



etb

Bord Oideachais agus
Oiliúna Dhún na nGall
*Donegal Education and
Training Board*

Donegal Education and Training Board (ETB) Further Education and Training (FET) Service

Staff Briefing and Consultation 2020 Executive Summary Report

Donegal ETB Vision

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

Donegal ETB Mission

To promote, provide and support accessible and inclusive education and training which enables young people and adults to empower themselves to reach their full potential in a safe and caring environment.

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I. CONTEXT

A Quality Assurance (QA) system that can help Donegal Education and Training Board's (ETB's) Further Education and Training (FET) Service to deliver on the promises in its Vision and Mission statements needs to go further than mandating robust policies and procedures. It must also be innovative and responsive to the needs and experiences of the students who use Donegal ETB's FET Service and the staff who make these experiences possible.

Donegal ETB held three FET Staff Briefing and Consultation events in February 2020. The dates and venues of these were:

- Wednesday 26 February: Central Hotel, Donegal Town
- Thursday 27 February: Inishowen Gateway Hotel, Buncrana
- Friday 28 February: Radisson Hotel, Letterkenny

These events were designed to inform staff throughout the service about the development of Donegal ETB's QA system, and, in turn, to gather information from them about what they need and expect from quality assured policies and procedures. The events were also an opportunity to consult with staff on the 'Inaugural Review of Quality Assurance within the ETB' which is taking place in 2021 and how best we could prepare for the event and involve staff in the process.

At present, Donegal ETB's FET Service has an extensive suite of existing documented quality assurance policies and procedures that are guided by the relevant legacy QA agreements as follows:

- Transitional Quality Assurance System (TQAS) QA Agreement
- VEC QA Agreement

At each event, staff were presented with a number of topics regarding the development of the QA system. These included:

- The need to review and update the two current QA systems (TQAS and Donegal ETB Quality Assurance) to reflect the activities of one organisation.
- The need to deliver on Donegal ETB's Vision and Mission.
- The need for Donegal ETB to meet its commitments under the statutory core guidelines for Quality Assurance as set out by Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI).
- The need to continuously improve the quality of the student experience provided by Donegal ETB.

The requirements to review the QA systems presently in place and improve the experience of those using Donegal ETB's FET Service necessitates effective information gathering from across the service. Moreover, these topics also specify the context in which the development of the FET Service's QA system is taking place and illustrate that its implementation is being guided by the needs of the ETB FET Service itself. This is in line with the QQI core guidelines, which suggest a provider-led quality assurance system.

II. METHODOLOGY

At each event, a presentation was made to the staff in attendance, which:

- Introduced Donegal ETB's integrated FET Quality Assurance System.
- Outlined the QA Governance structure that has been established in Donegal ETB to support the ongoing development, implementation, review and management of the QA System.
- Described the Self-Evaluation Report (SER) and the QQI Statutory Review processes and explained how they are linked with the development of Donegal ETB's integrated QA System.

Following the presentation staff members participated in four activities. These were aimed at gathering feedback from staff in relation to communication with staff members regarding the development of Donegal ETB's QA system, the comparative importance of various aspects of FET provision and planning for the forthcoming Self-Evaluation and Statutory Review processes.

III. OUTCOMES

Activity 1: How would you like to be consulted with on Quality Assurance Developments?

All groups from all centres cited that QA developments should be incorporated into staff briefings and meetings, ideally as an agenda item. This was seen as a good way of gathering and disseminating information.

Most staff requested that QA updates would be available in a digital format via email, newsletter, online forum such as Padlet, Google classroom, Donegal ETB staff Intranet (described as underutilised at present) or another online feedback platform. It is inferred from the comments that staff would like a central repository of information with QA developments and updates with an area that allows for staff feedback.

Coordinators and line managers were cited as the preferred contact for QA updates with staff consultation an important factor for relevant feedback.

The word 'inclusive' in relation to QA was used repeatedly and the inclusion of all staff at all levels was specified as a welcome measure. It was also highlighted that staff meetings should be more inclusive. Staff would like more QA Team visits to centres and updates directly from the QA Team.

Activity 2: The Development of Donegal ETB's FET Service Quality Assurance System

This activity listed four key areas of the QA system. Staff documented what each theme meant to them and why it was important. They then gave recommendations for future developments. The comments are extensive, with much duplication. The table that follows lists the key themes.

1. Fair and consistent assessment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>The quality of the education received by a student in a FET centre in Donegal should be of the same quality / standard of a student in any other centre within the ETB and in the country.</i> ● <i>Fair and consistent assessment: in order to treat all students equally, assessments must be fair and consistent and this would be considered a priority.</i> ● <i>Consistency in quality: grades, qualifications, assessments, student experience, universal design, reasonable accommodation.</i> ● <i>Students: extra time for assessment, equal opportunities with support and additional assistance, more resources for supports.</i> ● <i>Assessments: updated, varied, less formalised but more authentic assessments.</i> ● <i>External Authentication: more feedback from the EA, feedback on how to improve.</i> ● <i>Professional practice is extremely important.</i>

- *Evaluation and continuous improvement: are our current measures effective, adaptable, clearly communicated? Feedback from students to lead to continuous improvement.*

2. Learning environment

- *Inclusivity, care and motivation of students in a well-equipped classroom and centre.*
- *Positive learning environment where students feel supported and feel that they can ask questions or seek help.*
- *Fair, accessible, and accommodating assessment Student differentiation and physical access. Dignity, respect and quality.*
- *Some centres are not up to standard - cold, poor heating. Prefabs not ideal.*
- *Needs to be modern and up to date with proper technology. Also safe and welcoming.*
- *Very important to have all ICT and TEL in place to ensure the best environment for learning.*
- *Some centres better equipped and resourced than others – the experience is very different for students depending on the centre and programme they're engaged with.*

3. Course review

- *Courses must be monitored and reviewed to improve them. Course review can show what the students achieve out of the course and how it can be changed to suit the needs of students. Look at each course, using the feedback from teachers/tutors/instructors and students, to improve the course. What went well? What did not go so well?*
- *Liaising with employers to ensure courses delivered lead to job. To ensure courses are fit for purpose, no oversupply or not reflecting employment / progression.*
- *Systematically review and update courses and programmes*
- *Review courses and content to ensure material is relevant, up to date and consistent across the service.*
- *Important to strive for excellence.*
- *Constant review of courses from feedback from teachers/tutors/instructors, students, etc. to reflect changing times.*

4. Staff development

- *Staff are trained on how to deal with different learning styles, e.g. a student with learning difficulties.*
- *Staff must have the required qualifications to fulfil the role and keep abreast of developments in their field. CPD in your vocational area is very important.*
- *Support for students. Staff need to be informed and allowed to get support / develop professionally.*
- *All staff need to be aware of the expectations in delivering a quality service. They need to know the support services available to them.*
- *CPD - a great idea that has been rolled out over the last two years. More please. Does not need to be too structured. To encourage self-development is so important and the student achieves his / her education with encouragement to self-develop. If staff are skilled and confident at delivering their job, then leads to a more quality learning / experience. Important for staff retention / promotion.*
- *Always important to develop staff through a variety of methods.*
- *Our key resource need to be informed, consulted, developed and supported. Staff have a responsibility to commit and implement CPD availed of.*

Other

- *Support for staff: staff and students support is essential. Additional student support: this is inconsistent at the moment across all programmes and needs to be reviewed, and policies and procedures developed in line with the students that Donegal ETB have now and in the future on course programmes.*
- *Need for ICT coordinators in all centres to oversee maintenance issues technical difficulties.*
- *Disability officer. Student access fund. Dealing with mental health issues.*
- *Staff meetings: staff meetings within evaluation / review stage. More meetings with tutors, teachers.*
- *Communications: not all staff receive communications on matters / events / CPD, etc.*
- *Staff induction critical.*

Activity 3: How could we best communicate about the Self-Evaluation Report (SER) and Inaugural Review?

Advocacy for online means of communication occurred frequently in the responses to this question, citing a wide variety of platforms.

- *Intranet / website/ email*
- *Highlight good practice – social media*
- *Shared drive / Google Drive / Online forum*

There was also the suggestion of a newsletter, something which is currently being planned by the QA Team.

Apart from online means of communication, it is also clear that FET staff members would value face-to-face communication in relation to the SER and inaugural QA review. Several staff members suggested that QA should become an agenda item at their staff meetings. In addition, responses indicate that some FET staff feel that the QA team should bring information to them in their own working environment.

Other responses advocated organised face-to-face interaction among staff within centres, not necessarily involving members of the QA Team, to share information. Some attendees suggested having staff representatives for QA.

Several staff members present at the consultation and briefing events felt that feedback on the implementation of QA processes should be gathered using surveys, questionnaires or feedback forms.

Activity 4: Please share your ideas on how Donegal Education and Training Board's FET Service can further improve the approach to planning for the self-evaluation report and review visit.

Some of the submissions for this activity mirrored suggestions given in response to the question in Activity 3. These included the idea of making QA an agenda item at meetings, holding dedicated meetings in FET centres and appointing dedicated QA representatives among the staff of FET centres. In both activities, there was a small number of responses which also advocated for the appointment of student representatives.

Responses also indicate a certain amount of anxiety that preparation for the Self-Evaluation Report and QQI review visit will place demands on FET staff or disrupt FET programme delivery.

However, it is noticeable in the responses to this activity that many staff have a positive attitude to QA and a desire to implement it.

- *More interaction across programmes so sharing good practice, etc.*
- *Should be part of the culture of the organisation on an ongoing basis*

This activity also drew some creative suggestions from staff members in attendance at the consultation and briefing events.

- *"Mock" review scenarios*
- *Should develop visual templates so there is a seamless understanding across the ETB of QA best practice and how to implement it across all programmes and services*
- *Online review systems could be developed to provide scope for timely interventions which puts the students at the forefront*
- *Role specific portals, e.g. tutor/teachers/instructors, caretaker, administration / Focus groups for administration, tutors/teachers/instructor's caretakers*

Unsurprisingly, it is also clear from the responses to this activity that FET staff have the interests of students at heart, as many responses emphasised the idea that benefits should accrue to students as a result of the Self-Evaluation Report and QA review process.

Mentimeter Survey

The Mentimeter survey was focused on the communication of information about the ETB's QA System to staff members throughout the organisation, and how well it is understood.

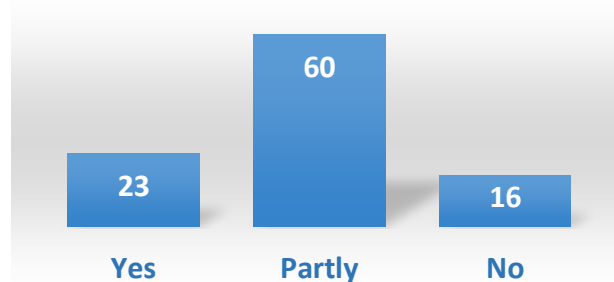
Five of the seven questions asked were open-ended and required qualitative responses. The table below presents common themes that emerged. Charts are used to illustrate the quantitative data generated by the two remaining questions.

<p>1. What does Quality Assurance mean to you?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Accountability/Transparency</i> ● <i>Consistency/Fairness</i> ● <i>Excellence/Professional</i> ● <i>Paperwork</i> ● <i>Quality/Standards</i>
<p>2. How can we achieve a stronger Quality Assurance System?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Collaboration</i> ● <i>Communication/Feedback</i> ● <i>Consistency</i> ● <i>Leadership</i>

3. How could we better engage staff in the development of QA?

- *Ask staff*
- *Content creation*
- *Focus groups / small groups/Forums / workshops / Centre-based*
- *Meetings/Training / briefings*

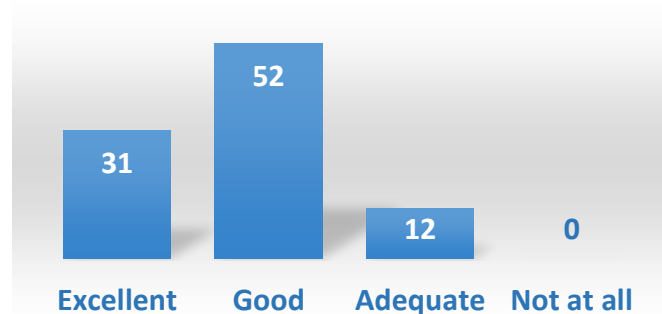
4. Is the ETB's Governance and Management of QA visible and transparent?



5. How can we make the Governance and Management structures more visible?

- *Communication*
- *Email/Online*
- *Feedback*
- *Inclusion/Interaction*
- *Organisation (structure/chart)/Simplify/Visual*
- *Small group meetings/Staff meetings / briefings*

6. How well did today's event meet its aims?



7. What could we do to improve the event?

- *Briefing / email / agenda prior to event*
- *Centre-based*
- *Feedback*
- *Smaller groups*

IV. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The sincere engagement of staff members who attended the QA Briefing and Consultation events must be seen as a source of encouragement as Donegal ETB's FET Service moves forward with its implementation of a single integrated QA system. Throughout the feedback submitted in response to the four activities and the survey, there is strong evidence that staff would like this to be a collaborative process, involving consultations between staff members, the QA team and senior management, and among staff members themselves.

- The clearest overarching conclusion to emerge from these Briefing and Consultation events is that successful organisation-wide adoption of QA policies and procedures, and subsequent adherence to them, is dependent on an ongoing collaborative approach being taken to Donegal Education and Training Board's QA system for its FET Service.
- Feedback received indicates that multiple methods of communication are required to ensure that information regarding the QA review and Self-Evaluation Report (SER) is successfully transmitted throughout the organisation on an ongoing basis.
- Examples of communication include a QA Newsletter, QA helpdesk, and QA meetings held within centres.
- Online communications will need to be carefully thought out, not only to maximise their effectiveness, but also to avoid generating confusion. The creation and maintenance of a QA communications strategy and a designated point of contact for QA-related queries are recommended measures.
- Although the attitude of FET staff to quality assurance is largely positive, some comments indicate that there exists a perception that the current QA review process, and QA policies and procedures in the future, will prove to be onerous for staff members and may disrupt life in FET centres and the delivery of programmes. In order to further enhance a quality culture, it is essential that we must continue with the positive promotion of QA and this should be considered in every interaction and communication with FET staff members.