and the Coordinating Provider is responsible for monitoring delivery of the apprenticeship in DDLETB. For more information on apprenticeships, see Section 7 of the *Provider Profile*.

**Table 6.1 DDLETB Apprenticeships and their Coordinating Providers**

Coordinating Provider	Apprenticeships
<b>Crafts Apprenticeships</b>	
SOLAS	Carpentry & Joinery
	Construction Plant Fitter
	Electrical Instrumentation
	Electrical
	Heavy Vehicle Mechanic
	Motor Mechanic
	Wood Manufacturing and Finishing
<b>2016+ Apprenticeships</b>	
Accounting Technician Ireland (ATI)	Accounting Technician
Fasttrack Into Information Technology (FIT)	ICT Associate Apprenticeship in Network Engineering
FIT	ICT Associate Apprenticeship in Software Developer
FIT	ICT Associate Apprenticeship in Cybersecurity
Limerick Clare ETB	National Hairdressing



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### **Transnational Programmes**

DDLETB does not deliver any transnational programmes.

### **6.3.2 Evaluation**

Community providers were surveyed to get feedback on their experience of working with DDLETB. Respondents identified some challenges, such as the complexity of the paperwork needed to enrol learners on the FETCH website, the need to update some of the Assessment Instrument Specifications, and a lack of clarity as to whether trainers delivering for second providers could avail of DDLETB-organised professional learning and development workshops.

However, overall, the feedback from community providers was very positive. The programmes offered by DDLETB generally met the needs of learners (shortcomings with the Assessment Instrument Specifications notwithstanding); providers noted that their designated contacts were very proactive and that they had the opportunity to meet on a regular basis. All those surveyed agreed that engagement with DDLETB could positively benefit their organisation, with respondents commenting that:



*"All interactions I have had to date have been positive, supportive and helpful."*

*"DDLETB staff have always been very helpful, particularly when dealing with queries in relation to DDLETB forms."*

*"DDLETB offer courses for those out of mainstream education which allow for different pathways to training/employment."*

### **Contracted Training Providers**

Procedures are in place for the tendering and awarding of contracts to Second Providers. Contracted Training Providers are required to adhere to DDLETB QA Policies and Procedures, with Internal Verification (IV) and External Authentication (EA) processes being monitored through the Results Approval Panel (RAP) process. Monitoring of all other aspects of the programme are conducted by the Contracted Training Officers.

All Contracted Training Providers have a dedicated contact person within DDLETB. Contracted Training Providers were surveyed as part of this self-evaluation process, in order to get feedback on their experience of this relationship, and all expressed satisfaction with the relationship, stating that the supports that they received were sufficient to ensure successful delivery of courses, and one provider stating that:



*"DDLETB are very supportive both to ourselves in delivery and the learners engaged in their courses."*

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### **Apprenticeship employers**

In preparation for this self-evaluation process, apprenticeship employers were invited to participate in a focus group and survey. Respondents all reported having an excellent relationship with DDLETB, saying that learners were appropriately prepared to carry out their duties in the workplace following the “off-the-job” phase of their training, and agreeing that DDLETB staff were skilled and knowledgeable about their industry, as well as being professional and helpful. One participant commented that:



*“[The ETB contacts] are incredibly efficient [in responding] to the many requests and queries we send their way. We are very grateful for their help and advice.”*

### **Higher Education (HE) Institutions**

DDLETB Further Education colleges and centres have developed close relationships with a number of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), to facilitate progression options for their learners. The Higher Education Links Scheme (HELs) allows learners to use their QQI Level 5 or 6 award to apply through the CAO to the first year of a Higher Education programme. Furthermore, a number of FE colleges/centres have established formal and informal links or agreements with HEIs both in the Dublin region, and further afield. In many cases, Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) are in place to facilitate advanced entry into Year 2 of a specific HE programme.

Recently, the Education & Training Provider Group (ETPG) within the Dublin Regional Skills Forum (DRSF) agreed to draw up a single all-encompassing Memorandum of Understanding to collaborate between the various institutions within the DRSF. It is anticipated that as a result of this agreement, greater levels of co-operation and support will continue to develop between Higher Education (HE) and Further Education & Training (FET) educational providers. In addition, the internal MoU will support access to the broad range of opportunities available across all providers and enhance progression routes for learners.

Case Study 37 provides an example of a Memorandum of Understanding between a DDLETB college and a Higher Education Institution.



## CASE STUDY 37: Developing a Memorandum of Understanding

A Further Education college in DDLETB delivers phases 4 and 6 in the apprenticeship in Carpentry & Joinery, and is regarded by Galway Mayo Institute of Technology (GMIT) as the leading FE provider nationally, of Furniture Design and Manufacture programmes. GMIT Letterfrack are themselves the national centre of excellence in Furniture Making degree programmes. GMIT has traditionally welcomed applications from the college's Level 5 graduates. However, due to the quality of FE students graduating with a Level 6 award in Furniture Making, GMIT sought an MOU with the college to offer advanced entry to the second year of its furniture programmes for students who graduate with a Distinction in Furniture Making. This arrangement has benefitted both the college and GMIT: the college has a tangible progression for learners from Level 6, while GMIT benefits from the high calibre of FE students who represent quality FE education in their degree programmes.

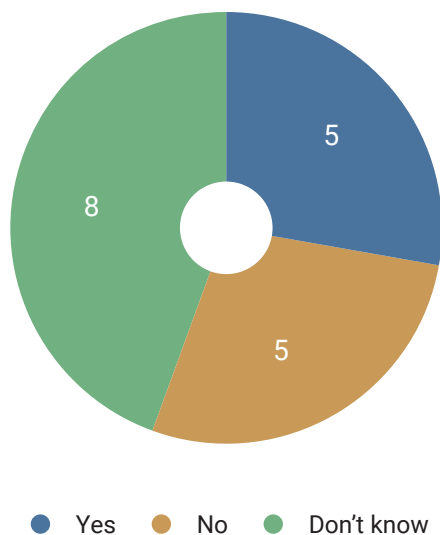
### External Partnerships

#### Arrangements with External Partners

In preparation for this self-evaluation process, centres were surveyed, and asked:

***"If you have a memorandum of understanding or agreement with another organisation, is this communicated transparently in accordance with Section 10 of the QQI Core Provider Guidelines?"***

***Is your MoU or SLA communicated transparently? (n=18)***



Of those who responded, five had communicated their agreements, while another five had not, but significantly, a further eight did not know whether they had. This could be due to uncertainty over the existence of national agreements. However, these findings do indicate that clear guidelines regarding the publication of agreements are needed to support centres. There are a range of approaches to the monitoring and review of external relationships which are encompassed in these agreements, and there is an opportunity to review the oversight of these processes following the review of the DDLETB governance structures.

#### Employer Engagement

The establishment and maintenance of good relationships with employers is essential to ensuring that DDLETB develops and delivers courses which facilitate learners to gain the knowledge, skills and competences needed for progression into the workplace. DDLETB has a number of dedicated resources in the area of employer engagement. A centralised approach was implemented in 2018 and developed to enhance the ETB's response to employers, for example through networks such as the Regional Skills Forum or the Fingal Skills Strategy Group. Centres also engage directly with a

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range of different employers, such as those who send their learners for up-skilling and re-skilling courses as part of Skills to Advance and Skills for Work initiatives, as well as with those employers who offer work placements to DDLETB learners. COVID-19 impacted these structures, and outcomes will be evaluated as the ETB emerges from the pandemic. For more information on how DDLETB centres engage with employers and other external stakeholders to ensure that the programmes they offer are responsive to the needs of learners and employers, see Section 4.5.2 above, “Stakeholder Consultation in Course Design.”

As part of the preparation for this *Self-Evaluation Report*, employers were invited to engage in a focus group, and participants were asked for feedback regarding their experiences with DDLETB. When asked about the nature of their relationship with the ETB, all participants described it as “**Excellent**”, commenting that the DDLETB liaison staff are responsive to the needs of the employers, listening to those needs, and in many cases identifying opportunities before they are requested. Feedback included comments such as:



*“[The ETB contact] actively seeks feedback from her client relationship and that’s really appreciated. There’s no complacency.”*

*“[The ETB contact] will tailor the course to suit our requirements. He made that clear, and it’s something he always reminds us about... We were talking about areas of training which would help the staff, not just the warehouse crew, and [the ETB contact] mentioned about the Communications course. We got talking...about leadership skills, customer service, health and safety. And at 8 o’clock the next morning, [the ETB contact] sent me an email with a draft outline for a course encompassing everything we had talked about. It was so good that I decided that ‘everyone’s going to do it’. It really hit the nail on the head for what we need.”*

The businesses surveyed all differed considerably, but each felt that their specific needs were being met, and they all agreed that the way that DDLETB offers education and training opportunities makes it easy for them to include it in their schedules for the benefit of the employees and ultimately the company. The representative from Keelings mentioned that employees had come to Ireland with little English, and with the support of DDLETB, they were now in skilled positions, and still with the company, while others pointed out that as their relationship with DDLETB evolved, further training needs were being identified and met.



*“A small number of staff originally got involved with the Explore Programme. It was for those who weren’t PC savvy. And then [the ETB contact] raised the opportunities in Skills for Work—a communications course, customer service.... So now we have our road crew, office staff and warehouse crew all involved in the courses. We could have a year’s worth of programmes to do.”*

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### Building on current relationships

When asked how DDLETB could improve its provision, responses were very positive, encouraging the “continued engagement with employers and employees on their varying and changing needs”. However, it was suggested that more online learning and weekend/evening courses might be made available to providers, and that more courses focussing on the specific field of manufacturing engineering might be developed and offered.

Generally, however, the engagement between DDLETB and the companies participating in the focus group was seen as being extremely positive, with one participant commenting:



*“Overall, the ETB connection has been a huge benefit to the company. We didn’t know how to go about it [accessing training], so it’s great that the opportunity has come to us. It’s like a one-stop shop for us to go and train everybody. We couldn’t have asked for anything more, and it’s been great to have this service available to us.”*



Case studies 38 and 39 are examples of how DDLETB collaborates with employers to develop innovative new programmes.



## CASE STUDY 38: DDLETB & Applegreen

DDLETB has successfully partnered with Applegreen to develop and deliver innovative Skills to Advance and Traineeship-employed programmes which meet Applegreen's identified needs for training. The joint collaboration resulted in the development of two programmes offering certification: Customer Service with Barista Training, and Leadership and Supervisory Management. These programmes were developed by adapting existing course content to include relevant content and input from Applegreen, thus tailoring the course to the needs of their workplace and business model. This collaborative approach has led to a long-term strategic alliance, and to date, 273 beneficiaries have availed of the courses DDLETB delivers for Applegreen.

The Head of HR in Applegreen outlined how these customised programmes have assisted Applegreen in growing their business:



*"DDLETB programmes have proved invaluable to our teams and have supported our business in up-skilling and developing our colleagues. The DDLETB team have made the learning engaging, personal and demonstrated a great understanding for our business and align with us always. Applegreen have enjoyed a wonderful partnership for over 2 years with the training team and I believe this innovative, flexible approach is ideal for any business."*

Feedback from course participants highlights the success of this programme, with one former learner commenting:

*"Applegreen support my passion to learn and succeed by providing accredited courses through the ETB. I have completed various traineeships such as the Customer Service & Barista training, [as well as] Leadership and Supervisory Management. These, combined with Applegreen's in-house ... courses have led me to being promoted to Food Operations Manager. I look forward to further up-skilling myself as I continue my career within Applegreen."*

## CASE STUDY 39: Partnership between DDLETB and Chadwicks - A Builder's Merchants Sales Traineeship

DDLETB has developed a traineeship in conjunction with Chadwicks in order to create a pipeline of skilled entry-level trade sales advisors within the Chadwicks brands including Heiton Buckley, Davies and The Panelling Centre.

Chadwicks is Ireland's leading builders' merchanting company; as consumer demand continues to grow in this area, this traineeship provides Chadwicks with new, educated and well-trained staff for their various branches in Ireland.

The 26-week, QQI-accredited traineeship equips learners with the skills and knowledge needed in trade sales. During the programme, learners receive training in customer service, retail sales, IT skills, health and safety and stock control as well as mentoring from experienced staff in their chosen branches. In addition, all learners receive a Safe Pass card and a Manual Handling Certificate.

Lauren D who benefited from this programme stated the following:



*'I feel very lucky to have experienced this programme. Not only has it given me an insight into all aspects of a builder's provider, but also, I received training and was familiarised with all the products, which is useful if you have never had a background in a business like this. The classroom-based learning had the added benefit of giving me a recognised qualification too. It has opened so many doors for me and I can't wait to see what the future holds.'*

In 2019, the programme was nominated for the Vocational Education and Training (VET) Excellence Award in the category of 'Training at work-company and learner'. Chadwicks and DDLETB representatives who were involved in the development of the programme, along with Lauren D were invited by the European Commission to take part in the award ceremony in Helsinki.

The CEO of Chadwicks, Patrick Atkinson said that they were delighted to be nominated for such a prestigious award and to have DDLETB's and Chadwick's programme recognised at the European level. The first year's programme saw 10 learners successfully graduating, with 8 learners receiving contracts of employment with Chadwicks.



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### **Engagement with Department of Social Protection**

Given its remit to provide training for progression into employment, DDLETB's engagement with the Department of Social Protection (DSP) is of significance, particularly for the three training centres and the Adult Education Service, and an Interagency Framework between the Department of Social Protection, DDLETB, and City of Dublin ETB was developed in 2016. Case Study 40 provides an example of cross-service engagement with the DSP to support the needs of a local community.

The DSP has worked, prior to the temporary imposition of COVID-19 restrictions, with the training centres to organise open days and other targeted events. For the different events, the DSP could invite up to 2,500–5,000 clients to open days in the relevant training centre, and these events are also promoted on social media. Local employers and community services take stands promoting job opportunities, the DSP provides jobs boards highlighting all local vacancies, and clients can register with JobsIreland, using the training centre computer room.

Exhibitors include DDLETB and CDET, services such as local PLC colleges and Adult Literacy services. Other exhibitors include universities, South Dublin Partnership, the Local Enterprise Office (LEO) and other training companies. Many clients leave the event with a job interview or training opportunity organised, and feedback from both exhibitors and clients has always been very positive. While these events are temporarily on hold due to COVID-19 restrictions, cooperative relationships with the DSP remain ongoing in order to support clients; open days and similar events will recommence as soon as is feasible.

### **CASE STUDY 40: Engaging with the DSP to develop a high support intervention programme**

Based on CSO data which identified Tyrrelstown in Dublin 15 as an area with very high levels of long-term unemployed individuals, DDLETB was asked to develop and deliver a high support intervention programme for the area. The local Adult Education Service and Training Centre collaborated to develop a plan to engage with the local community to conduct an education and training needs analysis for this area. They liaised with the local DEASP office to invite 300 potential learners to an appointment-based information day in a local hotel, where DDLETB FET gave a detailed presentation on the varied education and training opportunities in the area. Experienced staff from the AES Guidance Service, Literacy Service and the Training Centre were on hand to support learners.

This programme identified a clear need for ESOL classes at NFQ Levels 2-4, which led to these classes being established in local venues. Other learners were referred to the literacy service, Adult Guidance or Training Centre.



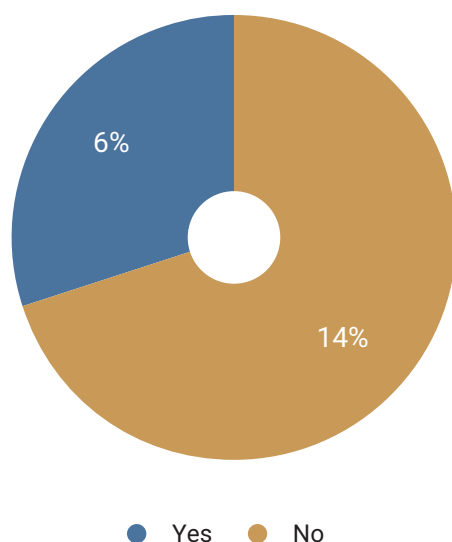
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## Assessing impact within the region and local community

In preparation for this report, centres were surveyed and asked:

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### Assessing the impact of the centre/ service (n=20)



***Do you assess the impact of your centre/service within the region and local community (e.g. through consultation with local employers, informally through word-of-mouth, through formal review and planning sessions, through guidance and information officers etc?)***

More than two-thirds of respondents reported that they did assess the impact of their centre/service within the region, but significantly, 11 centres did not respond to the question. While this may have been due to the survey methodology, it would appear that this could be an area of improvement for the ETB to focus on. However, those that did respond reported using a wide variety of

methods and forums such as formal and informal evaluations and engagements with partners such as the DSP, local partnerships, community partners, employers, regional and local forums, schools and Higher Education Institutions. Within the training centres, staff from the Apprenticeship Services Unit operate as a liaison between employers and apprentices and promote apprenticeships within the community and schools.

### ***Oversight of Relationships with External Authenticators***

DDLETB has a panel of approved External Authenticators (EAs) from which centres may select an EA with the appropriate subject matter expertise to authenticate their learners' portfolios of assessment. This panel has recently been revised and expanded to ensure a sufficient supply of appropriately trained and qualified EAs. To be selected on to the ETB panel, EAs must first be shortlisted from the national EA Panel managed by ETBI, and they must have participated in recent training from the Further Education Support Services. Thereafter, EAs are asked to submit their qualifications for verification before they are included on the panel. Once on the panel, all EAs are briefed on the relevant DDLETB QA policies and procedures for all services, so that they can work across **all** centres, and thus support the consistency of assessment. A recruitment process map is available [here](#).

### **6.3.3 Oversight of External Relationships: Effective Practice Identified**

- > DDLETB has extensive engagement with external partners. Oversight systems, such as SLAs and MoUs and the Contracted Training Framework are available at local and national level to ensure the suitability of such partnerships.
- > Where these providers offer certification under DDLETB's QA system, centre-level monitoring systems are in place, and authentication reports are forwarded for review by DDLETB.

- > Good progression routes have been established with HEIs through the Higher Education Links Scheme (HELs) as well as through formal and informal agreements with individual centres.
- > There is strong evidence of engagement with external partners, and they are provided with the opportunity to input into programme design to ensure that the programme meets their needs.
- > An Interagency Framework is in place with the Department of Social Protection, in order to support unemployed clients.
- > The new DDLETB EA panel is working well, providing centres with a fresh pool of appropriately qualified EAs who are briefed in DDLETB's assessment policies and procedures.

#### 6.3.4 Oversight of External Relationships: Areas for Improvement

- > Feedback from external stakeholders noted the need for Assessment Instrument Specifications to be continuously updated; this work is ongoing, and should be prioritised.
- > While a significant number of centres assessed the impact that their provision had in the local community, a consistent approach to assessing impact on regions and communities would be beneficial.
- > Some centres do publish their arrangements with external partners, (e.g., MoUs), however, there could be more consistency across all centres in this regard.
- > While there are a range of approaches to the monitoring and review of arrangements with external parties, there is an opportunity to review the oversight of these processes following the review of the DDLETB governance structures.



## 6.3.5 Conclusion

QQI *Core QA Guidelines* ask that providers have QA systems which allow for engagement with external partnerships and second providers. This review has shown that such systems exist centrally, for example, as with the Contracted Training Provider Framework, and the DSP Interagency Framework. Agreements with individual community providers exist at local (centre) level, but there is not a common DDLETB approach to monitoring these relationships. Feedback from external stakeholders suggests that relationships with DDLETB are good; ongoing monitoring of these relationships at centre and ETB level would ensure that DDLETB continues to meet the needs of all stakeholders.

### **Potential Future Enhancements:**

- > Publish existing arrangements with external parties, where appropriate.
- > Continue to review and update Assessment Instrument Specifications to ensure that they remain current and fit for purpose.
- > Develop governance oversight of the monitoring and review of external arrangements.
- > Research feasibility of conducting an economic and social impact study for DDLETB.

# 7 CONCLUSIONS



This self-evaluation process has been undertaken in preparation for the Inaugural Review of DDLETB's FET Quality Assurance (QA) System and has provided an opportunity to reflect on that system and articulate its stage of development. The purpose of this Inaugural Review as outlined by QQI,<sup>64</sup> is to support the organisation to further embed a culture of quality, to enhance the learning environment and experience, as well as to give feedback on the overall effectiveness of its QA System. This process will support the further development of that system, as part of the ongoing engagement in a quality improvement cycle, and thus help to further improve public confidence in the quality of its FET provision.

QQI has stated in the Review Handbook that "Self-evaluation is a reflective and critical evaluation completed by members of the ETB community, including learners, staff at all levels of the organisation, and external stakeholders" (p. 5). Chapter 2 of this report clearly outlines the extent to which the process undertaken here attempted to capture the voice of all stakeholders, and to ensure that they had the opportunity to critically reflect on DDLETB's provision of quality assured teaching and learning, and their own role in that provision. All who engaged in the process did so with great enthusiasm and in a spirit of critical reflection to support DDLETB in recognising its strengths and identify areas for improvement. All participants commented on what a valuable learning experience it had been for them. That learning, and the great range of good practice identified (much of which did not make it into this review) must now be shared.

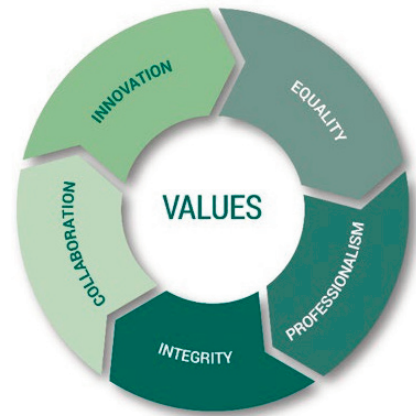
This self-evaluation process has provided the opportunity to reflect on DDLETB's governance and management of quality; its approaches to teaching, learning and assessment; and its self-evaluation, monitoring and review of its own QA system, its programmes, and its relationships with external stakeholders.

DDLETB is a learning organisation, and this self-evaluation has indeed been a learning experience. In undertaking this process, many areas of strength in its QA System have been identified, such as the DDLETB's programme development expertise, its commitment to ensuring the integrity of learner results and its commitment to engaging with employers and other external stakeholders. Areas for improvement have also been identified, such as the need to finalise a common, comprehensive QA Manual, including policies on assessment, teaching and learning, as well as self-evaluation, monitoring and review. That notwithstanding, this evaluation has evidenced DDLETB's commitment to achieving its strategic goals of delivering high quality education and training programmes and in doing so, delivering a high-quality experience for learners. This has been supported through a commitment to organisation and staff development, exemplified by effective communication and collaboration.

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<sup>64</sup> Inaugural Review of Quality Assurance in Training Boards: Review Handbook, pp 23 & 24.

Further Education and Training in DDLETB is now embarking on the next phase of its quality assurance cycle; the Inaugural Review process will provide the opportunity for even greater learning, and new goals to be identified and worked towards. As an organisation, DDLETB is greatly looking forward to the opportunities promised by this new phase of development and will embark on it in the spirit of those values which have guided the organisation thus far: collaboration, innovation, equality, professionalism and integrity. DDLETB is, indeed a learning organisation, and the experience of this self-evaluation has taught all involved much about quality assurance. But above all, the experience of ensuring that learning has continued despite a global pandemic, has shown that, both within the staff and as an organisation, there is a resilience and a determination to ensure learners receive a high-quality education and training experience. DDLETB will ensure that the learning from this process and the priorities in the *DFHERIS Statement of Strategy 2020-2024* and the *FET Strategy 2020-2024* are embedded in the DDLETB Statement of Strategy 2022-2026.



FET in DDLETB is now embarking on its Inaugural Review and the next phase of the QA cycle. As it does, it will be guided more than ever by its philosophical approach to quality:



*"Together, we are building a culture of quality, to keep the learner at the heart of all we do."*



# APPENDICES

# Appendix 1: Inaugural Review Steering Group Members

Steering Group Member	Representing
Siobhan Lynch Director of Further Education and Training	<b>Chair</b>
Clodagh Beare	Quality Assurance Manager, DDLETB
Máirín Uí Riain	Inaugural Review Coordination, QA Unit
Anna Farrell	Strategy & Planning Unit
Mary Mooty	Strategy & Planning Unit: Data
Estelle Webb	Training Centre (Centre Manager)
Sharon Fields	Training Centre (Asst. Manager)
Elaine Cullen	Training Centre QA (Training Standards Officer)
Patricia O'Brien	Further Education College (Principal)
Tina Reddin	Further Education College (Deputy Principal)
Margaret Hogan	Employee Operations Manager, Operational Services Division
Joanne Russell	Adult Education (Adult Education Officer)
Anne McDonald	Adult Education (Adult Literacy Organiser & QA)
Clodagh O'Gorman	Dual provision schools (Further Education Coordinator)
Deirdre Kinsella	Youthreach (QA Coordinator)
Jessica Sheekey	Technology Enhanced Learning
Eoin McCabe	Guidance Counsellor
Averil Whelan	Teachers/instructor
Patricia Cassells	External Representative
Kurtis Traynor	Learner Representative



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## Appendix 2: Inaugural Review Steering Group, Terms of Reference

<b>Governance unit</b>	Inaugural Review Steering Group
<b>Document</b>	Terms of Reference
<b>Approved by / Date</b>	Quality Council
<b>Version</b>	V 1
<b>Date</b>	August 2021

### PROPOSED TITLE OF GROUP:

Dublin and Dún Laoghaire ETB (DDLETB) Inaugural Review Steering Group

### CONTEXT:

In 2018, DDLETB completed a re-engagement process with Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI), and became a recognised provider of quality assured programmes of further education and training. QQI is now undertaking a process of external review of the Quality Assurance systems of all 16 ETBs, including DDLETB. As this is the first such review, it is to be considered the Inaugural Review. Its purpose is to provide an external dimension to internal quality assurance and review activity, and to provide an opportunity for the ETB to evaluate and reflect on the effectiveness of its quality assurance system.

In preparation for this Inaugural Review, the ETB will prepare a Provider Profile and a Self-Evaluation Report, which will be submitted to QQI in advance of the External Review Panel visit. An Inaugural Review Steering Group will be set up to support the preparation for the Inaugural Review.

### INAUGURAL REVIEW DATA SUB-GROUP TERMS OF REFERENCE

The IR Steering Group will be responsible for the following:

- > Agreeing its Terms of Reference
- > Identifying and reviewing data to be used for the DDLETB Provider Profile
- > Identifying and documenting the current situation regarding the gathering and use of data at ETB level
- > Reviewing and analysing responses from the ETB centres regarding their data management
- > Drawing conclusions and making recommendations following the analysis of ETB- and centre-level data management practices
- > Identifying an action plan for future data management in

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## **Operational Matters**

- > Reviewing and recommending the Provider Profile and Self-evaluation report
- > Participating in meetings of the Inaugural Review External Panel Visit m as required
- > Recommending participants for meetings of the Inaugural Review External Panel visit
- > Considering the findings of the Draft Review Report sent by QQI for check of factual accuracy
- > Supporting the submission of a factual accuracy check
- > Reviewing and recommending the final response to the Review Report

## **Accountability**

The Inaugural Review Steering Group will report to the DDLETB Quality Council through the QA Manager.

## **MEMBERSHIP OF THE STEERING GROUP**

The membership of the IR Steering Group is designed to ensure that all FET services as well as staff with a range of grades and roles/responsibilities are represented, so that the steering group will be in a position to advise on the entirety of FET provision within DDLETB. The membership will include the following representatives:

- > Director of Further Education and Training (Chair)
- > Manager, Quality Assurance Unit
- > ETB-Level QA staff (Secretary to the Inaugural Review Steering Group)
- > Representatives of:
  - Adult Education
  - Further Education/Dual Provision
  - Training Centres
  - Youthreach
- > Representatives of ranges of grades such as:
  - Centre/service managers/principals
  - Assistant managers/Deputy principals
  - Centre/service QA staff
  - Tutor/teacher/instructor
  - Support staff

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In addition, the IR Steering Group will include:

- > One or more external representative/s (as required)
- > Learner representatives

### **Chair:**

The Chair of the Inaugural Review Steering Group will be the Director of Further Education and Training.

### **DDLETB Quality Assurance Manager**

The DDLETB QA Manager will have overall responsibility for the Inaugural Review Process, and the work of the QA Unit in supporting that process.

### **Secretary:**

The Secretary will be a member of the DDLETB QA Unit.

### **Tenure**

Membership of the DDLETB IR Steering Group will last for the duration of the preparations for the Inaugural Review process, the external review visit, and consideration of the Review Report submitted by QQI for a factual accuracy check. Thereafter, the group and its associated sub-groups will be disbanded.

Should a member have to resign from the Inaugural Review Steering Group, their place may be taken by another staff member who represents a similar constituency within DDLETB.

### **ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE CHAIR**

The responsibilities of the Chair of the IR Steering Group include:

- > Agreeing a schedule of meetings with the QA Manager and Secretary in consultation with members and having regard to the deadlines of the Inaugural Review Process
- > Working closely with the Quality Assurance Manager and the Secretary to agree meeting agendas
- > Ensuring meetings function efficiently and effectively
- > Providing adequate time for the discussion of agenda items
- > Ensuring that the timeline is adhered to, and that deadlines are met
- > Ensuring that a quorum is present before commencing an Inaugural Review Steering Group meeting

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## **ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE QUALITY ASSURANCE MANAGER**

The responsibilities of the DDLETB QA Manager include:

- > Agreeing a schedule of meetings with the Chair and Secretary in consultation with members and having regard to the business of the Inaugural Review Steering Group and the deadlines of the Inaugural Review Process IR Steering Group, in the absence of the Director of Further Education/CEO
- > Chairing meetings of the Inaugural Review Steering Group in the absence of the Director of Further Education/CEO
- > Chairing meetings of sub-groups/working groups of the Inaugural Review Steering Group. In the absence of the Quality Manager, the sub-groups will be chaired by the Secretary.
- > Reporting to the Chair on the implementation of the decisions of the Steering Group
- > Reporting to the Quality Council on the work of the Inaugural Review Steering Group
- > Ensuring that members have been provided with materials in advance of the meeting to support informed decision-making
- > Ensuring that decisions are recorded.

## **ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE SECRETARY**

The responsibilities of the secretary include:

- > Agreeing a schedule of meetings with the Chair and Secretary in consultation with members and having regard to the business of the Inaugural Review Steering Group and the deadlines of the Inaugural Review Process
- > Chairing meetings of sub-groups/working groups of the Inaugural Review Steering Group in the absence of the Quality Manager.
- > Circulating the agendas for meetings and associated documentation and reports for review by the relevant steering group/sub-group members
- > Preparing draft minutes of meetings and circulating these to members
- > Developing and maintaining appropriate channels of communications for the Inaugural Review Steering Group and its associated sub/working groups (e.g. MS Teams/Sharepoint groups etc.)

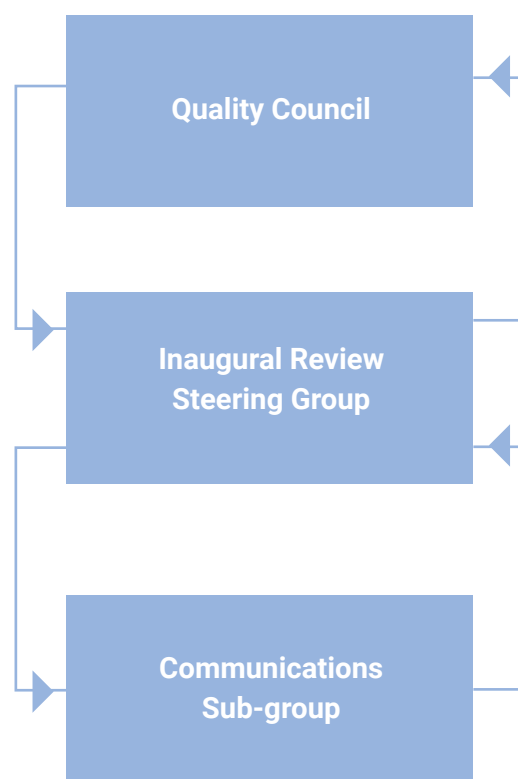
## **OPERATING PROCEDURES**

- > The Inaugural Review Steering Group will meet at least once per month until the submission of the Self-Evaluation Report. Thereafter, it will meet as required to consider the Review Report and recommend a response on behalf of DDLETB. An initial draft schedule of meetings will be agreed with the members, however, it may be decided that further extraordinary meetings will be needed to address issues that arise

- > In order for a quorum to be established, 50% of members + 1 additional member must be in attendance
- > A quorum will not be required for sub/working groups
- > The meeting agenda and supporting documentation should, where possible, be circulated to members at least one week in advance of a scheduled meeting and external members may be invited to present agenda items
- > Decisions are made by consensus or by the exercise of a vote if necessary; the Chair has the deciding vote in the event of a split decision
- > Meeting outcomes are recorded and circulated in draft form within 2 weeks of a meeting
- > The minutes of meetings are approved at the beginning of the subsequent meeting of the IR Steering Committee
- > Confirmed minutes are submitted for noting to the next meeting of the FET Quality Council

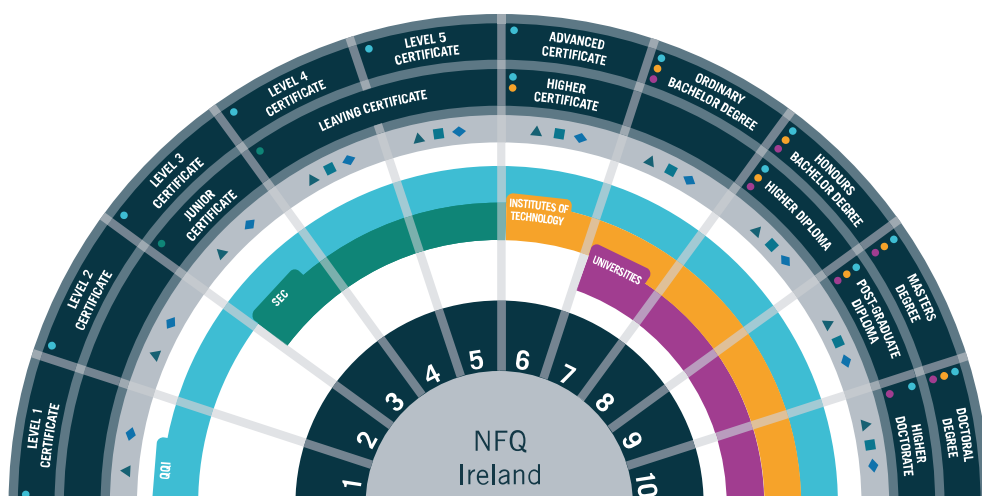
## COMMUNICATIONS PROCEDURES

- > A Communications sub-group will be formed which will agree on a communications strategy to support the Inaugural Review Process.
- > The Communications sub-group will identify and roll-out the agreed communications activities
- > The Communications sub-group will report to the Inaugural Review Steering group at each meeting.
- > The Inaugural Review Steering Group will report to the DDLETB Quality Council through the QA Manager
- > The Quality Council will note update reports from the Inaugural Steering Group
- > The Quality Council will approve the final version of the Provider Profile and the Self-Evaluation Report before these are sent to QQI
- > The Quality Council will feedback to the Inaugural Review Steering Group through the Quality Manager in a two-way communications process.



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## Appendix 3: National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ)



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## Appendix 4: QA Governance Units

### 1 | Quality Council

Overall responsibility for the governance and management of quality within DDLETB FET programmes resides with the DDLETB Quality Council. This group consists of senior management representatives from all four services, and is chaired by the Director of FET. It reports to the DDLETB Senior Management Team, and updates are also given to the Further Education Management Team (FMT) to ensure that they are kept abreast of all QA developments. The purpose of the Quality Council is to oversee the planning, co-ordination, quality, development and improvement of all aspects FET delivery in DDLETB. The group meets a minimum of three times a year. Terms of Reference for the Quality Council are available [here](#)

### 2 | Course Approval Committee

The Course Approval Committee is responsible for the oversight of all requests for course delivery by FET centres, and for the approval of such requests where appropriate. Such requests may be for new, innovative programmes which have never been delivered by DDLETB, and for which validation may need to be sought, or they may be for requests for approval to deliver a programme that DDLETB has already validated and may be running in another centre. This committee is chaired by the Director of FET, and further consists of the Adult Education Officer with responsibility for Strategy and Planning, and the Adult Education Officer (QA Manager) with responsibility for Quality Assurance, and its goal is to reduce duplication and optimise delivery of programmes. The group meets a minimum of four times a year. Terms of Reference for the Course Approval Committee are available [here](#).

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### 3 | Programmes Committee

The Programmes Committee has oversight of any programme amendments or development that centres may request to in order to address perceived local or emerging needs; as such it is the 'Custodian' of all programmes validated for DDLETB by QQI, other than the apprenticeship programmes. ETB-level oversight of QQI delivery is managed through a review of EA/RAP processes as reported by the QA Manager to the Programmes Committee. It is chaired by the Director of FET, and has representatives from all DDLETB FET services. The group meets a minimum of three times a year. Terms of Reference for the Programmes Committee are available [here](#). **Note:** Currently oversight for non-QQI awards resides at centre level, and is not reviewed by the Programmes Committee.

### 4 | QA Committee

The QA Committee is responsible for the development and enhancement of quality assured policies, procedures and processes. It is chaired by the Director of FET and has representatives from all DDLETB FET services. The group meets a minimum of three times a year. Terms of Reference for the QA Committee are available [here](#).

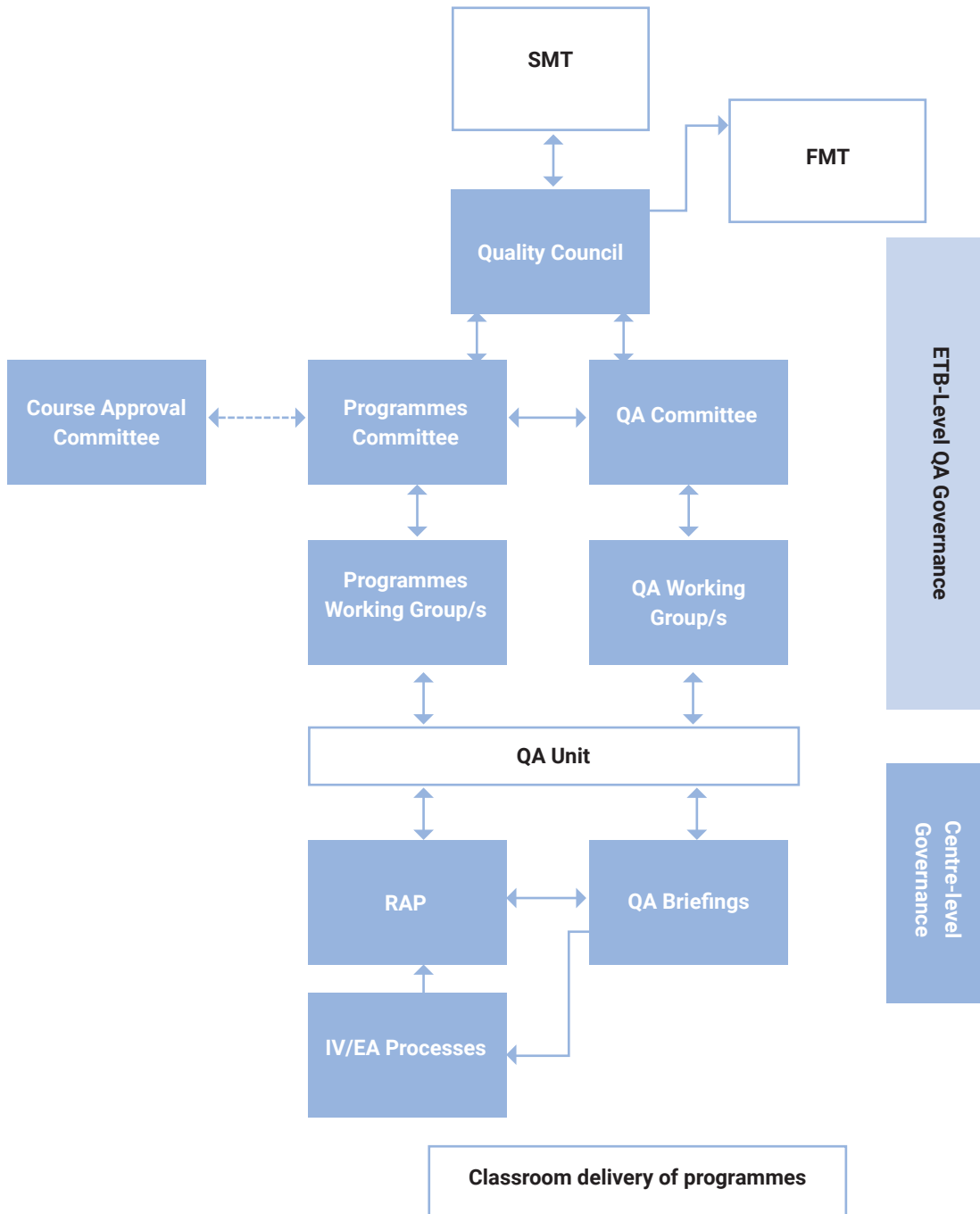
### 5 | Programme Development Project Group/s

These are groups of subject matter and curriculum development experts who are convened to develop programme documentation on behalf of DDLETB. There is one standing Programme Development Project Group, which has oversight of the development of new/revised Assessment Specifications for use within the training centres. These groups meet as required based on the needs of the project. Terms of reference are available [here](#).

### 6 | QA Project Group/s

These are groups convened to support the QA Committee in the development of quality assured policies and procedures. These groups meet as required based on the needs of the project. Terms of reference are available [here](#).

**Overarching DDLETB QA governance system**





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Bord Oideachais agus Oiliúna Dublin and Dún Laoghaire  
Átha Cliath agus Dhún Laoghaire Education and Training Board

**LEARN  
ACHIEVE  
SUCCEED**