



Inaugural Review of Quality Assurance

Mayo, Sligo & Leitrim Education and Training Board Self-Evaluation Report

FEBRUARY 2021



msletb

Bord Oideachais agus Oiliúna
Mhaigh Eo, Shligigh agus Liatroma
Mayo, Sligo and Leitrim
Education and Training Board



QQI

Dearbhú Cáilíochta agus Cáilíochtaí Éireann
Quality and Qualifications Ireland

Foreword



In Mayo, Sligo Leitrim Education and Training Board in line with our “Statement of Strategy 2018-2022” we are committed to providing the highest quality teaching and learning and services across every aspect of our provision. This ensures that we fulfil our mission statement of providing opportunities for life and living for people in our community. The pandemic and the changing educational landscape, including the establishment of Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science and the new SOLAS FET Strategy 2020-2024 is calling on ETBs to be as dynamic, flexible and responsive as possible to ensure that we meet the needs of the future world of work and the evolving needs of economy and society. Providing the highest quality FET services that continuously improves will be critical to our post-pandemic recovery.

It is with great pleasure therefore, that I introduce the MSLETB Self-Evaluation Report as part of the QQI Inaugural Review of Quality Assurance.

In this Self-Evaluation Report we have conducted a very deep and thorough examination of the design and planning approaches of our existing internal quality processes and their consistency with QQI’s Core, Sector-Specific and Topic-Specific quality assurance guidelines (including on Apprenticeship and Blended Learning) and other policies and procedures. In MSLETB, we welcome this evaluation of the effectiveness of our internal quality assurance procedures for the purposes of establishing, ascertaining, maintaining and improving the quality of further education, training, and related services.

The Self-Evaluation has enabled us to focus on our many achievements to date and to identify the perceived gaps in the internal quality assurance mechanisms and the appropriateness, sufficiency, prioritisation and timeliness of planned measures to address them. We are truly dedicated to the quality management cycle of effective planning, high quality delivery and content, monitoring and evaluation and ongoing continuous improvement.

The document is an important milestone in the continuous improvement of our quality assurance as it builds on the significant advances that we have made since the establishment of the ETB. I would like to thank the Quality Council, the Inaugural Review Steering Group, the Quality Assurance team, FET leadership, staff and all the learners and stakeholders who have participated in this collaborative, consultative and intensive process. Particularly, I would like to thank our Quality Assurance Manager, Fiona Kieran for her dedicated focus on coordinating the evaluation.

Finally, I look forward to the ongoing engagement with QQI and welcoming the International Review Team when they visit in May 2021.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Tom Grady". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Tom Grady
Chief Executive - MSLETB

Glossary & Abbreviations

ACSS	Apprentice Client Services System
AECS	Adult Education Guidance Service
AEO	Adult Education Officer
AHEAD	Association for Higher Education Access & Disability
AIS	Assessment Instrument Specification
AONTAS	National Adult Learning Organisation
ATP	Access Transfer and Progression
CAO	Central Applications Office
CE	Chief Executive
CIBTAC	Confederation of International Beauty Therapy and Cosmetology
CIDESCO	Comité International d'Esthétique et de Cosmétologie
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
CRM	Client Relationship Management
CSO	Central Statistics Office
CT	Contracted Training
CTC	Community Training Centre
DES	Department of Education and Skills
DSP	Department of Social Protection
EA	External Authenticator
EMT	Executive Management Team
EQA	External Quality Assurer
EQARF	European Quality Assurance Reference Framework
ESER	Executive Self-Evaluation Report
ESF	European Social Fund
ESOL	English for Speakers of Other Languages
ETB	Education and Training Board
ETBI	Education and Training Boards Ireland
FARR	Funding Allocations Requests and Reporting
FÁS	Foras Áiseanna Saothair
FESS	Further Education Support Service
FET	Further Education and Training
FETCH	Further Education and Training Course Hub
FIT	Fasttrack to Information Technology
FOI	Freedom of Information
FSD	Fund for Students with Disability
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
GMIT	Galway Mayo Institute of Technology
HEA	Higher Education Authority
HGV	Heavy Goods Vehicle
HR	Human Resources
ICT	Information Communications Technology
IDA	Industrial Development Authority
IRHA	Irish Road Haulage Association
ITEC	International Therapy Examination Council
IV	Internal Verification
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
LTI	Local Training Initiative
MFA	Multi Factor Authentication

MIS	Management Information System
MOA	Memorandum of Agreement
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MSLETB	Mayo Sligo Leitrim Education and Training Board
NCC	National Course Calendar
NPD	National Programme Database
NUI	National University of Ireland
NUIG	National University of Ireland Galway
NZEB	Nearly Zero Energy Building
OGP	Office of Government Procurement
OSD	Organisational Support & Development
PAC	Programme Approval Committee
PD	Professional Development
PDAG	Professional Development Advisory Group
PHECC	Pre-Hospital Emergency Care Council
PLC	Post Leaving Certificate
PLSS	Programme Learner Support System
PR	Public Relations
PSA	Private Security Authority
QA	Quality Assurance
QAP	Quality Assurance Procedures
QAS	Quality Assurance Services (SOLAS)
QBS	QQI Business System
QIP	Quality Improvement Plan
QQI	Quality and Qualifications Ireland
RAP	Results Approval Panel
RCCRS	Results Capture and Certification Request System
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
SAG	Support to Apprentices Group
SCCM	System Centre Configuration Manager
SCORE	MSLETB's Staff SharePoint Site
SER	Self-Evaluation Report
SLA	Service Level Agreement
SME	Subject Matter Expert
SOLAS	The Further Education and Training Authority
SOP	Standard Operating Procedures
STA	Skills to Advance
STC	Skills to Compete
STP	Specialist Training Provision
TEL	Technology Enhanced Learning
TOR	Terms of Reference
TQAS	Transitional Quality Assurance System
TSO	Training Standards Officer
UCD	University College Dublin
UDL	Universal Design for Learning
UTM	Unified Threat Management
VEC	Vocational Education Committee
VTOS	Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme
WWETB	Waterford Wexford Education and Training Board

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Chapter 1

Introduction and Context



1.1

Introduction and Context

1.1 Context

Mayo Sligo and Leitrim Education and Training Board (MSLETB) is one of the sixteen Education and Training Boards (ETBs) established in 2013 by the Education and Training Boards Act that led to the amalgamation of the Vocational and Education Committees in Counties Mayo, Sligo and Leitrim and, from 1st July 2014, the transfer of the services previously provided by FÁS/SOLAS in Mayo, Sligo and Leitrim, including the Training Centres in Sligo and Ballina.

There are 32 QQI-registered centres across Mayo, Sligo and Leitrim, providing further education and training and associated services. A full profile of MSLETB's FET provision is contained in the Provider Profile that accompanies this report.

MSLETB has wide-ranging experience of working in partnership with a variety of statutory, community and voluntary groups. Management and staff are represented on various boards and committees across the three counties of Mayo, Sligo and Leitrim (a detailed list can be found in [Appendix 1](#)). This partnership approach affords opportunities to share information on MSLETB services, to work cooperatively in identifying gaps in provision regionally and to provide new or updated services.



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Location of Services

The location of the services provided by MSLETB are shown below:



- | | |
|--|---|
| A Post Leaving Certificate Colleges (PLC) | K Specialist Training Programme (STP) |
| B Youthreach | L Local Training Initiatives |
| C Community Education Facilitators* | M Back to Education Initiative (BTEI) |
| D Music Generation | N Adult Basic Education Centre |
| E Skills for Work** (SFW) | O Youth Services |
| F Night Class Provision | P The Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS) |
| G Training Centres | Q Adult Educational Guidance & Information Service (AEGIS) |
| H Post Primary Schools | R Achill Outdoor Education Centre |
| I Services to Business Advisors | |
| J Community Training Centres | |

Three Community Education Facilitators operate within MSLETB with courses running in various locations throughout the three counties*
 Two Skills for Work Facilitators operate within MSLETB with courses running in various locations throughout the three counties**

1.2 Mission, Vision, Values and Goals

In 2017, MSLETB developed its [Strategy Statement 2018-2022](#) in which it documented the Board's Vision, Mission, Values and Goals. This strategic statement evolved through a process of consultation with internal and external stakeholders.

MSLETB's Vision and Mission is to deliver a comprehensive suite of innovative high-quality FET programmes and services that provide learners, in this region and beyond, with transformative lifelong education and training opportunities. The Board's FET provision is for all persons over 16 years of age, that wants to:

- Learn new skills
- Enhance existing skills
- Gain new skills to access employment or progress current career
- Pursue a pathway to Higher Education
- Achieve personal goals



Vision

The vision of MSLETB is to be a dynamic Education and Training Board providing a positive experience for all its learners in a professional, caring and collaborative education and training environment.



Mission

The mission of MSLETB is to provide those in our communities with opportunities for life and living.



Values and Behaviours

The organisation has identified core values which underpin the work of MSLETB and relate to the work of the organisation with learners, staff and community. Alongside each of these values, corresponding behaviours have been mapped, outlining how the organisation puts the values in to effect.

The Strategic Statement is supported by the Core Values of:

- Quality
- Professionalism
- Proactivity
- Collaboration



Quality

We will:

- ▶ Strive for excellence in all that we do
- ▶ Actively seek and recognise new standards and ways to improve our service
- ▶ Evaluate the suitability of our systems, structures and programmes to identify and implement opportunities for improvement



Professional

We will:

- ▶ Treat everyone with respect and in a professional manner in accordance to our governance principles
- ▶ Promote a positive image both inside and outside of the organisation
- ▶ Encourage and engage in continuous development
- ▶ Reflect on our work and revise our work practices



Collaboration

We will:

- ▶ Empower all those in MSLETB to work in a collaborative manner to maximise the value of the service we provide our learners
- ▶ Trust all those in MSLETB to act with integrity and behave ethically
- ▶ Seek out opportunities to enhance communication with our learners and colleagues



Proactive

We will:

- ▶ Look to be solution focused, flexible and open to new ideas
- ▶ Endeavour to respond who everybody who contacts the ETB
- ▶ Use relevant data and endeavour to make our service responsive in meeting the needs of our people

The MSLETB Strategy Statement also sets out six high-level Strategic Goals to be achieved in the period that will:

- Enhance skills for the economy
- Prioritise active inclusion
- Provide the highest quality provision
- Prioritise outcomes-based planning and funding
- Increase the standing of FET
- Implement technology enhanced learning across all provision

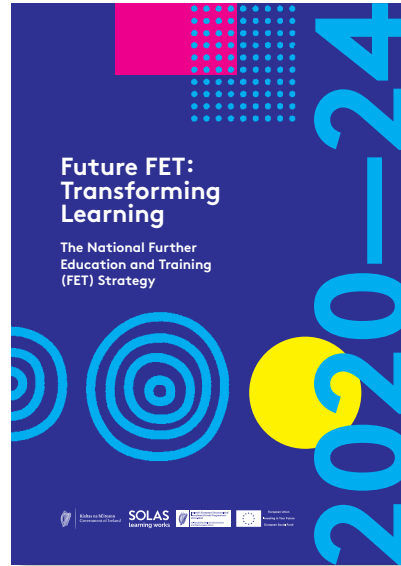
Strategic Goals of MSLETB





Strategic Performance Agreement 2018-2020 – SOLAS and MSLETB

In early 2018, MSLETB and SOLAS established the [Strategic Performance Agreement 2018-2020](#). This agreement sets out the context, strategic priorities and MSLETB’s contribution to the achievement of key national FET sector targets over the period 2018-20. It also articulates MSLETB’s commitment to supporting the implementation of a range of national policies and strategies relevant to FET provision and identifies the key risks and challenges which must be mitigated and addressed to ensure successful delivery of this agreement. This agreement is the product of extensive dialogue and engagement between SOLAS and MSLETB, with independent views and inputs from a panel of experts with an understanding of Irish and international good practice in further education and training systems. MSLETB fully implemented the agreement and have mainly achieved the commitments set out.



New FET Strategy 2020-2024

In 2021, MSLETB is already engaging with SOLAS and other stakeholders to implement the FET Strategy 2020-2024 ([Future FET: Transforming Learning The National Further Education and Training \(FET\) Strategy](#)). This new strategy is radical and exciting as it aims to improve and evolve FET as an equal part of the tertiary education system.

Currently, MSLETB awaits engagement with SOLAS in the development of the FET Strategy Implementation Plan. In this regard, the Board has already commenced a major consultation project with its internal and external stakeholders that will focus on the concept of a FET College for the future and the need to create a more integrated, dynamic, innovative and forward-looking FET service.

MSLETB has appointed a consultant to identify and visualise a number of organisational options for the future, ensuring that the learner remains at the centre of the Board’s FET services and delivery.

2021 – An Evolving Learning Environment

In 2021, despite the global pandemic, it is estimated that 13,000 learners will benefit from MSLETB programmes, both full-time and part-time. In addition, it is estimated that up to 4,000 citizens in the MSLETB region will avail of adult guidance services. The Board’s main priority is the continued roll out of high-quality teaching and learning experiences and the completion of all programmes during these challenging times. MSLETB is committed to supporting learners in every way possible. It is important to acknowledge that, whilst learners have experienced significant disruption, the manner in which they have adapted to the evolving teaching and learning environment, is inspiring.

Supporting the unfolding Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL) environment, developing blended learning methodologies, making equipment available across all programmes and assisting teachers/tutors/instructors and learners, remains an on-going priority for MSLETB.

Due to fortuitous investment in 2018, 2019 and 2020, the Board, when presented with the challenges of Covid-19, was in a position to immediately roll out effective, wide scale emergency remote learning opportunities, thereby accelerating its goal of including TEL within all aspects of FET delivery.



New Generation Apprenticeship

MSLETB has taken the lead in the development and delivery of new generation apprenticeships including The National Craft Butchery Apprenticeship and The Sales Apprenticeship. The Board is also a leading collaborating provider in the Commis Chef and the FIT ICT Associate apprenticeship. In 2021 MSLETB plans to expand apprenticeship delivery and participation in its region.



Employer Engagement

MSLETB engages collaboratively with workplace stakeholders, in business and enterprise, to ensure the curriculum and content of FET programmes are relevant to the skill needs of the region. Related consultation is facilitated by an Employer Engagement Team established by the Board.

Community Education

MSLETB has well-established Community Education and Training programmes outreaching to some of its more rural locations comprising Community Education (CE) and Local Training Initiative (LTI). MSLETB also provides specialist training services for persons with a disability through Specialist Training Providers (STP). FET in MSLETB also operates a vibrant Adult Guidance Service, Youth Services, Music Generation and Adult Basic Education Service.

1.3 Current Transformative Initiatives

MSLETB is currently engaged in a number of transformative initiatives that will increase the profile of FET provision in the region:

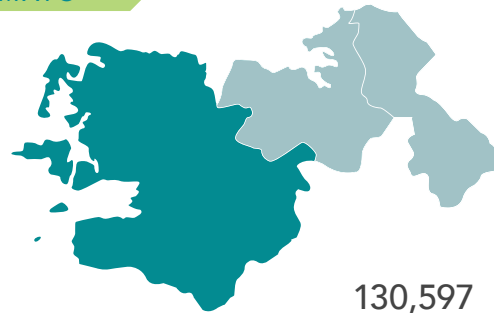
- The Board is leading out on two national Skills to Advance (STA) innovation projects – Sustainable Driving for the Freight and Logistics Sector and an Employer Engagement Customer Report Management system for the FET sector nationally.
- MSLETB has commenced a consultative project, 'Re-Imagining the Future Structural Organisation of an Enhanced, Learner-Focused Further Education and Training Service within MSLETB.' This will enable MSLETB to move forward in harmonising and integrating services and programmes, as the Board starts to engage with SOLAS on the new FET Strategy 2020-2024.
- In 2021, MSLETB will implement new common QA policies and procedures across FET and deliver on the QQI inaugural review.
- MSLETB continues to improve its FET buildings and will establish new centres in Ballina and Sligo.
- MSLETB has commenced supporting people in the region who have been displaced in the labour market because of the pandemic. In March 2021, MSLETB will launch the Skills to Compete (STC) initiative focusing on building digital skills, transversal skills and skills for emerging employment growth areas e.g. remote working.
- MSLETB is at an advanced planning stage in the establishment of a new Future Ready Skills Centre in Sligo. This will provide building, retrofitting and sustainable energy skills for the North West.
- MSLETB has commenced a broad-based FET promotion campaign across the region, supported by a freephone help desk.

1.4 Context of FET Provision

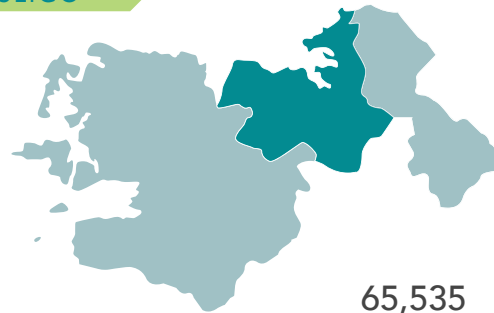
MSLETB has the largest geographical area of all the ETBs, with a total area of 9011 km² and a combined population 228,176 (CSO 2016). The population of the three counties, as per the 2016 Census, is outlined below. 66% of the population live in rural areas.

County populations

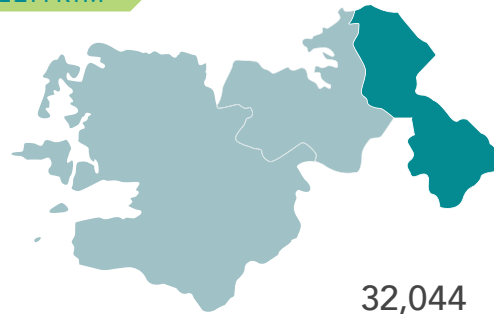
MAYO



SLIGO



LEITRIM



Total 228,086

The region has relatively low educational attainment rates in comparison to national benchmarks, with only 26% of those aged 15 years and over having completed third level education, compared to the national average of 42% (CSO 2016). According to the Pobal-Haase Deprivation Index 2016 (which shows the overall level of affluence and deprivation based on multiple indicators such as population change, education, unemployment, age dependency etc.) the entire region is “marginally below average”.

Unemployment and Disadvantage

While nationwide pre Covid-19 unemployment levels had dropped to just 5% at the beginning of March 2020, this drop was not felt equally throughout the country. Of the 70 electoral divisions across the country deemed unemployment blackspots, five are located in the MSLETB region. In these blackspots, the unemployment rate is over 27%. Three unemployment blackspots are in the West Mayo Municipal District – An Geata Mór Theas, Cnoc na Lobhar and Cnoc na Ráithe – and two in the Ballina area – Ardnaree South and Ballina Urban, with Ardnaree South having the highest unemployment rate of these five areas, at over 31%.

In the MSLETB region many face additional disadvantage that constrains their ability to find work, or access education and training services, such as poor public transport services, no access to broadband and social isolation. In addition, many of those in work have never benefited from the economic recovery and are already depending on income supports. All of these people will require significant support to find or return to work post Covid-19.

This MSLETB self-evaluation takes place against the backdrop of the Covid-19 pandemic, the full impact of which is not yet known. The Board plans to be at the forefront in addressing education and training needs as they emerge, post Covid-19.

Education Attainment

In an effort to address the relatively low educational attainment rates and the high levels of unemployment in the region, MSLETB continues to focus funding and resources into the area of workplace traineeships and apprenticeships. A database of employers has been developed to forge better links with industry, so that learners are participating on courses that offer skills in line with employer needs, thereby increasing their employability.

A number of significant programme development initiatives undertaken by MSLETB are outlined in Chapter 2.

1.5 Commitment to Quality Assurance and Enhancement

Each former VEC and the services previously provided by FÁS/SOLAS operated discreet Quality Assurance and Training Standards Systems. In common with all ETBs, MSLETB is working to create a single Quality Assurance System as part of its quality governance infrastructure. The Board is committed to a learner-centred approach to education and training and is well advanced in the development of a single integrated QA system, in line with the Board’s Strategy Statement 2018-2022.

The ongoing review, development and improvement of standards and the promotion of a culture of evaluation and quality improvement is a high priority. In this regard, the Board recognises the importance of obtaining and

acting on feedback from all learners, staff and key stakeholders that will inform quality and standards development and improvement. The overarching methodology employed conforms to the four-stage quality cycle process of the EQARF for FET¹.

The Board, in promoting a culture of continuous improvement throughout the organisation, encourages all staff, through their individual efforts and membership of various teams and units, to take responsibility for the quality of their contribution to the Board’s FET provision. Key to achieving this objective is the clear communication of roles, responsibilities and expectations, support for new and updated QA initiatives and the engagement of centre management.



¹European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training



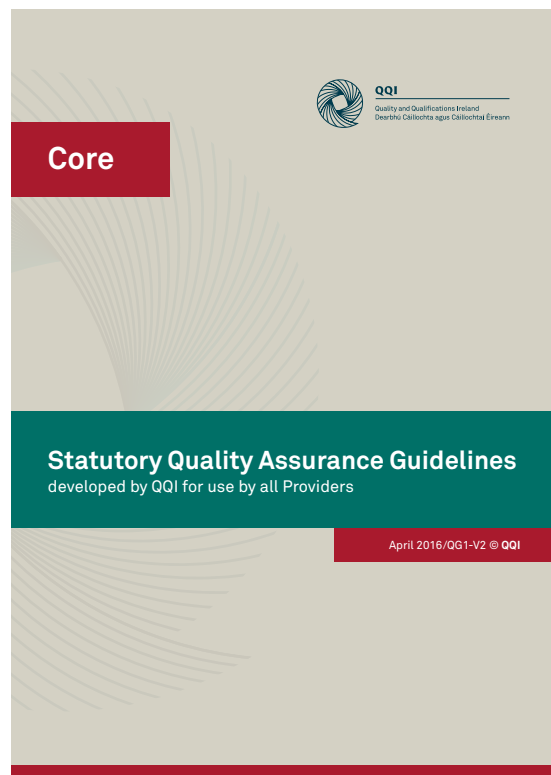
In 2018, the Board completed re-engagement with QQI through which its QA policies and procedures were formally approved. The Board is committed to the ongoing monitoring, periodic review/evaluation, development and improvement of the QA system that supports its FET provision; a process that informs the Board's annual [Quality Improvement Plan \(QIP\) and Progress Report](#), submitted to QQI each year.

MSLETB QA system, as it relates to its FET provision, addresses each of the eleven areas identified in the [Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines \(2016\)](#).

The Board's QA system is also informed by the following documents:

- Sector-Specific Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Education and Training Boards (ETBs)
- Topic Specific Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Statutory Apprenticeship Programmes (2016)
- Topic Specific Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Blended Learning Programmes (2018)
- EQAVET Guidelines – The community of practice that promotes European collaboration in developing and improving the quality assurance in VET

In addition, direction was taken from the quality and standard requirements of bodies such as City and Guilds, CIBTAC and CIDESCO.



1.6 SER Development Process

Following the publication of the QQI guideline documentation on the [Inaugural Review of Quality Assurance in Education and Training](#), the MSLETB FET Director proposed the establishment of an External Review Management Group, a Self-Evaluation Steering Group and appointed a Review Co-ordinator to oversee the Self-Evaluation Report (SER) development process.

An early decision was taken to follow the proposed structure for the Board's Report as outlined in the [Review Handbook](#) (Annex C). Consequently, the MSLETB SER consists of four chapters covering the three objectives: Governance and Management of Quality; Teaching, Learning and Assessment; Self-Evaluation, Monitoring & Review. Each objective is broken down into subsections that broadly follow the following format:

- **Description** - An outline of the QA arrangements that are aligned to this section, the evidence that supports these arrangements and why they have been adopted.
- **Evaluation** – An evaluation of the QA components being described including references to examples. An evaluation of how effective MSLETB considers these to be in supporting the achievements of strategic objectives.
- **Conclusion** - Identification of effective practice, challenges and potential future enhancements.

A number of key appendices are included as well as URL links to relevant additional supporting documentation.

The External Review Management Group consists of four members including the Chair of the Self-Evaluation Steering Group and the Review Coordinator. A draft plan from this group was presented to the Self-Evaluation Steering Group at its inaugural meeting. Subsequently, this plan was updated and amended as the need arose.

Three key phases of the self-evaluation process were identified, as follows:



Communications

Early communication across the ETB on the Inaugural Review and the Self-Evaluation process was key to promoting awareness and ownership by all stakeholders. A number of strategies were employed including:

- Articles in ETB newsletter and QA newsletter
- Posters for staffrooms and staff common areas
- Agenda item for meetings at centre level and FET Leader/PLC Principal level

A series of ETB-wide memos from the Chief Executive also assisted in communicating the aims and objectives of the review. In addition, the self-evaluation process was outlined to over 100 staff and management at the annual Business Planning Day that took place on 14th February 2020. A series of facilitated break out sessions, after a formal presentation, proved very successful on the day, in adding clarity.

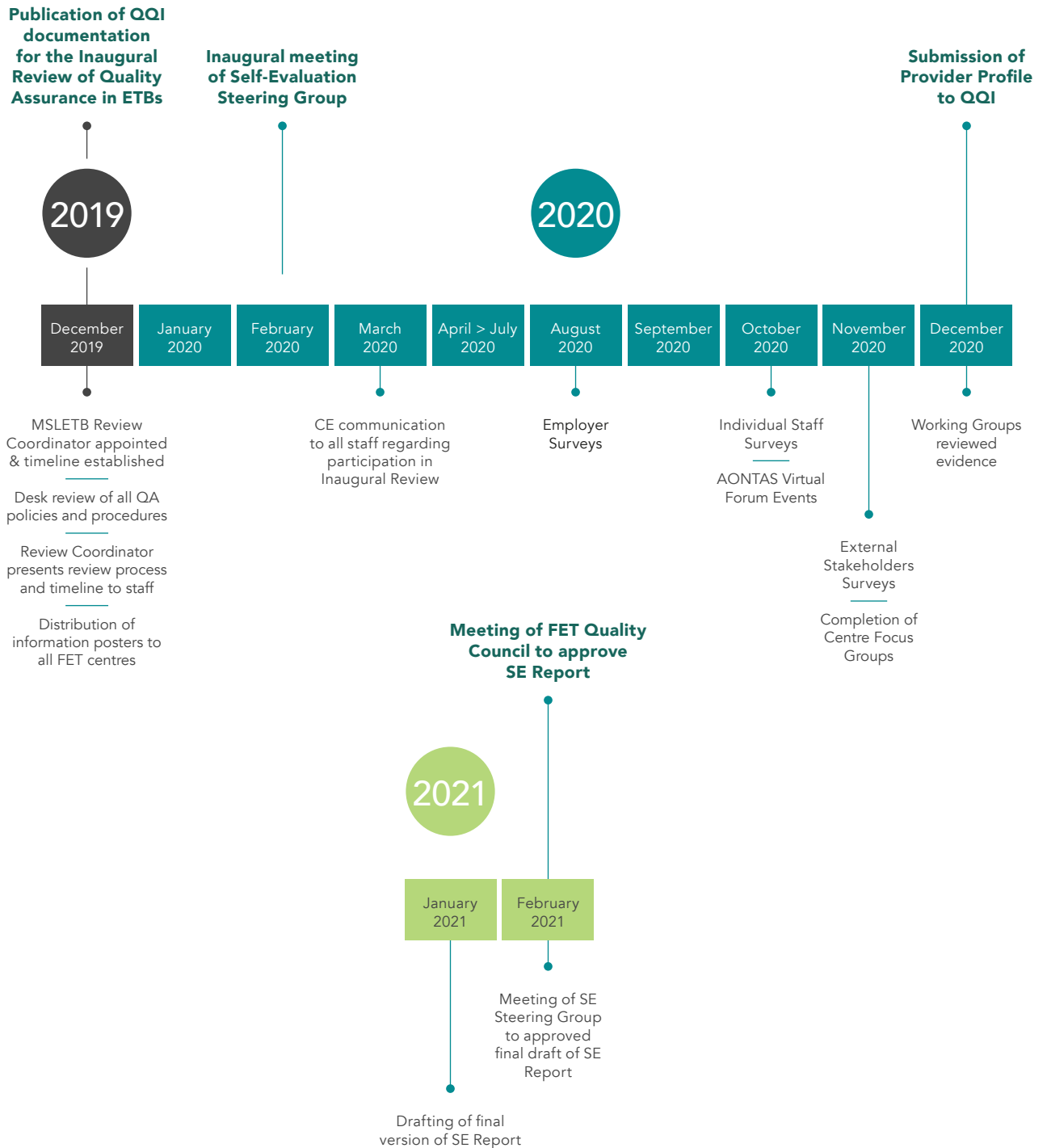
Planning and Design

A desk review of QA procedures was carried out by the QA Working Group in early 2020. This phase also incorporated the design and implementation of a centre-based self-evaluation that sought to gather the views of all QQI registered centres in relation to the current QA policies and procedures.

Consultation

This phase consisted of consultations (surveys, focus groups, etc) with all stakeholders: staff, learners, employers, community partners and other partners. More detail can be found in Section 1.8.

Drafting of the SER commenced following the consultation phase. The Report was compiled by the Review Coordinator, with input from a range of other staff members. The draft Report was circulated to the Self-Evaluation Steering Group for feedback. It was then presented to the MSLETB Quality Council for final approval.



1.6.1 Self-Evaluation Steering Group

In line with Section 2.2.2 of the Review Handbook, MSLETB's FET Quality Council sought nominations, across a broad cross section of staff, for membership of the Self-Evaluation Steering Group. These nominations were approved at a meeting of the FET Quality Council on 25th February 2020, and letters of invitation and [Terms of Reference](#) were sent to the group's members.

The inaugural meeting of the SE Steering Group was held on 28th February 2020. A list of all meetings held can be found in [Appendix 2](#). The work of the SE Steering Group was facilitated by the Review Coordinator and the programme of work was approved by the group at this first meeting. Throughout the process, all information and relevant documentation was accessible through a dedicated space on MS Teams, where updates and exchanges between members took place.

SE Steering Group Membership	
Area Training Manager (Chair)	
Assistant Training Manager x 2	External Member (QA Consultant)
TEL Coordinator	QA Manager (Review Coordinator)
Training Standards Officer	VTOS Coordinator
Youth Officer	QA Support Officer
FET Administration Coordinator	Data Protection Officer
Adult Education Officer	FET Systems & Strategic Reporting Coordinator
Community Education Facilitator	Adult Education Officer
Adult Guidance Counsellor	Deputy Principal, College of FE x 2
PD Coordinator	Coordinator, Outdoor Education Centre
Senior Training Advisor	National Coordinator, Sales Apprenticeship
External Member (QA Consultant)	Employment Engagement Officer

1.7 Stakeholder Consultation

Four sub-groups from the main SE Steering Group were established to undertake consultation activities and other key tasks with stakeholder groups:

- Internal Marketing Working Group
- Centre Survey Working Group
- External Stakeholder Working Group
- Learner Consultation Working Group

Five main consultation events were completed to inform the self-evaluation process.

Centre-based Self-Evaluation - all QQI-registered centres were invited to take part in a centre-based Focus Group to gather feedback on a number of topics including supports for learners, assessment of learners and staff development. 21 separate groups met, representing 26 individual services/centres and used guidelines and resources that were developed to assist them with this self-evaluation.

Individual Staff Survey - all MSLETB staff members were invited to participate in the self-evaluation process by completing an Individual Staff Survey that sought feedback and comment on the effectiveness of MSLETB's quality improvement/quality assurance systems.

AONTAS Virtual Learner Forum Event and Survey - In recent years, MSLETB has engaged the services of AONTAS to facilitate consultation aimed at establishing learner feedback from those participating in the Board's programmes or availing of its services. For 2020, this event was designed around requirements for this SER. Three virtual fora and an online survey that included questions on the impact of Covid-19, were completed. A total of 331 learners participated, far in excess of numbers involved in previous years.

Employer Survey - a survey was circulated to 15 employers in the region seeking feedback and comment on MSLETB's provision. Ten employers responded. The survey sought to establish how aware employers were of the services provided by MSLETB, the levels of training/education sought by employers for entry level employees, the engagement in employer

focused programmes, the relevancy of MSLETB programmes and how the Board could better engage/collaborate with employers in the future.

External Stakeholder Survey - 25 External Stakeholders, including Local Authorities, Third Level Colleges and Development Organisations, were invited to participate in a survey to ascertain their views on MSLETB provision and establish if the Board's current programmes remain relevant to employment needs. 20 submissions were received. Views were also sought in relation to the awareness of MSLETB services, the perceived quality of programmes and the level of collaboration in existence between MSLETB and these stakeholders.

The consultation process commenced in March 2020. Unfortunately, it was disrupted significantly by the Covid-19 pandemic. Consequently, it was decided to conduct consultations online, due to restrictions on in-person meetings. This added significantly to the workload of the SE Steering Group, in converting focus group sessions to online engagement. It also meant that the response rate was not as high as anticipated, within some stakeholder groups.

1.8 Evaluation

Monitoring and Review

All MSLETB's FET services are reviewed and renewed on a regular basis to ensure that they remain relevant to the needs of learners, society and the labour market.

The Board's capacity to rapidly respond to unanticipated circumstances was recently demonstrated when addressing the teaching, learning and assessment challenges presented by the closure of centres and colleges in March 2020 ([see Reflections on Covid-19 Modifications to Teaching, Learning and Assessment and what can be learned for 20/21, June 2020](#)) Much learning was gained from this experience that will inform future rapid responses to changed circumstances.

Chapter 2

Objective 1 - Governance and Management of Quality

LOCK UP
SECURITY



etb

Bord Oideachais agus Oiliúna
Mhaigh eó, Shligigh agus Leitrim
Mayo, Sligo and Leitrim
Education and Training Board

Entrance / Bealach Isteach

etb

Classes
Upstairs
←←←

2.1

The ETB's Mission and Strategy

2.1.1 Description

MSLETB acknowledges that quality assurance and evaluation of its provision are key components in realising its vision and mission:



Vision

The vision of MSLETB is to be a dynamic Education and Training Board providing a positive experience for all its learners in a professional, caring and collaborative education and training environment.



Mission

The mission of MSLETB is to provide those in our communities with opportunities for life and living.

The Board's [Strategy Statement 2018-2022](#), which sets out the organisation's Vision, Mission, and Goals, is the product of a comprehensive consultative process that took place with key stakeholders including management, staff, learners, parents of learners, community partners, representative bodies from industry and employers in the MSLETB region. It charts the strategic direction for the Board's education and training programmes, youth work and other statutory functions, with the key objective that the quality of learning experiences for all will continuously improve. It identifies the following core values as they relate to quality:

MSLETB will:

- Strive for excellence in all that we do
- Actively seek and recognise new standards and ways to improve our service
- Evaluate the suitability of our systems, structures and programmes to identify and implement opportunities for improvements

The Board’s Strategic Statement also sets out five strategic goals to be achieved in the period:-

MSLETB Strategic Goals	
Goal 1	Excellent teaching, learning and training Quality is one of the core values of MSLETB. It is pivotal to delivering the best learner experience to the highest standards to all students, learners and trainees in MSLETB.
Goal 2	Positive experience for all in an equal and inclusive environment Central to MSLETB core values is the goal of being ‘person-centred’. We aim to deliver training and education that is based on mutual respect, trust and inclusion.
Goal 3	Effective corporate governance and compliance MSLETB continues to create a strong corporate governance and compliance structure. Our culture of integrity and ethics is built around our core values and commitment to our learners.
Goal 4	Promote a positive and healthy organisational culture MSLETB’s values and behaviours underpin who we are and what we do. We aim to foster a culture where respect and regard for all individuals is key in the success of the organisation.
Goal 5	Promote the standing of MSLETB as an integral part of the community Our aim is to enhance the profile of MSLETB by meeting the needs of the community through the effective delivery of services and by developing an awareness of the MSLETB brand.

Corporate Governance

MSLETB is governed by a Board consisting of 21 members. Reporting to the Board, the Chief Executive (CE) is the Accounting Officer and holds responsibility for the executive management of the organisation. In line with the governing legislation, the Board has established a number of committees, including the Finance and Audit Committee, Boards of Management and the MSLETB FET Committee, which acts as an advisory group to Senior FET Management personnel, in relation to FET Provision within the region. In addition, the Board establishes other committees as required.

The Board has overall responsibility for ensuring, maintaining and operating an effective system of internal control. The Executive has day-to-day responsibility for implementing this system, which operates on the basis of detailed administrative procedures, segregation of duties, specific authorisation thresholds and regular review by management of reports outlining actual and budgeted results of its various programmes.

Over 92% of staff members agreed with the statement:

I am aware of MSLETB’s Mission and Values

Corporate Governance comprises the systems and procedures by which ETBs are directed and controlled. Accordingly, MSLETB is subject to sectoral Codes of Practice for Governance of Education, Training Boards, and circulars as published, from time to time, by the Department of Education & Skills.

The CE is responsible for the performance of the executive functions of the Board and is accountable to the Board for the performance of such functions. The CE must provide information regarding performance to the Board and to the Minister for Education and Skills as requested.

Composition of The Board
12 Members elected by local authorities
2 Parent Members
2 Members of ETB staff
5 Special Interest Groups Representatives

The executive functions of the authority are related to service provision in education and training, as well as corporate and operational matters. The work of the ETB is structured across three separate but interlinked divisions or pillars namely:

- Schools
- Organisation Support and Development
- Further Education and Training

Each pillar has a Director appointed, reporting to the CE.

The Executive Management Team (EMT) in MSLETB is outlined in the table below.

Executive Management Team		
Chief Executive Tom Grady		
<p><i>Director of Schools</i></p> <p>Mary Madden</p>	<p><i>Director of Organisation Support and Development</i></p> <p>Pat Howley</p>	<p><i>Director of Further Education and Training</i></p> <p>Peter Egan</p>
<p>Post-Primary and Post-Leaving Certificate Schools: Principals/Deputy Principals and School Leaders</p>	<p>Head Office Functions: Assistant Principal Officers - Finance, Human Resources, Capital, Procurement Corporate Services, Administration and ICT.</p>	<p>Further Education and Training, Youth-Work, Outdoor Education and Music Generations: Adult Education Officers, Training Managers and Post Leaving Certificate Principals (in conjunction with the Director of Schools).</p>

While the CE has overall responsibility for the performance of the Board’s services, the Director of Schools, Director of Organisation Support and Development and the Director of FET, as well as School Principals, FET Centre Managers, Programme Officers, Coordinators and Assistant Principal Officers are responsible for the day-to-day management of schools, centres and services.

The Director of Schools is responsible for 19 Post-Primary and Post-Leaving Certificate Schools throughout Mayo, Sligo and Leitrim.

The Director of Organisation Support and Development has responsibility for Human Resources, Finance and Corporate Services. The functions are centrally organised from the MSLETB Head Office in Castlebar, Co. Mayo and the sub offices in Quay Street, Sligo and St Georges Tce., Carrick-on-Shannon, Co. Leitrim.

The Director of Further Education and Training has responsibility for education and training programmes, other than those at mainstream second level. FET programmes are broadly categorised as full-time or part-time, with a range of provision offered across the three counties.

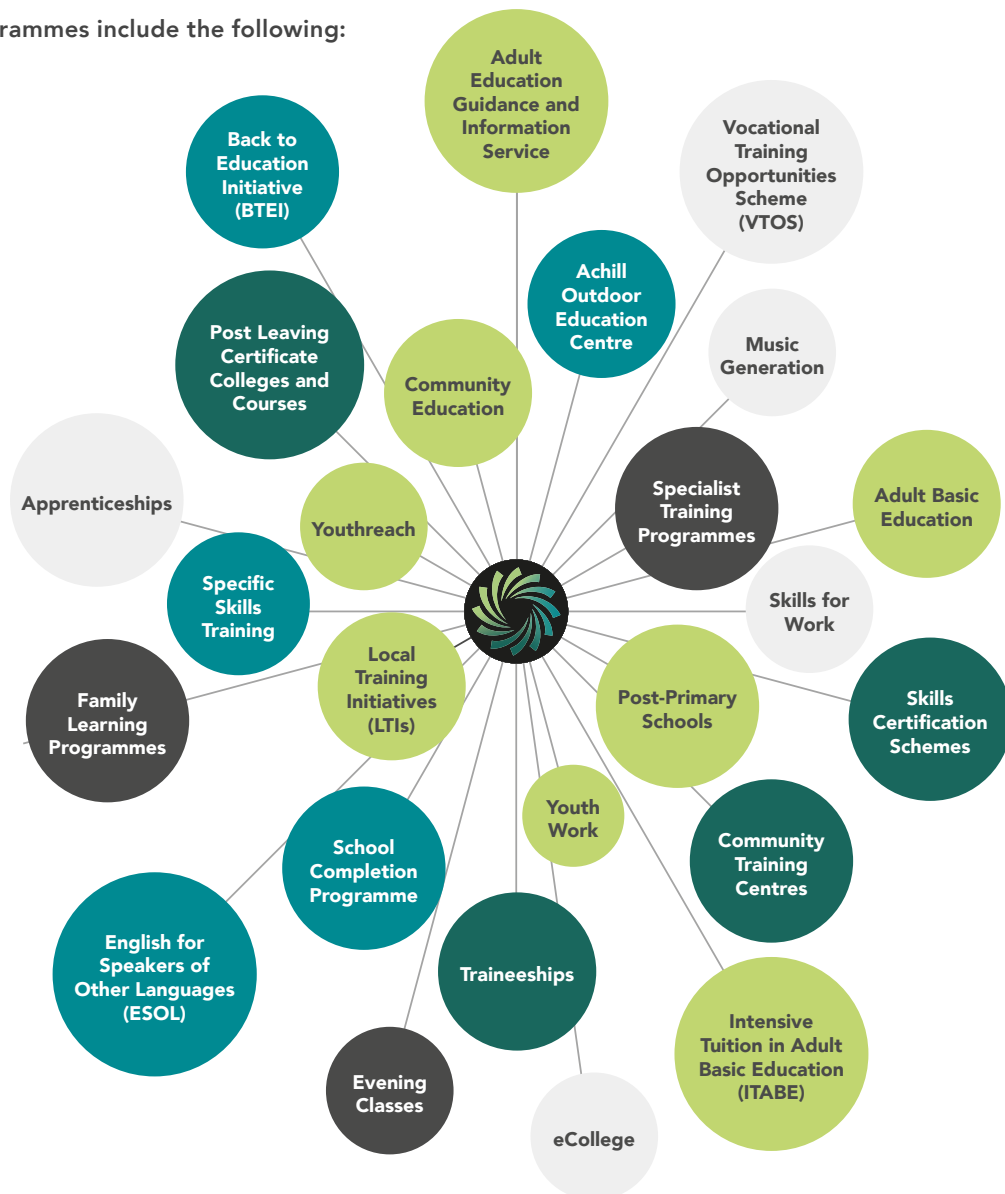
Currently, MSLETB operates FET programmes out of approx. 20 main centres including 9 Post-Leaving Cert (PLC) Colleges (7 dual provision), 2 main Training Centres (Sligo and Ballina), 1 new Retrofitting NZEB Future Skills Centre (due to open spring 2021), 6 Youthreach Centres (incl. 1 CTC) and an Outdoor Education Centre in Achill. FET centres are established in all the main and smaller towns in the three counties. MSLETB also delivers programmes on Clare Island and Inishturk. In addition to FET programmes, the

Director of FET is responsible for Adult Education and Guidance Services, Youth Services and Music Generation.

FET in MSLETB

MSLETB provides a broad range of FET programmes, all of which are designed to meet the training requirements of individuals, both employed and unemployed, and the business and economic needs of employers in the region.

Programmes include the following:



FET Leadership Responsibilities and Reporting Structure:

The FET leadership and responsibility structure of the Board is outlined in the table below. FET Leaders have dual responsibility for both operational elements, broken down on a programme basis and at least one core strategic area. The operational and strategic areas are reviewed annually as part of the annual business planning process/cycle and informed by engagement with stakeholders, internal and external requirements and priorities.

In 2021 the strategic areas of focus are Quality Assurance, Literacy and Numeracy, Learner Supports, Buildings, CPD, FET Policy, Research and Organisational Development, Community Education and Training, Employer Engagement, Skills to Compete (FET supports for persons impacted by the pandemic), Apprenticeships, Contracted Training, Technology Enhanced Learning, Digital Skills development, Outdoor Education and Ecology and PLC.

FET Leadership Responsibilities and Reporting Structure – January 2021						
Peter Egan – Director of FET						
Cathy Powell <i>Adult Education Officer</i>	Cormac Hanlon <i>Adult Education Officer</i>	Mary Brodie <i>Adult Education Officer</i>	Fiona Kieran <i>Training Centre Manager</i>	Sean Burke <i>Area Training Manager</i>	Mick Kane <i>Director of Outdoor Education</i>	Principals <i>Post Leaving Certificate Colleges</i>
Adult Literacy & Numeracy Programmes	Buildings Adult Education and Guidance Information Service	Continuous Professional Development FET FET Policy, Research and Organisational Development	Quality Assurance and Programme Development Mayo Training Centre(s)	Employer Engagement/ STA Sligo Training Centre(s) SBA + New Generation Apprenticeship		
ESOL, Refugee Access Programme	Music Generation Youth Services	FET Reporting European Projects Back to Education Initiative	FET Reporting Marketing and Promoting of FET	Skills to Compete		
Learner Supports (Co-Chair)						
Youthreach, CTC (in conjunction with TC)						
			Ann McNamara <i>Assistant Training Manager</i>	Anthony Quinn <i>Assistant Training Manager</i>	Simon Cosgrove <i>Assistant Training Manager</i>	
			Community Education and Training FET	Contracted Training	Finance and Admin – Corporate Services FET	
			FET Co-operation Hours	Incentre programmes – MSLETB in conjunction with Sean and Fiona	Technology Enhanced Learning	
			Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme	Recruitment Traineeship	Learner Supports (Co-Chair) Self-financing and Evening Training	
					Digital Skills and ICT courses	

2.1.2 Evaluation

Awareness of Vision, Mission and Values is high among MSLETB staff. This is a result of the extensive consultation that took place when setting out to chart the strategic direction for the organisation. Further awareness was brought about through the display of posters in schools, centres and administrative buildings that inform learners, staff and the public of MSLETB's core values.

The Board of MSLETB is committed to carrying out its management function in line with best practice and strives to continuously improve operations. Recently, members of the Board took part in a Governance Workshop as part of their ongoing development.

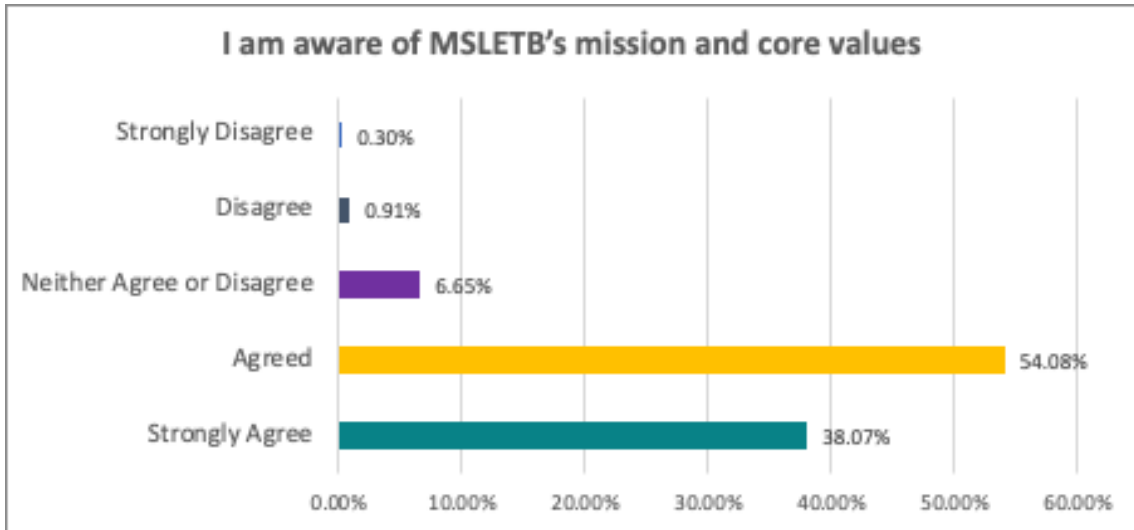
The Board's EMT works collaboratively, with the learner at the centre of decision-making, to deliver on the MSLETB Strategy and to lead and guide the organisation to continue to provide innovative and high-quality education and training services. This is achieved through bi-weekly meetings of the EMT, as a management group, supported by cross-pillar engagement and cooperation e.g., regular attendance by the CE and three Directors at FET Leaders' and Principals' meetings.



The goals and priorities outlined in the MSLETB Strategy Statement have been aligned to the goals and priorities laid out in the Specific Performance Agreement between the Board and SOLAS. This demonstrates that the FET pillar is in harmony with the overall mission and core values of the organisation. In turn, annual [Quality Improvement Plans](#) (QIPs) have been developed, in line with these strategic goals, and significant progress has been made since 2018, in achieving specific actions and quality improvements linked to these goals.

The division of responsibilities and workload sharing within the FET management structure enables a focused approach to both strategic and programme areas. It also provides these areas with an organisational champion. To date, this approach has been very successful. It has enabled senior FET leadership develop high performance cross-functional teams, to support the achievement of strategic goals and key performance indicators.

2.1.3 Conclusion



Strengths

- There is a clear awareness of MSLETB’s Missions and Values as evidenced by the response to a staff survey.
- There are robust governance structures in place, with clear lines of communication and transparent reporting between the different levels of governance as evidenced by the publication of [annual reports](#).
- The management structures in place across FET ensure consistency of focus that supports cross-organisational developments and communications.

Recommendations

- It is imperative that new staff members, during their induction process, are made aware of MSLETB’s Missions, Values and Goals.
- There is opportunity to take advantage of the consultation and reflective processes undertaken in the preparation of this SER and in the ongoing engagements with stakeholders in the development of the Board’s new SOLAS FET Strategy 2020-2024, to inform the development and implementation of an enhanced FET Strategic Framework and associated action plans.
- Consideration must be given to the establishment of ‘cluster’ meetings, whereby programme and service providers in a geographical area meet to champion innovative ideas in relation to programme delivery in the area.

2.2

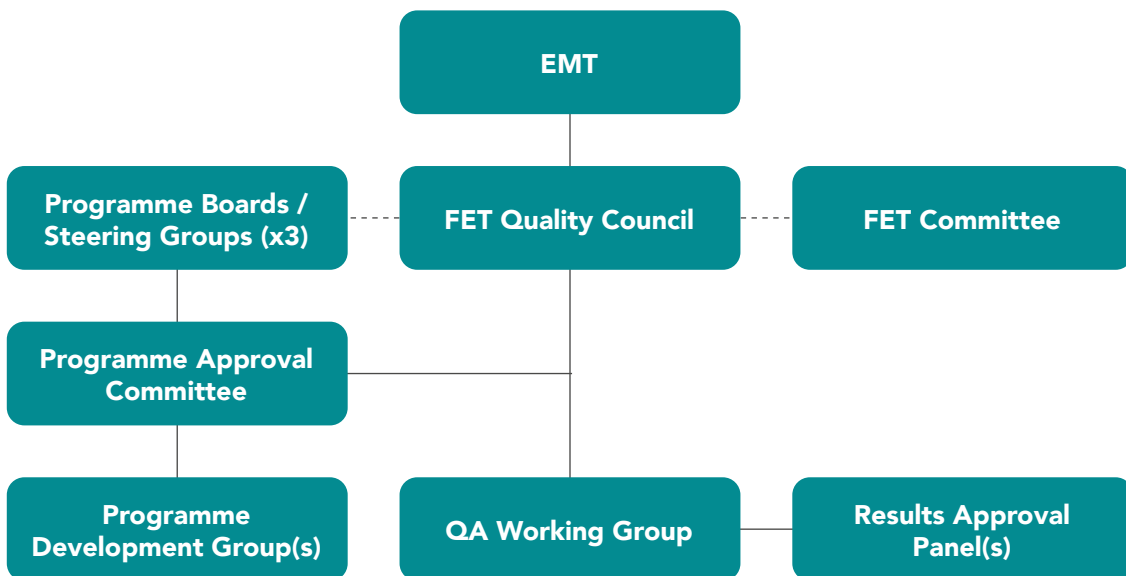
Structures and Terms of Reference for the Governance & Management of QA

2.2.1 Description

In 2019, MSLETB's FET QA governance structure was formally approved to oversee all aspects of the Board's quality assurance of FET provision; QQI and non-QQI awards. In this regard, the overarching governance group is the FET Quality Council, to which a number of governance groups report, including the Programme Approval Committee (PAC) and the QA Working Group.

Assurance Guidelines, published by QQI, and the Board's aspirations for a quality-led structure that is transparent, documented and accessible to all stakeholders. The structure's development was informed by the ETBI supported Shared Quality Assurance Enhancement Project and workshops on the Introduction of FET QA Governance, attended by MSLETB management and QA staff.

The Board's FET QA governance structure reflects both the obligations noted in the Statutory Quality



Each governance group has its own clear and comprehensive [terms of reference](#) setting out respective roles and responsibilities. To ensure visibility and transparency of QA governance and management, the following steps have been taken:

- Terms of Reference for each group has been published on the QA section of MSLETB’s intranet (SCORE).
- Membership of QA governance groups includes a broad range of FET staff, ensuring that communications to centre-level is achieved.
- Reporting on Results Approval Panel (RAP) meetings across the entire ETB ensures greater transparency in ETB-level governance.
- Quarterly QA Newsletters highlight achievements around QA at both centre and ETB level. It also raises awareness of QA Governance groups through articles and profiles.
- The Quality Assurance section of the public-facing MSLETB website (www.msletb.ie) details the structures of the Board’s QA governance.

99% of centre staff agree or somewhat agree

‘that they are aware of MSLETB’s quality assurance structures, roles and responsibilities’

A number of mechanisms external to the ETB are also in place that add to the transparency of QA governance:



**82% of managers, principals and coordinators agree or strongly agree
‘that Quality Assurance is regularly on the agenda
at centre, department or section meetings’**

Management of Quality Assurance

In compliance with QQI Sector Specific Guidelines for the ETB sector, the MSLETB governance and management of QA is a ‘multi-layered system... so that quality and its assurance is monitored in a consistent and appropriate way within and across the various constituent divisions or institutions.’

Consequently, management of QA exists at a number of different levels across the Board’s FET provision:

Centre Level – All FET centre managers, coordinators and Training Standards Officers report to a member of the FET Leaders Team, and PLC Principals report directly to the FET Director. All heads of centres are supported in their QA responsibilities by the QA Unit. In the majority of centres, an identified member of staff has specific responsibility for coordinating activities relating to assessments.

MSLETB centres delivering QQI assessments operate Internal Verification (IV) and External Authentication (EA) processes. In addition, centres attend RAP meetings to review the results of the IV and EA processes and address any QA issues that may have arisen during the course of the assessment process. The QA Unit coordinates and monitors the IV, EA and RAP processes across all centres and makes recommendations for development and improvement, as the need arises.

Board level oversight of QQI delivery is achieved through a review of related KPIs for example, certification rates, EA and RAP observations, as reported by the QA Unit to the FET Quality Council. The Director of FET reports on all strategic areas to the regular EMT meetings. In addition the Director of FET prepares a report for each board meeting including any items relating to QA.

QA Unit – Develops, implements, manages and supports all cross-centre and centre level QA activities including monitoring, reviewing and improving quality of service and provision.

FET Quality Council – This group is responsible for corporate planning, oversight and governance of all MSLETB QA activities. It examines and reviews the ETB’s quality provision, monitoring, self-evaluation, certification, risk factors and critical indicators. Established in 2019, it held its inaugural meeting on 25th February 2020. It met regularly during the year to ensure contingency arrangements for teaching, learning and assessment, during the Covid-19 crisis, were adhering to QQI guidelines and standards.

On reviewing the membership of this group, it is noted that there is no learner representation. This matter is currently being addressed and is at nomination stage.

**91% of staff agreed or somewhat agreed with the statement
‘Staff are well informed of developments
impacting the organisation and
believe they can input to decision making’**

All staff agreed or somewhat agreed with the statement
‘Information available to staff regarding decision-making around programme approval is clear and transparent’

2.2.2 Evaluation

- The robust QA governance structures in MSLETB recently demonstrated their effectiveness during the Covid-19 crisis whereby, following centre closures, timely, effective and coordinated responses to teaching, learning and assessment challenges were rolled out.
- Feedback from tutors/teachers/instructors during consultation around Covid-19 modifications, indicated that respondents felt strongly that academic integrity was not impacted. They also felt that the Board’s alternative assessment plan outlined a clear roadmap that meant both assessors and learners knew what was expected of them.
- Feedback from Centre Focus Groups demonstrated an interest from teachers/tutors/instructors to get involved in decision-making around QA. Comments reflected a desire from staff for increased consultation in order to inform decision making and to enhance communication regarding the outcomes of surveys and consultations, particularly in relation to changes arising from feedback.
- Feedback from Centre Focus Groups, in relation to decision-making around programme approval was also very positive, indicating that staff are aware of the PAC and their related role. To maintain this awareness and create greater understanding around decision-making processes, suggestions from centres included a calendar of PAC meetings and wider communication of outcomes.

2.2.3 Conclusion

Strengths

- The establishment of the FET Quality Council have given enhanced transparency around decision making.
- Staff feel that they are adequately briefed, trained and kept up to date with quality assurance expectations and requirements (84% of staff surveyed agreed).

Recommendations

- Regular review of membership of all QA Governance groups to ensure broad-based representation is in place, including learner representation.
- Publish minutes of meetings internally and publicly on the Board’s website.
- Review the induction programme for staff members involved in governance groups and action any recommendations.
- Develop an induction programme for learner representatives on governance groups.

2.3

The Documentation of Quality Assurance Policy & Procedures

2.3.1 Description

MSLETB documents all of its policies and procedures, including those relating to QA. Corporate and core institutional policies and procedures are accessible on the SCORE site, with many policies and procedures also publicly available on www.msletb.ie

Though significant harmonisation of legacy QA related policies and procedures has been achieved, some work remains to be completed in this regard. A desk review, carried out by the QA Working Group as part of this SER, concluded that all existing policies and procedures are robust, comprehensive and fit for purpose. It noted that planning for the implementation of fully harmonised QA policies and procedures across the Board's FET provision is underway. In addition, the ongoing development of an updated Quality Assurance Manual to document a single, integrated and harmonised QA system for the Board's FET provision, is work in progress. This is a significant project, requiring broad consultation across centres, with an expected rollout date of September 2021.

All current QA policies and procedures are accessible to staff via the QA SCORE site. The QA section of the Board's website www.msletb.ie also provides QA related information to staff, as well as to learners, interested stakeholders and the public at large.

QA policies and procedures development, monitoring and review is the responsibility of the QA Working Group. Members of this group work in the areas of QA and Training Standards. This group is mandated to establish separate task and finish groups where expertise external to the group's membership is required. A recent example was the development of an updated blended learning policy, which was undertaken by the TEL Advisory Group, on behalf of the QA Working Group.

The recent Covid-19 contingencies required the QA Working Group to develop a number of procedures including the following:

- [Change of Assessment Technique Procedures](#)
- [MSLETB IV & EA Contingency Planning Procedure](#)
- [External Authentication Guidelines and Procedures](#)
- [Work Placement Contingency Guidelines](#)

This work followed the development and approval process outline below.



There has been significant learning during Covid-19 contingency planning and rollout, and this will inform the update of the process for the development, approval and review of QA policies and procedures across MSLETB in the future.

2.3.2 Evaluation

- The learning gained during Covid-19 contingency planning and from the recent desk review of all QA policies and procedures by the QA Working Group, has identified opportunity to review and streamline current practice in the area of policy and procedure development.
- A more inclusive consultation and engagement with the wider MSLETB community during policy development should foster greater ownership that will, in turn, facilitate rollout at the implementation stage.
- The use of SCORE, as a repository for policies and procedures, is effective. This is evidenced by feedback received during Centre Focus Groups, with staff highlighting their reliance on the QA SCORE site for updates and access to procedures and other QA-related documentation.
- Staff were positive about communications from the QA Unit via emails, newsletters and direct links to the QA SCORE site.
- It was noted however, that it was sometimes challenging to locate information on the SCORE site. In this regard, it was suggested that a more user-friendly approach would be to have all assessment related documentation available in a single folder on the site.
- Suggestions were made in relation to the development of a QA Handbook for both staff and learners.

2.3.3 Conclusion

Strengths

- Communication channels are well established but could be more fully utilised to ensure staff are using the most up-to-date version of policies, procedures and related documentation.
- Recent experience during Covid-19 contingency planning, demonstrated the QA Working Group's capacity to develop robust and fit-for-purpose procedures in a timely manner. It also demonstrated the group's ability to review, amend and communicate updates to line managers for subsequent rollout at centres.

Recommendations

- An in-depth consultation with stakeholders, on the evolving Quality Assurance Manual is needed.
- A procedure around policy development should be researched and developed based on learning from recent experiences.
- Following the agreement on an integrated Quality Assurance Manual, an MSLETB Learner Handbook must be developed and included in an updated learner induction process.
- There is need to develop a Learner Charter for the Board's FET provision.
- A formal review cycle for the Board's updated Quality Assurance Manual must be agreed as part of the rollout process.

2.4

Staff Recruitment, Management and Development

2.4.1 Description

It is the mission of MSLETB to recruit and retain quality staff in a fair and consistent manner, free from discrimination. To this effect, MSLETB bases its recruitment and selection procedures on a job description and its objective requirements, without bias on the grounds of the applicant's sex, marital or family status, age, disability, religion, sexual orientation, race, or membership of the travelling community.

The process for recruitment and selection is set out on next page.

95.5% of staff surveyed during the Centre Focus Groups agreed that they are advised of all career opportunities within MSLETB. Staff noted that all job vacancies are circulated via email by the HR Department and welcome this direct communications.

Professional Development

MSLETB, as a growing and learning organisation, provides staff the opportunity to update their knowledge and skills with changing trends and directions in their respective professions and roles. In line with the Board's [PD Policy](#) and related [procedures](#), staff are actively encouraged to identify opportunities to progress their own professional development and to avail of related financial support from the Board.

MSLETB's PD Policy is aligned to the [SOLAS FET Professional Development Strategy](#), which outlines seven strategic areas. The MSLETB PD policy reflects and emphasises each of these and actively promotes all related SOLAS-led initiatives. The ETB will review and monitor its policy in line with future developments from SOLAS.

Professional Development Advisory Group

A review of MSLETB's PD Working Group, resulted in its replacement by the Professional Development Advisory Group (PDAG) in March 2020. The PDAG supports the rollout of the national FET PD Strategy and its implementation across the region and has a much broader [terms of reference](#) than its predecessor. The PDAG acts in an advisory capacity to the:

- PD Coordinator
- FET Leader with strategic responsibility for PD
- FET Director and
- OSD Director

The PDAG carries out the following functions:

- Reviews and supports the PD work plan
- Recommends PD priorities across the ETB
- Advises on the implementation of PD strategic priorities
- Promotes PD opportunities to embed a culture of PD
- Drafts and updates PD policy and procedures

Professional Development Survey

MSLETB is committed to build on organisational performance through the development of its key resource, its people. To this end, the PDAG, in the period March to July 2020, invited all staff in the Board's FET pillar, learning practitioners, management, support and administration staff, to participate in a survey aimed at establishing the PD priorities for the Board. 289 (70%) responses were received. Each respondent identified their main role within the organisation, as follows:

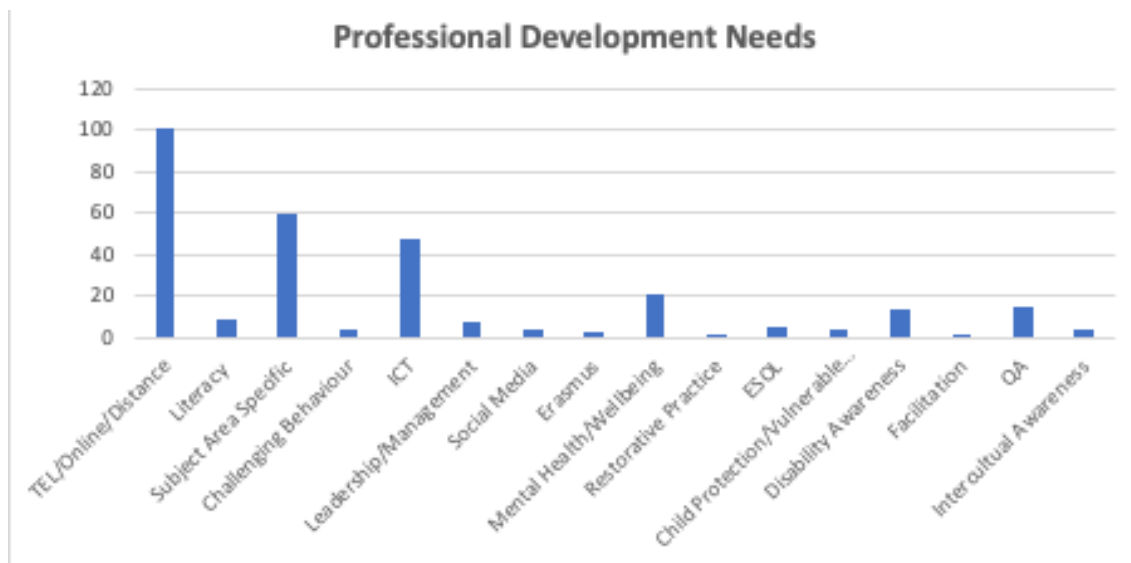
- 206 Educators
- 38 Admin
- 11 Admin Management
- 43 Management Education

Recruitment and Selection Procedure



‘In the next year what Professional development areas would you see as critical to your role within MSLETB?’

A summary of the responses, ‘grouped by type’, to the principal question of the survey is provided in the chart below.



Post PD Survey Actions

A strategic approach was taken in addressing the findings of this survey, being aware of the particular challenges presented by Covid -19 and the consequent urgent need to facilitate and support staff in the use of technology enhanced learning. A comprehensive schedule of PD programmes was rolled out in the period June-December 2020. TEL interventions, in the period, are outlined in the table below:

Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL)	
Programme	Participants
Digital Skills in the Classroom	135
Tara 365 Learning Blended Learning	120
Leading Distance and Blended Learning	20
Webinar 1: Communities of Practice	15
Webinar 2: OneNote Class Notebook & Teams	400 (external)
Webinar 3: Getting Started with Accessibility using MS365	11
Starting your ePortfolio Journey	10
Digital Portfolio Workshop	40
Digital Portfolios from a QA and Practicing Teachers Perspective	23
Moodle Webinars	103

PD programmes were also rolled out in the following areas during this period.

Leadership & Management	
Programme	Participants
ILM Level 4 Leadership and Management (Leading through Change)	21
Executive Coaching (ongoing)	15

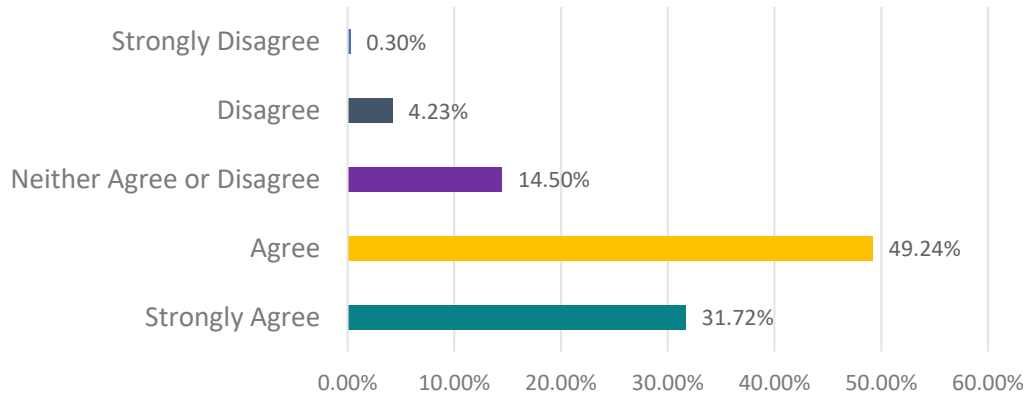
Quality Assurance	
Programme	Participants
Level 9 Post-graduate Certificate in Programme Design and Validation (PDV) for Further Education and Training (FET)	22
FESS/MSLETB QA Adapting Assessment for QQI Certification	70

ICT	
Programme	Participants
Microsoft Office Specialist	20
Ongoing drop-in Sessions with representative from Tara 365 Learning	100

Literacy	
Programme	Participants
WIT Integrating Literacy (Level 6)	12
WIT TESOL (Level 6)	9

Acknowledging the role that new programme development and programme re-design has in addressing the MSLETB commitment to provide opportunities for 'life and living for people in the community', the Board currently supports 22 FET staff on an NUI Maynooth course in Programme Design and Validation in FET. The knowledge and skill gained, in this regard, will facilitate programme development and update, in collaboration with external partners and stakeholders, as the Board responds effectively to the needs of a dynamic workplace in the region.

I am supported by the ETB to maintain and enhance my professional standards



2.4.3 Evaluation

- Recruitment processes in MSLETB are clear and unambiguous. Staff are made aware of all job vacancies.
- Prior to their inclusion on Selection Boards, interviewers are required to undertake training. This training covers competency-based interview skills, relevant legislation and disability awareness. Recently, this training includes remote interviewing techniques.
- The focused response by MSLETB, through the PDAG and TEL Advisory Group to the unanticipated teaching, learning and assessment challenges presented to staff by the Covid-19 crisis, demonstrates the Board's capacity to effectively and expeditiously address the professional development needs of staff at short notice.
- Teachers, tutors and instructors, who responded to a survey on Reflections on Covid-19 Modifications, that informed a follow up report to QQI, cited training in TEL as a welcome and timely initiative.
- Feedback from Centre Focus Groups identified PD as a strength area. [Appendix 3](#) documents the variety of PD undertaken by staff members in the last 3-5 years. Overall, staff are satisfied with the level, choice and quality of PD offered.
- Regarding communication of PD opportunities, email and line management were cited most frequently as channels of communications with a small number of centres referencing the PD SCORE site. The feedback indicates a clear desire from teachers, tutors and instructors to meet up with subject matter experts from their own field, with many mentioning communities of practice as an option.
- All Staff agree or somewhat agree that they are aware of and have access to PD opportunities
- The current online delivery of PD (due to the ongoing Covid-19 crisis) has proven to be a popular method of engagement by staff. Future delivery should be informed by this learning and will help to alleviate the burden of release and payment issues that currently exist.
- The PDAG will continue to review and update its strategic approach, which will be informed by current trends and developments in education. For example, consideration is being given to the introduction of a micro credentials-based system.

2.4.4 Conclusion

Strengths

- Overall, there is a good level of engagement with PD opportunities by staff.
- There is a wide range of PD options and increased awareness of opportunities among staff.
- Centre Focus Groups showed a high level of satisfaction among staff with PD opportunities.
- Second Providers, who deliver specific courses on behalf of MSLETB, are invited to participate in all PD opportunities.
- In light of the increased delivery of programmes through blended learning, the collaboration between PD and TEL ensures that there is a coordinated approach to training.
- The alignment of MSLETB's PD Policy to the national SOLAS FET Professional Development Strategy ensures a systematic approach to professional development.

Recommendations

- Introduce a formalised training needs analysis process to ensure that future PD is targeted to specific identified needs.
- There is a need for an ETB-wide policy around staff release and remuneration in order ensure equity of opportunity.
- There is an opportunity to develop communities of practice in different subject areas with support and resourcing from PD.
- There are significant opportunities to increase the offerings of PD around quality assurance and assessment with support from and collaboration with the PDAG.

2.5

Programme Development, Approval, and Submission for Validation

2.5.1 Description

Programme Approval Committee

MSLETB programme development and approval processes are managed by the PAC according to their [terms of reference](#) and in line with the Board's [Programme Delivery, Development & Validation Policy](#). All new programme development and programme delivery requests from centres must be approved by the PAC before being ratified by the Board's FET Quality Council. Centre requests for programme updates are processed directly by the PAC and communicated via the QA SCORE site and the quarterly QA Newsletter. Requests and outcomes from PAC meetings, since September 2019, can be found in [Appendix 4](#).

The chart on the next page outlines the process for all applications made to the PAC.

Members of the PAC were recently [surveyed](#) in relation to a number of topics including:

- The effectiveness of the PAC as a governance unit
- Its terms of reference
- Representation

The group agreed that the PAC is successful in:

- Effectively processing programme development and update requests and
- In minimising the duplication of programmes throughout the region

When asked about the effectiveness of the current Terms of Reference, feedback indicated that 78% of members felt that these were fit for purpose. However, it was noted that they should be updated to reflect any changes in existing composition of the committee or extended responsibilities and also that they should be brought into line with the terms of reference that exist for other structures to ensure consistency and uniformity.

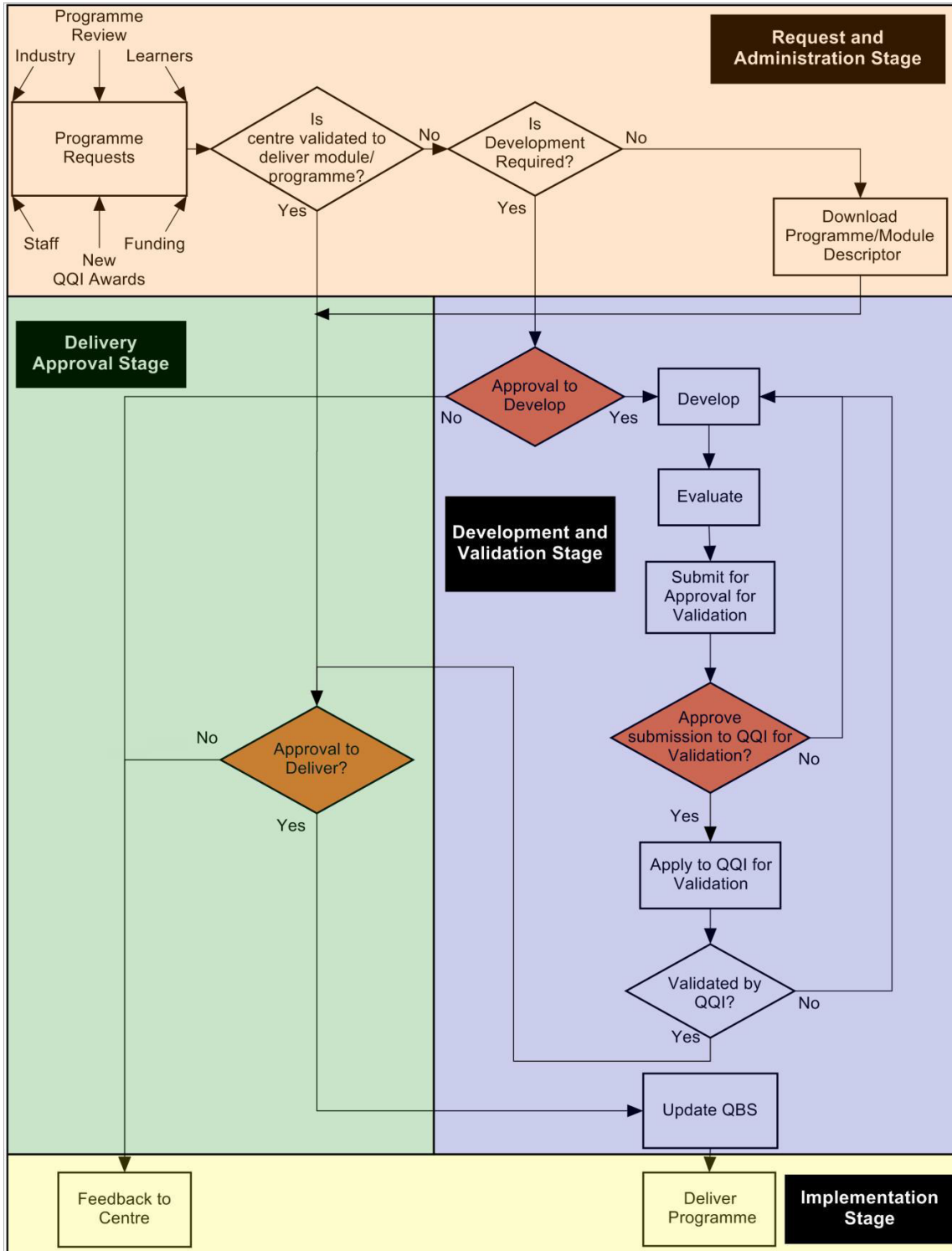
The majority (89%) of PAC members surveyed agreed or strongly agreed that there is broad representation of all services and programmes within the membership of the PAC. Feedback suggested that representation from the PLC sector would be a welcome addition to the group's membership.

Partnership Approach

MSLETB works collaboratively with stakeholders including other ETBs, ETBI, the Further Education Support Service (FESS), SOLAS, QQI, employers, industry and professional bodies in developing and updating programmes. Over the past 3 years, the Board has taken the lead in, and retains the Coordinating Provider role for, several programme development projects including:

- [Craft Butchery Apprenticeship](#)
- [Agriculture Programmes](#)
- [Sales Apprenticeship](#)

PAC Application Process



MSLETB and Stakeholders work collaboratively so that employers, business and enterprise can influence the curriculum and content of programmes delivered by MSLETB to make them relevant for the workplace.

- 60% of employers surveyed agreed or somewhat agreed that “Employers can influence the curriculum and content of programmes delivered by MSLETB to make them more relevant for the workplace”.
- From a survey of external stakeholders, 85% agreed or somewhat agreed that MSLETB and Stakeholders work collaboratively together so that employers, business and enterprise can influence the curriculum and content of programmes delivered by MSLETB to make them relevant for the workplace.

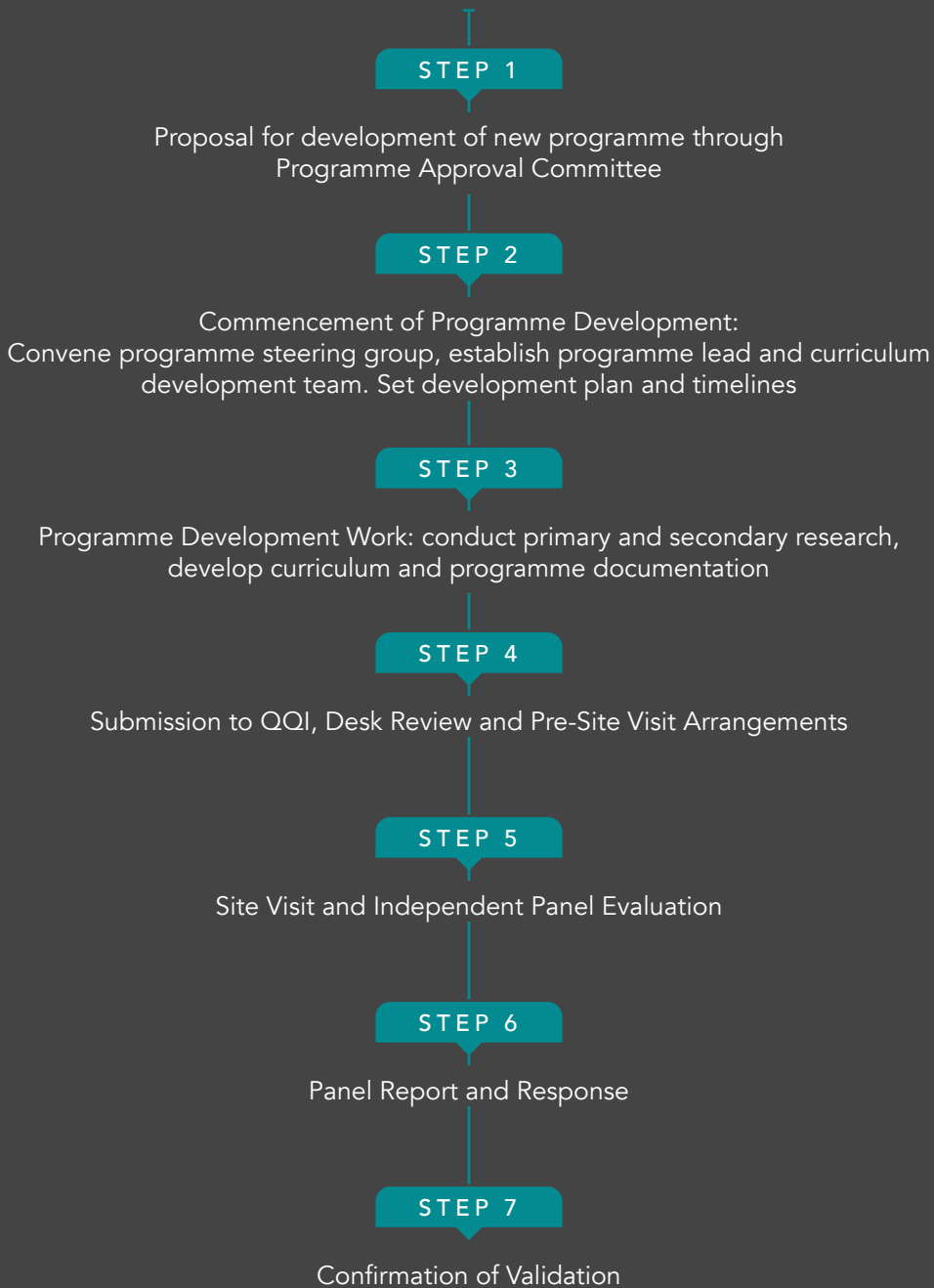
In September 2019, a consortium from Mayo, Sligo and Leitrim Education and Training Board (MSLETB) in collaboration with Waterford Wexford Education and Training Board (WWETB) and the Irish Road Haulage Association (IRHA) submitted a proposal to SOLAS for funding under the ‘Skills to Advance: Innovation through Collaboration Call for Proposals 2019’. The aim of the proposal was to develop a new programme focused on economical and safe driving that included some fundamental digital skills training for HGV drivers in Ireland. The proposal was successful, and a comprehensive programme development process ensued. This is MSLETB’s most recent programme recommended for validation and leads to a Level 5 Certificate in Digital Assisted Eco Driving (HGV).

Labelled the [SMART driving](http://www.smartdriving.ie) programme (www.smartdriving.ie), a key feature of the project was the appointment of a Research Consultant to undertake a comprehensive employer and industry engagement process, [feedback](#) from which informed the development of this special purpose award.

MSLETB is currently engaged in a number of significant innovative programme development projects including:

- A Nearly Zero Energy Building (NZEB) Retrofitting training programme was recently launched by Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, Simon Harris TD. This programme introduces the learner to NZEB regulations and simultaneously offers the first step on a pathway focusing on deep retrofit. In this regard, complementary funding has been secured for the establishment of a new MSLETB-led Centre of Excellence in Sustainable Energy, NZEB, Retrofitting in Sligo.
- A feasibility study is under way for the development of a new level 5 programme in essential business skills.

Outlined below is the MSLETB process for new programme development.



2.5.2 Evaluation

- The PAC has a broad membership. However, further to a recent survey, it is planned to immediately address the identified under-representation of PLC centres. It is noted that the recent inclusion of the Board's PLSS Coordinator as a member of the PAC, acknowledges and highlights the pivotal role of PLSS nationally, and the need to ensure the Board's programmes are accurately and comprehensively recorded on this national course database.
- Two programme development projects described in section 2.5.1 were also validated under Blended Learning Guidelines. This experience, along with online teaching, learning and assessment experiences during Covid-19, has highlighted the need to develop a blended/online learning strategy and associated policy to develop, manage and monitor quality-assured online delivery.
- To meet the anticipated demands for new programmes and to ensure that programme development and QA requirements can meet expectations, MSLETB is currently upskilling a number of staff members in the area of [programme development and validation](#). In addition, a number of staff have gained significant experience in other projects that have resulted in the successful validation of programmes.

2.5.3 Conclusion

Strengths:

- Senior Management strongly supports the design and delivery of professional, high quality, learner-centred education and training programmes.
- MSLETB has a clear and comprehensive Programme Delivery, Development and Validation Policy, which is administered effectively by the PAC.
- MSLETB has contributed significantly to shared curriculum initiatives at national level and will continue to do so into the future.
- The partnership approach and, in particular, employer engagement, has proven to be an effective way of working collaboratively for the development of new and innovative programmes.
- With the support of a comprehensive PD strategy, MSLETB is building capacity for programme development and validation by upskilling staff.
- MSLETB is a collaborating provider for two New Generation Apprenticeships: Commis Chef apprenticeship and ICT Associate apprenticeship.

Recommendations:

- Review membership, roles and responsibilities of the PAC.
- Develop a blended learning strategy framework based on good practice and national developments.
- Explore opportunities to expand the current apprenticeship provision in line with the new Government's action plan for apprenticeships.
- Explore opportunities to facilitate progression to apprenticeships.
- Upskill a wide range of teachers, tutors and instructors in programme validation and revalidation and in how they can contribute to the process.
- Initiate clusters to allow centres network locally, thus providing a platform for the planning and rollout of programmes and services to the communities in which they operate.

2.6

Access, Transfer and Progression

2.6.1 Description

Supporting potential learners with comprehensive up to date access transfer and progression information on MSLETB's portfolio of FET programmes, is key to the Board realising its mission to provide opportunities for life and living in the region. A number of different communication channels are employed to ensure interested parties are fully aware of Access, Transfer and Progression (ATP) details that will facilitate informed decision making in this regard; see Section 2.9 Public Information and Communication, of this report.

Access

Public information published for MSLETB's programmes informs interested parties on each programme's access details:

- Course outline
- Application procedure
- Minimum entry requirements
- Duration
- Funding availability – grants, childcare, etc.
- RPL
- Learner supports available
- Extra-curricular activities, as they apply

Some FET centres have a learner prospectus (see sample [here](#)) and many produce course flyers which are available both online and in hard copy.

Learners can register for a programme in a number of ways:

- Online using FETCH (the national Further Education and Training Course Hub)
- Direct application to a centre using a paper-based application form.
- Apprentices and their employers register on the Apprentice Client Services System (ACSS) through a Senior Training Advisor

Management of the learner application process remains at centre level.

North Connaught College of Further Education
Tubbercurry, Co. Sligo
Mayo, Sligo & Leitrim Education and Training Board
Your Journey Starts Here...

Horsemanship

Type Full-time
Start Date 31st August 2020
Duration 33 weeks
Focus Employment/
Certification QQI Level 6

What are the progression opportunities?
This programme prepares the student for managerial roles in the equine industry. The learner will be prepared for work in a supervisory position in riding schools, clubs, competition stables, livery stables, young horse training and dealing yards.
The training for Level 6 will also prepare the learner for the British Horse Society (BHS) exams up to BHS Stage 3 and BHS Stage 2 Teach. Taking the BHS exams, the learner will have internationally recognised qualifications.
There is also the option of progression onto Further Education:
• Higher Certificate in Business in Equine Studies in Athlone Institute of Technology, Co. Westmeath
• Equine Business in NUI Maynooth, Co. Kildare or the BSc in Equine Management in Enniskillen, Co. Fermanagh.

What are the entry requirements?
• It is desirable that applicants have participated in primary and post primary education. It is an advantage if an applicant has completed a QQI Level 5 qualification or equivalent.
• Applicants should be able to demonstrate skills and competence in an equine environment and be able to exercise initiative and independence when carrying out course activities.
• Applicants must complete an interview to determine suitability for the course.

What award will I achieve?
QQI Certificate in Horsemanship (RM305)

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

Programme information advises on RPL opportunities for access to all MSLETB programmes. This includes details on how to apply for exemptions where a learner has already achieved a programme-related QQI module and how life experience can be considered where minimum entry requirements, as stated, are not being met. Currently, MSLETB does not have a process in place whereby certification can be achieved through RPL.

Transfer

Learners may transfer from or to other QQI programmes within a centre's provision, at the same level, subject to entry requirements and terms and conditions of the programme. Learners may progress to QQI programmes in a centre, at a level above the level of the programme they have completed, subject to the entry requirements of the programme.

Progression

MSLETB is committed to providing learners with opportunities to progress to Higher Education. Learners who have successfully achieved a QQI award can apply to the CAO, through the Higher Links Scheme, for a place at Higher Education. In addition, the Board has established strong progression links with GMIT, IT Sligo and St. Angela's College, NUIG. Advice is provided on all progression opportunities by the local centre's career guidance service or through the Board's Adult Education Guidance Service (AEGS).

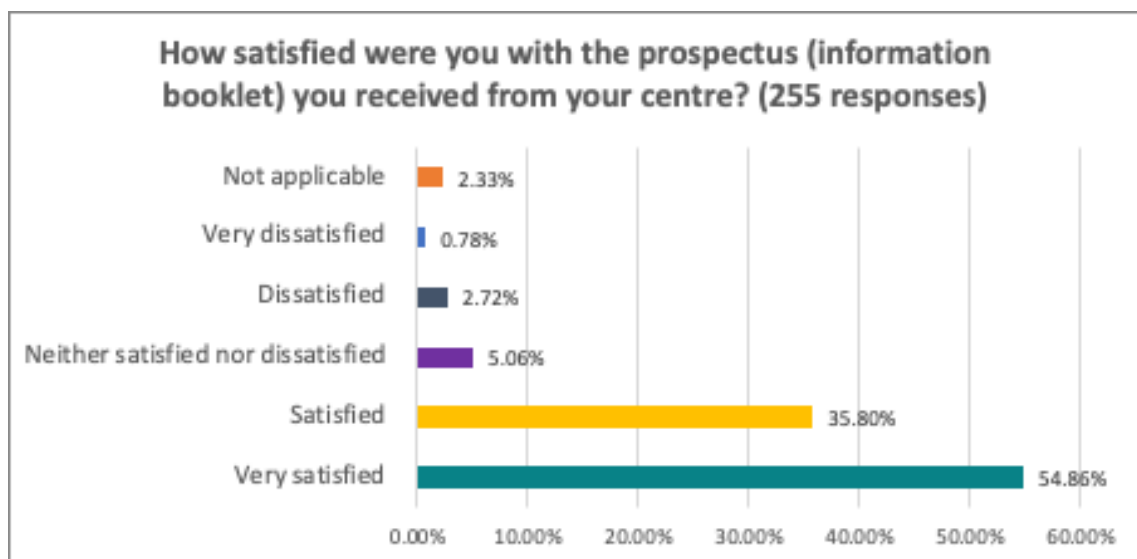
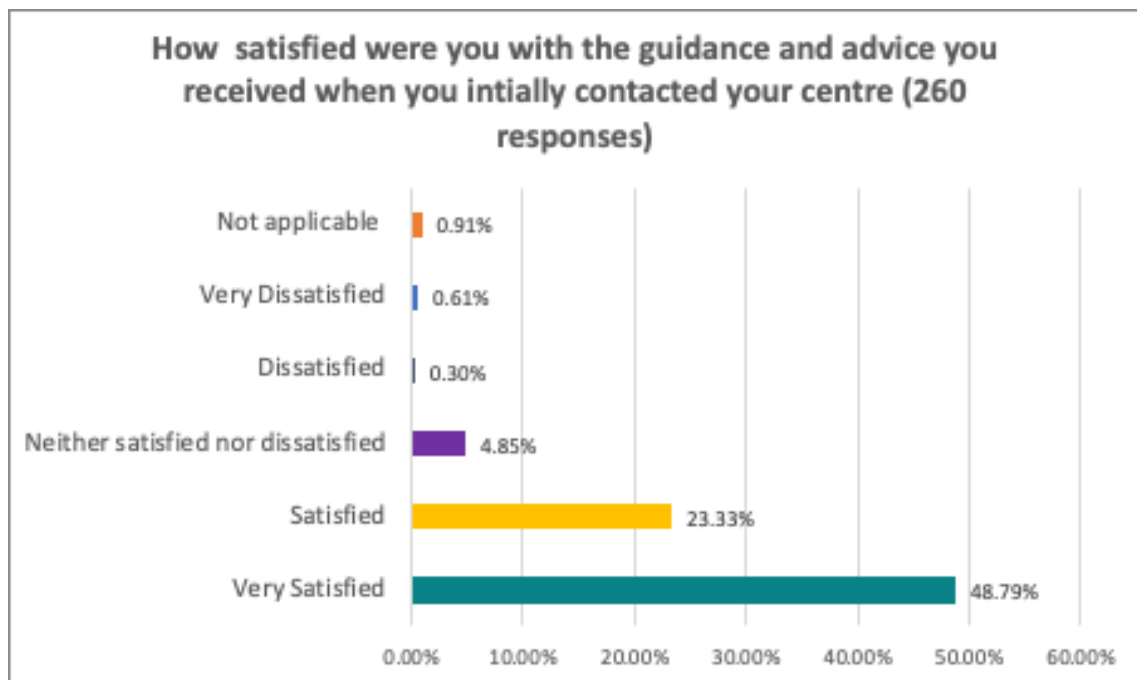
Details of progression MOUs are available [here](#)

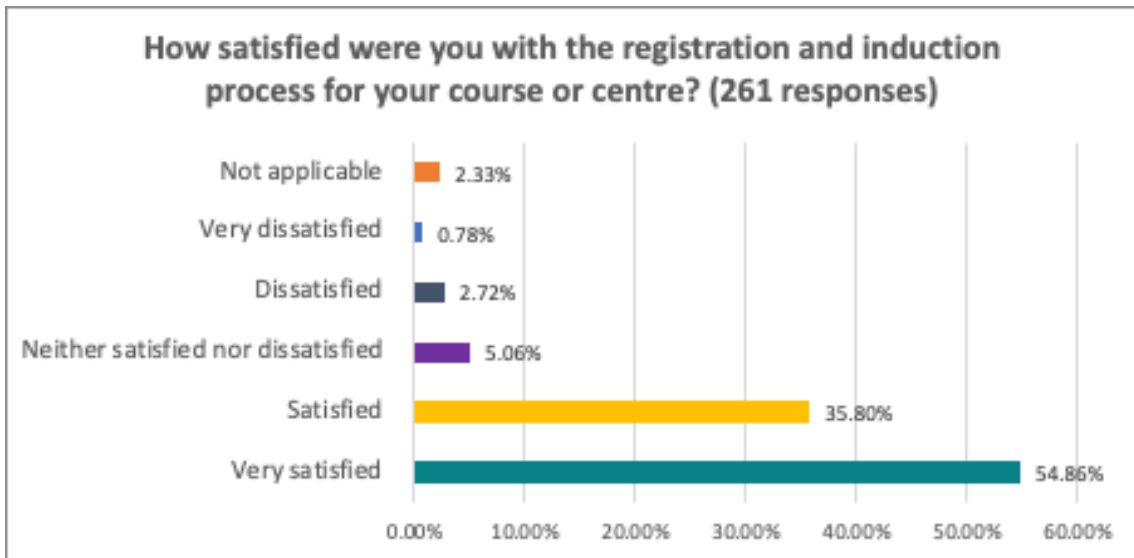
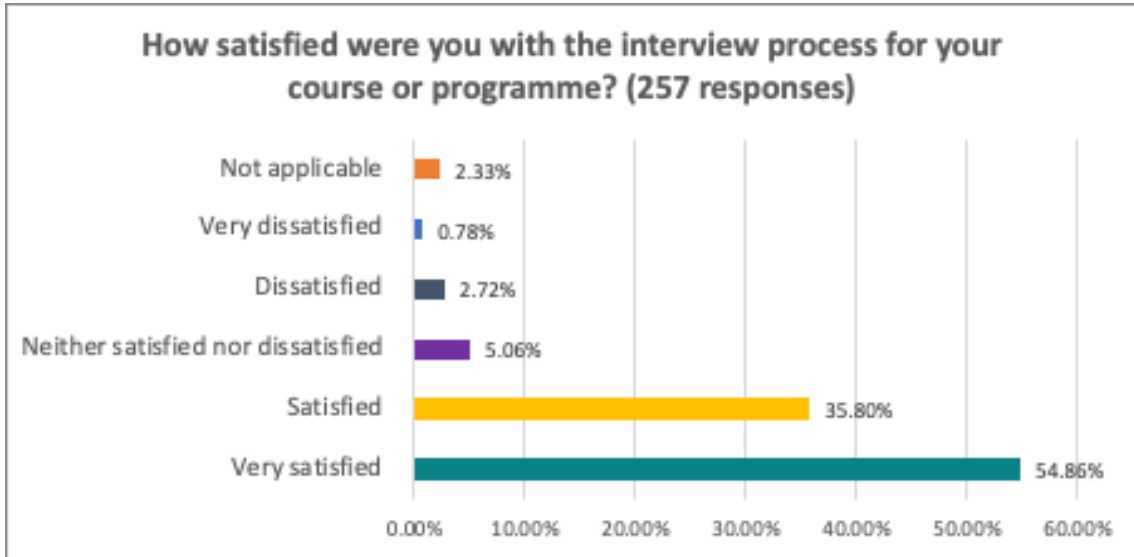
Progression and Destination Data

The PLSS is the principal source of centralised progression and destination data once a learner has completed or exited a programme. Data captured and stored, in this regard, is returned to SOLAS as part of the Board’s reporting obligations. In addition, tracking progression and destination is undertaken at centre level by local management.

2.6.2 Evaluation

- Applicants have reported a high satisfaction level with their initial pre-registration engagement with centres.





- MSLETB is currently developing an overarching common admission policy. This will assist in ensuring consistent FET admission procedures across the region.
- MSLETB is engaging with the standard application procedure that has resulted from the introduction of the PLSS and online learner application system.
- In response to the question, *“What could your centre do to improve its registration and induction policies?”* Learners suggested that more advertising and promotion of the Board’s programmes and services should be undertaken, as well as more information on courses available online.
- A number of respondents requested that additional information be given to them around grants, student cards, etc. during induction and registration.
- Some respondents requested that more detailed information on programmes and services be available to the general public.

2.6.3 Conclusion

Strengths

- Over 95% of centres agreed or somewhat agreed that the learner application process is open and transparent. This is also in keeping with the feedback from the learner survey.
- Over 95% of centres agreed or somewhat agreed that procedures for potential learners seeking exemptions in their centre is clear.

Recommendations

- There is need to review the programme application process, whereby data captured in the first instance on an eform can be imported directly to the PLSS. This aims to ensure only relevant data is captured and to streamline administrative processes.
- Continue engagement with national partners to enhance the functionality of the PLSS in providing accurate and updated information, especially in the area of learner destinations.
- Continue engagement with third level colleges to expand progression opportunities.
- An opportunity exists to review and update the role of MSLETB’s adult guidance and information service to include networking with second level schools in the region, to inform them of FET programmes available to school leavers, as well as employment opportunities and progression routes to higher education.
- There is a need to develop and roll out a common assessment tool for entry to FET programmes, where a learner’s suitability cannot be determined on the basis of past achievement. This will ensure that a learner is placed on a programme that best meets their needs and that appropriate supports are put in place, as required.
- MSLETB recognises the increasing demand for RPL by its learners and is committed to working towards a formal process through sectoral engagement at a national level.
- There is an opportunity to review the application of exemptions across the service to ensure its consistent implementation for learners.

2.7

Integrity and Approval of Assessment Results

2.7.1 Description

MSLETB has established a fit for purpose assessment framework to ensure the fair and consistent assessment of learners and the integrity and approval of assessment results. Robust assessment procedures, protocols and supports are in place in all centres, that ensure the security, integrity and transparency of assessment processes in line with statutory QQI guidelines and award standards. In this regard, the Board provides direction to its centres in the following areas:

- The preparation and distribution of assessment instruments
- The provision of assessment related information to learners
- Extenuating circumstances
- Reasonable accommodation
- The conduct of assessment
- The consistency of assessment
- Assessment appeals and
- Record keeping

Centres are supported, on an ongoing basis, by the MSLETB QA Unit on all assessment related quality and assurance matters that may arise.

All related documentation is available on the Board's SCORE site.

The Board's assessment framework includes both internal and external authentication procedures that are focused on assuring the integrity and approval of assessment results. These commence once all learner assessment evidence has been collated, marked and to hand.

The internal verification (IV) process, managed at centre level, confirms the completeness and accuracy of the local assessment process in line with the MSLETB assessment framework. This process is completed in preparation for the external authentication process and produces an IV Report.

The external authentication process, conducted by a subject matter expert, sets out to provide independent authoritative confirmation of fair, consistent, valid and reliable assessment in line with award standards. External Authenticators (EA) are appointed to each centre by the QA Unit. Each EA appointed may visit a number of centres in the region to confirm standards both within and across centres. The EA provides a report on observations and recommendations for each centre visited.

Once EA Reports are to hand, the QA Unit schedules RAP meetings. Representatives from different centres across the region attend this meeting. Attendees must include a minimum of three of the following, to conform with the Board's governance of assessment results:

- Director of FET
- Adult Education Officer/s
- Area Training Manager
- Assistant Training Manager/s
- QA Leads/TSOs
- Programmatic Leaders

RAP meetings consider the observations and recommendations of both the IV and EA reports and have the responsibility to recommend provisional results for approval, request certification from QQI and propose an improvement plan, as the need arises. Corrective and enhancement measures identified are actioned by centre managers and principals to mitigate future risk, in line with the centre's and MSLETB's commitment to continuous development and improvement.

The QA Unit prepares a consolidated RAP report for submission to the FET Quality Council identifying areas of good practice, non-compliance and risk. A summary of findings is also published in the quarterly QA Newsletter.

Non-QQI Assessment Processes

QQI certifies the largest proportion of FET programmes in MSLETB. A small number of programmes are certified by City and Guilds, ITEC, CIBTAC and CIDESCO. The Board also has quality assurance arrangements and agreements in place with these awarding bodies.

Oversight of all assessment processes, regardless of the awarding body, are managed by the QA Unit.

2.7.2 Evaluation

- MSLETB is committed to developing a single integrated set of assessment-related policies and procedures. Significant work has been completed in harmonising elements of the legacy QA systems inherited by MSLETB, especially in the areas of compassionate considerations and reasonable accommodations.
- While integration and harmonisation has not yet been fully achieved (work in progress) the integrity of processes and procedures around assessment is confirmed by feedback as follows:

FEEDBACK

Highlights from Centre Focus Groups and Individual Staff Survey

- 100% of centres agreed that learners in their centre are well informed of their role, responsibilities and requirements around assessment.
- 90.5% agreed and 9.5% somewhat agreed that learners are provided with timely and constructive feedback on assessment.
- 95.2% agreed and 4.8% somewhat agreed that learners are well informed in relation to assessment appeals procedures.
- 90.5% agreed and 9.5% somewhat agreed that assessors are well informed in relation to their roles and responsibilities in the conduct of assessments in their own centres.
- 90.5% agreed and 9.5% somewhat agreed that the internal verification process in their centre is reliable in confirming the accuracy of assessment results.

Sample of comments from staff highlighting the strengths of assessment processes:

Students are provided with feedback on completion of assessment, a thorough IV Process is carried out with all staff involved, staff roles and responsibilities are well communicated,

Rigorous IV process, in which all teachers are involved. A robust system exists within the centre where a good team ethos exists to ensure that the standard and implementation of assessment is enforced.

The QA checklists around IV are comprehensive and are consistently implemented

Strict observance of the rules in terms of Assessments, Feedback, Appeals and Internal Verification is a critical part of all our work.

Feedback is given by all teachers after each submitted project. Learners are briefed on grievance regarding a grade and appeals process.

Teachers and those involved in QA have received training in the area over the last number of years and this has encouraged a strong focus on QA in this area

Assessors and Learners are well informed, the IV is process robust. Induction documentation shows the assessment process.

- Some differences remain in documentation used in different provisions, which will be standardised in so far as is possible.
- Noting that bodies other than QQI certify a small number of MSLETB programmes, it is planned that the Board's evolving integrated QA Guidelines will incorporate the specific requirements of these bodies, as well as those of unaccredited provision. This will include a requirement that all results are presented at RAP meetings.
- The centralised role of the QA Unit in providing supports, briefing and management of the EA process and the central review of RAP meetings, ensures a consistent approach to the application of standards.
- The establishment of a central Assessment Appeals Office for the ETB in 2018 has led to a consistent approach to learner appeals.
- Reporting of certification and outcomes of RAP meetings to the FET Quality Council demonstrates governance oversight of the assessment results process
- Centres are given feedback from RAP meetings to facilitate the ongoing development and improvement of processes at the centre.

2.7.3 Conclusion

Strengths

- Significant integration of processes has been achieved in centralising the IV, EA, RAP and Assessment Appeals procedures under the management of the QA Unit.
- Streamlined approach is in place for the payment of EAs.
- Analysis and reporting procedures to meetings of the various QA governance groups are in place (including non-QQI certification).
- A review of the learner appeals process, during this self-evaluation period, has identified the need for standardisation in the appeals process from a learner perspective and a review of appeals fees and application processes.
- There is significant opportunity for MSLETB to establish a process for centre-level quality improvement based on recommendations emerging from RAP meetings.
- MSLETB is currently reviewing its assessment procedures based on best practice and the development work undertaken with other ETBs through ETBI. This will include updated QA procedures covering the following sections of the assessment process in its QA Manual:

Recommendations

- Further development is needed to fully integrate all learner results processes and this will be highlighted in the development of an integrated QA Manual.
- There is an opportunity to carry out briefings with EAs in similar subject areas in order to capture feedback at a programmatic level.
- A more streamlined approach is required to report on certification outcomes and associated data.
- There is opportunity to provide ongoing training and briefings for assessors.
- Assessment Deadlines
- Assessment Malpractice
- Compassionate Consideration
- Reasonable Accommodation
- Secure Storage
- Examination Regulations
- Appeals

2.8

Information and Data Management

2.8.1 Descriptions

Policy/Commitment Statement

MSLETB recognises the importance of quality data, as the source of reliable information, to facilitate decision making and planning. This data helps the Board realise its organisational goals and reporting obligations to certifying and regulatory bodies. The Board is committed to retaining secure and robust systems and processes, in line with prevailing statutory and legislative requirements.

The Board's ICT platform, that supports information management, is acknowledged as a mission critical corporate asset and, as such, an area of high risk for the organisation. Consequently, the ongoing monitoring, review, development and improvement of the Board's ICT infrastructure and systems are a key priority.

Management Information Systems

A range of management information systems are employed by MSLETB and its centres for data capture and information processing that support timely and effective decision making. Some are hosted centrally, others locally at centre level. All are securely accessed on a needs-only basis.

The Programme Learning Support System (PLSS)

The Programme Learner Support System (PLSS) is the principal centralised on-line system that supports MSLETB's FET provision. This system, hosted centrally by SOLAS, retains a comprehensive set of data on learners, FET programmes and service provision nationally. It is a key component of MSLETB's management information system and is used to store and process course information, learner records, performance and reports.

The PLSS provides a secure platform for the collection, processing and sharing of data through the following portals:

- National Programme Database (NPD) - repository of FET programmes being delivered nationally.
- National Course Calendar (NCC) – schedule of programmes. Data in the NCC is transferred to the Further Education Training Course Hub (FETCH) website (fetchcourses.ie). This allows the public to search, view and apply for courses online.
- Learner Database – Data from FETCH online applications is transferred into a Learner Database. Further data entered at ETB level for enrolled learners creates a secure learner record.
- An Assessment Management Information System is also in place to record apprentice achievement on new Apprenticeship Programmes.
- Funding Allocation Requests and Reporting System (FARR) – MSLETB's rollout of the PLSS enables centres to plan courses annually through FARR. Data from both the NCC and Learner Database is transferred to FARR.

The PLSS also provides real-time oversight of current and planned FET provision and enables a reduction or elimination of ad-hoc management information systems at centre level. Data captured on the PLSS is available for producing tailored reports that facilitate ongoing review of programmes and services to learners and the monitoring of a centre's KPIs; registration, retention rates, certification rates, etc. Since January 2018 all the Board's programmes are scheduled on the NCC.

In 2020, the position of FET Systems and Strategic Reporting Coordinator was created in MSLETB. This coordinator is the liaison person between MSLETB, ETBI, SOLAS and ESF for all PLSS issues and all non-financial reporting. The coordinator also provides support and training to staff on the PLSS, FARR and e-cohesion systems and completes all yearly non-financial reporting to ESF, SOLAS and Department of Education and Skills. Monthly learner reports are provided by the coordinator to FET Leaders. A comprehensive set of [standard operating procedures](#) for the operation of the PLSS have been developed.

Certification Data Systems

At centre level, the principal on-line systems supporting FET certification data are the QBS, The Walled Garden and the RCCRS.

The QQI Business System (QBS)

QQI certification accounts for approximately 90% of MSLETB's certified FET provision. Learner registration and certification with QQI is facilitated by providing each centre access to the QBS using Multi Factor Authentication (MFA). QBS functionality provides centres with a variety of reports on individual learner achievement and overall centre performance that supports data validation, quality assurance, monitoring, review, as well as continuous development and improvement of provision at a centre. Data from the PLSS can be uploaded directly to the QBS.

The Walled Garden

Registration, assessment and certification with City and Guilds is facilitated by providing each centre secure access to The Walled Garden. As with the QBS, functionality within the system provides centres with a variety of reports to support data validation, quality assurance, monitoring, review, as well as continuous development and improvement at a centre.

Results Capture and

Certification Request System

The RCCRS is a web-based system used in Training Centres to manage certification requests. The RCCRS certificate request functions are integrated with the QBS and the Apprenticeship Client Services Management System for apprenticeships. It is also used to capture results from other providers, e.g. City & Guilds.

Breach Risk Assessment and System Failures

MSLETB corporate networks has high-end, entry-level Fortinet Fortigate 100D firewalls at the network gateway. These units are configured in high availability mode with automatic failover. In addition to basic firewall functionality, this equipment additionally performs Unified Threat Management (UTM). Including deep-packet inspections of routed traffic and has reliable anti-virus and threat-prevention tools. The firmware on these Firewalls were updated in February 2021.

All desktops are Windows 10 and are patch managed by SCCM (System Centre Configuration Manager) and Intune. Virus guard is Microsoft Defender. In 2020 a complete upgrade of production servers within MSLETB was completed. With the migration from Windows Server 2012/2016 to the latest Server OS Windows Server 2019. These virtual servers are hosted on new physical Dell PowerEdge R740. Microsoft Data Protection Manager (DPM) has been utilized to provide an enterprise backup and recovery system solution. Backup of all servers are written to local storage and replicated to the Azure cloud which offers excellent recovery options.

Microsoft/Office 365 is available to staff and learners across the MSLETB network. Access to personal account information is restricted by secure personal account login. Shared information is determined by class or group structure. The MS 365 platform is a global market leader and is renowned for its reliability and resilience. In 2020 MSLETB enabled Multi-Factor Authentication on all staff member accounts increasing the level of security across the ICT structure.

GDPR - Responsibilities and Rights

MSLETB has a statutory obligation to protect the rights and freedoms of individuals with respect to the processing of their personal data. All information provided is treated lawfully in accordance with the Data Protection Acts, 1988, 2003 and 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulation 2016/679 and/or such amending legislation or other applicable data protection legislation as may be adopted in Ireland from time to time.

MSLETB has developed a range of GDPR related policies and procedures, published on www.msletb.ie.

All learners are advised of their GDPR rights as data subjects and of MSLETB's related responsibilities as a data controller, when they register for a programme at any of the Board's centres.

GDPR Support for Centres and Staff

MSLETB has established a Data Protection Unit that includes both a Data Protection Officer and a Data Protection Research Officer. Additional nominated staff are available to assist and provide guidance to centres as the need arises.

All MSLETB staff are required to complete online GDPR Training, hosted by ETBI. To date, 918 staff have received this training, with a record retained in the GDPR Training Register.

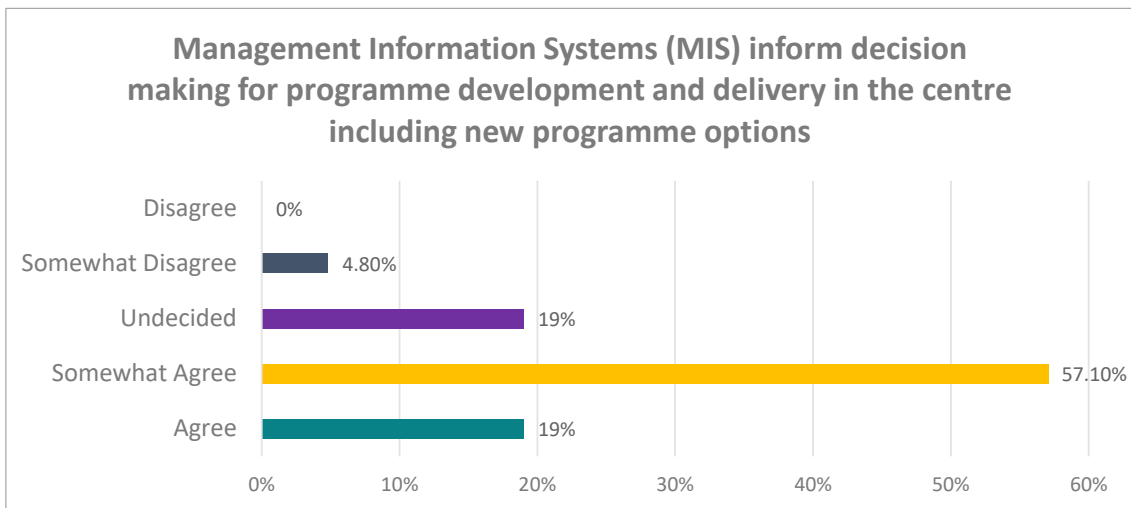
MSLETB has published a [GDPR Manual - A Practical Guide for Schools and Centres](#), which provides guidance for school staff and those working in FET centres in the region.

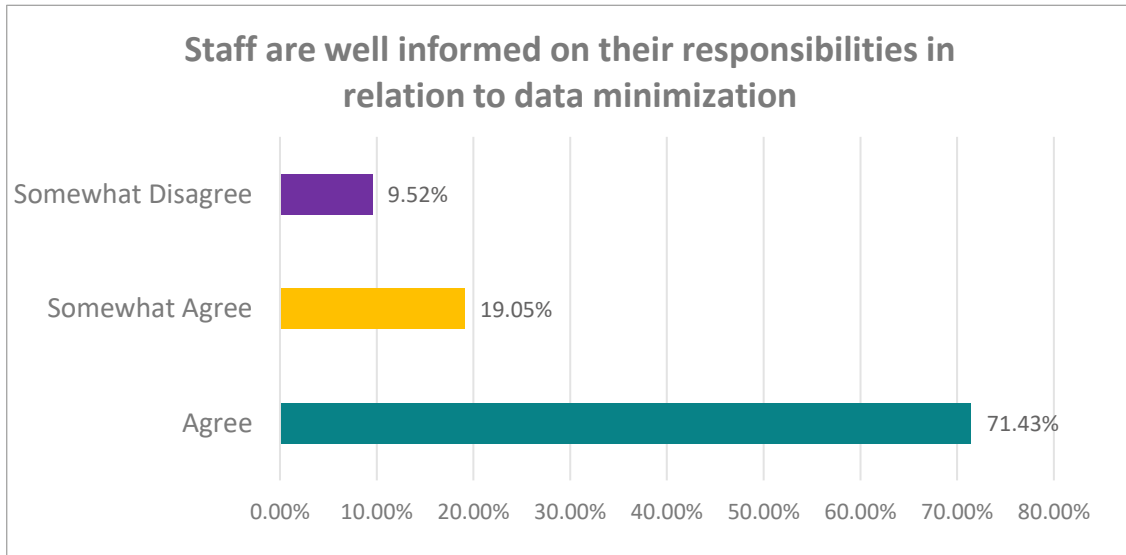
A dedicated section of the MSLETB website hosts the Board's suite of Data Protection documentation, available <http://mayosligoleitrim.etb.ie/about-us/data-protection/>. This section also provides ongoing updates and guidance, in relation to data protection and security of personal data, to all staff.

Client Relationship Management (CRM) [Project SEED](#) (Strategic Employer Engagement Development) is a project currently in development, led by MSLETB in collaboration with four partner ETBs, which will provide a new CRM system for use in the sector. This project is funded by SOLAS through the 'Innovation through collaboration' fund and aims to design a dedicated system to capture all employer data. The CRM will be used primarily as a database but will also have information on how MSLETB works with employers on an ongoing basis. The ability to report on business needs, the volumes and frequency of training required, along with upcoming trends provided by the system will be of significant benefit to the employer engagement brief of MSLETB.

2.8.2 Evaluation

- The effectiveness of the MSLETB management information systems and related infrastructures are constantly under review and subject to update, with the aim of optimising security and the experience of service users.
- The monitoring of compliance, process review and the development of MSLETB’s commitments and obligations relating to GDPR is ongoing, and is the primary responsibility of the Board’s Data Protection Unit. It ensures GDPR compliance is achieved through policy development and implementation, ongoing data protection awareness training, performing internal audits and checklists, and implementing appropriate technical and organisational measures to ensure the security of the personal data held by MSLETB.
- The Board is represented on the national PLSS advisory group. The update and enhancement of the PLSS and its various portals is a priority for SOLAS and significantly influenced by feedback from stakeholders nationally.
- 99.4% of staff surveyed are aware that they must use their MSLETB email address for work purposes.
- Staff awareness relating to GDPR responsibilities is high, with 98.4% of staff stating that they understand their professional obligations in relation to GDPR.
- Responses from Centre Focus Groups broadly indicate the merit of using MIS to inform decision making:





2.8.3 Conclusion

Strengths

- A new GDPR Training Tool is in development, to be rolled out across MSLETB by mid-2021. This bespoke tool, will be hosted on the Board’s Moodle VLE.
- The GDPR Manual developed internally by MSLETB continues as a reference and guide for all staff.
- MSLETB’s Data Protection Policy is currently undergoing a review process.
- Data Protection remains a priority and there are several projects underway to ensure MSLETB’s ongoing compliance with legislation.

- There is strong staff awareness of obligations in relation to several areas of GDPR.

Recommendations

- Continue to collaborate with ETBs and lead out the development of new CRM database.
- Ensure GDPR training is included in induction for all new staff.
- Continue the ongoing reporting and feedback to SOLAS in order to affect necessary updates and functionality of the PLSS.

2.9

Public Information and Communication

2.9.1 Description

MSLETB is mindful that institutional visibility and public awareness are fundamental to maintaining public trust and confidence in its FET provision and the resulting qualifications obtained by learners.

Consequently, the Board is committed to publishing and communicating accurate, objective, up-to-date and timely information on its structures, activities, FET programmes and services, its QA system and the findings of QA evaluations. In doing so, it ensures this information is easily accessible to all stakeholders; learners, prospective learners, staff, interested parties and the public at large.

The Board engages a variety of channels to communicate its public information message including social media, websites, newsletters, brochures and marketing material, open days, public events and school visits.

Public Profile

The MSLETB website is the principal platform through which the Board maintains its public profile and communicates its public information. The site provides a range of clear, up-to-date and accessible public information topics on the Board's activities under the FOI Publication Scheme. In addition, the website provides links to the website of each of the Board's centres where information is available on local FET opportunities across the three counties of Mayo, Sligo and Leitrim.

The MSLETB PR and Marketing Group

The MSLETB PR and Marketing Group supports a strategic approach to communications and marketing of the Board's FET provision. MSLETB utilises a number of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn to communicate with members of the public. The group manages the ETB's main social media accounts using a social media management platform that integrates the publishing of posts from accounts and monitors social media interactions, as well as providing analytics on interactions.

Recent successful marketing and PR outcomes achieved by the group include:

- Print, radio and online advertising campaigns around a new freephone number.
- Billboard advertising.
- Targeted media coverage of the new freephone number and the Board's website.
- ETB-wide newsletter.

Learner Specific Information

Many centres provide a course prospectus which is available for download from the local website. Hard copies are also available on request.

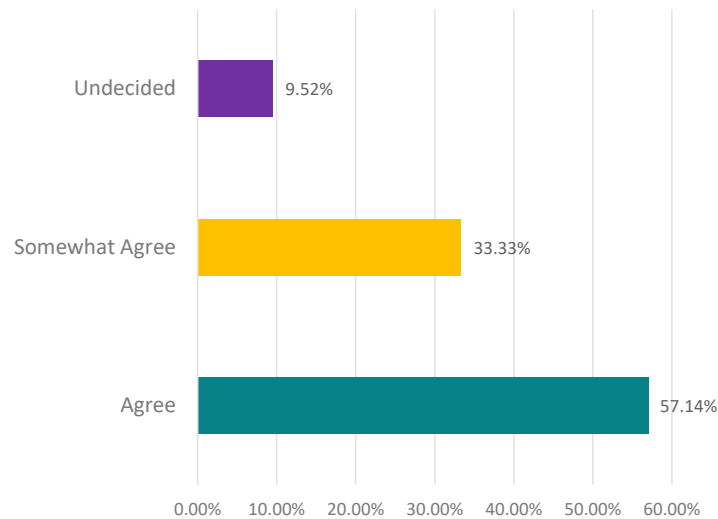
Each learner, on registering for a programme, receives a Learner Handbook, which details the terms and conditions, policies and procedures related to participation in their chosen programme. Learners are comprehensively briefed on the handbook's details during learner induction on programme commencement.

Information relating to all FET programmes offered by MSLETB is also available through the national FET Course Hub (FETCH).

2.9.2 Evaluation

- A number of channels of communication exist that inform staff, learners and the general public of MSLETB’s QA systems. These need to be continuously monitored for accurate and up-to-date content.
- 90% of staff are aware that information on the MSLETB Quality Assurance system, procedures and activities are publicly available and regularly updated, but noted SCORE as their primary source when looking for QA-related information and resources.

Information on the MSLETB Quality Assurance system, procedures and activities are publicly available and regularly updated

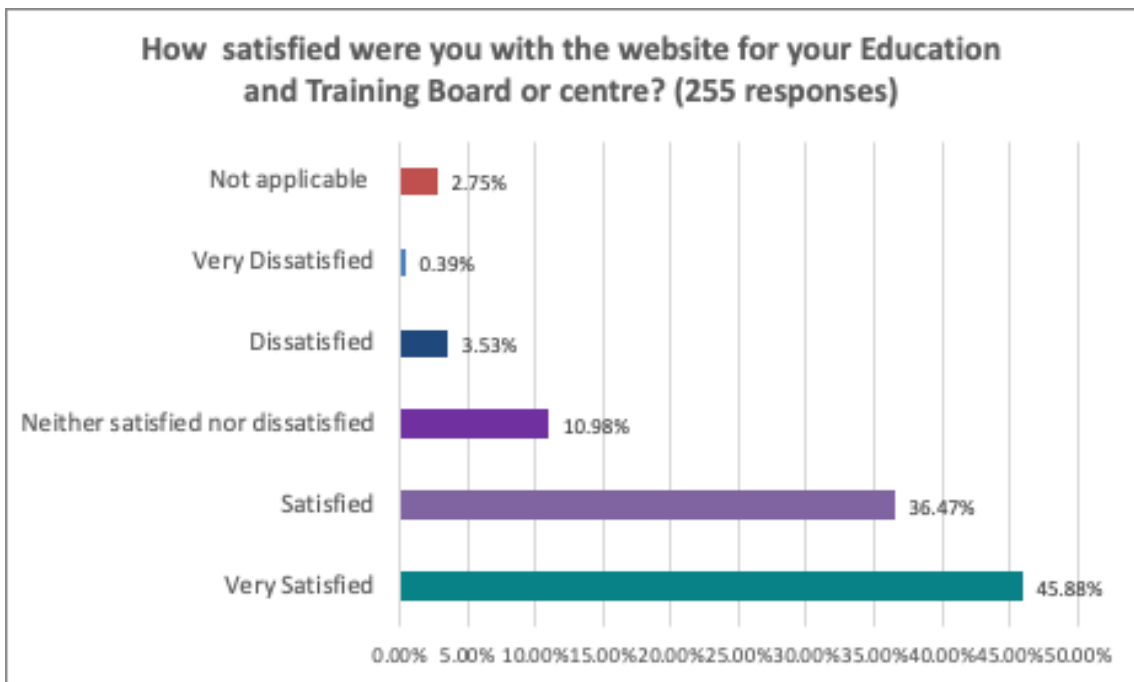


- MSLETB’s website was updated in 2020 and is now a more effective and user-friendly channel for communicating public information.
- A number of FET centres host and manage their own websites, each of which can be accessed through links on the MSLETB site.
- The PR and Marketing Group successfully manages and supports numerous corporate and centre-based events annually, with support from external agencies for an increasing number of large-scale projects.
- An ETB-wide newsletter has been developed. The aim of this newsletter is to enhance communication within MSLETB and give staff an up-to-date overview of developments throughout the organisation.

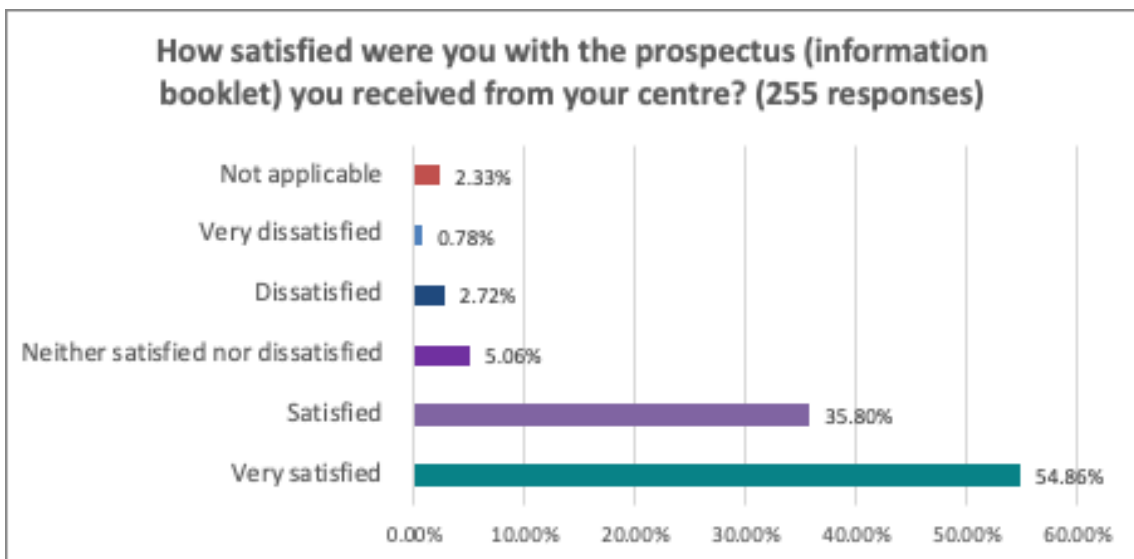
2.9.3 Conclusion

Strengths

- All information published on the ETB’s website is approved and reviewed by a small team including Corporate Services staff, to ensure details are accurate and up to date.
- Learner satisfaction with the MSLETB website (or centre website) is high.



- Learners surveyed expressed a high level of satisfaction with the information they received prior to the commencement of their course.



Recommendations

- As demands for the services of the PR and Marketing Group grows across the region due to the increasing number of largescale events, there is an emerging need to appoint a Communications Officer for the ETB, to provide a more streamlined, focused, professional and coordinated approach to all future public relations and marketing events.
- There is need to complete a comprehensive review of all linked websites to consider their viability and possible redesign to provide a consistent 'look and feel', user interface and transition from the ETB site.
- There is a need for the development of a 'house style' for all MSLETB communications. There is also a need for naming conventions to be established in order to present a uniform and consistent approach when conveying information relating to the ETB.
- Media training should be provided for persons likely to be in a position of representing the organisation through any media outlet. In addition, it is recommended that MSLETB appoint dedicated spokespersons to represent the organisation.





Chapter 3

Objective 2 - Teaching, Learning and Assessment

3.1

The Learning Environment

3.1.1 Description

MSLETB is committed to:

Develop and maintain our facilities to promote a positive and attractive learning and working environment.

(Goal 5- Strategy)

FET provision across the MSLETB region is broadly categorised as full-time or part-time. A full overview of the range of this provision is provided in Chapter 1, see [Provider Profile](#). The learning environment in all of the Board's centres is subject to ongoing review, development and improvement to ensure the optimum environment for programme participants.

Physical Learning Environment

Since the publication of [MSLETB's Executive Self-Evaluation Report \(ESER\)](#) in 2018, the Board's focus on improving its building infrastructure, across the three counties continues at pace. New buildings have come on stream and existing centres have seen significant re-development and/or refurbishment.

Recent capital and building upgrade projects include:



• Swinford

Located in the town, Swinford FET Centre, includes a central meeting hub, open plan offices, conference centre, extended carparking and hosts a VTOS Programme and Part-time options.



• Sligo

MSLETB was successful in securing a capital grant for a state-of-the-art Catering Kitchen to support the Commis Chief Apprenticeship and the Hospitality Traineeship.



• Ballinrobe & Kiltimagh

In line with Disability Access regulations, MSLETB applied for and received, a Capital Grant to develop New Lifts in Ballinrobe and Kiltimagh FET centres. These house Youthreach, VTOS and various Part-time and evening course options.



• Carrick-on-Shannon

MSLETB consolidated all FE activity at a state of the art facility at the Market Yard, Carrick on Shannon. All Adult Learning, BTEI, Community Education and training courses and Leitrim Guidance Service are located here.

MSLETB is committed to the ongoing development and improvement of its entire building infrastructure facilitated by the Board's AEO with responsibility for buildings and a list of current projects can be located in [Appendix 5](#).

Digital Learning Environment

Integrating ICT in the teaching and learning process (Goal 2 - Strategy) is key to MSLETB realising its TEL objectives.

MSLETB is committed to using technology to enhance teaching and learning and actively embed digital technology within programmes to offer more engaging and flexible learning opportunities for learners. A key goal is to enable learners to become skilled and confident in using technology as part of their work, study and home life.

MSLETB has established and supports a number of core platforms, including Office 365 Education, Moodle and Microsoft Teams, and harness the benefits of these mainstream tools to create innovative assessment practices, provide feedback to learners and share learning materials. The Office 365 suite offers learners a wealth of accessibility features giving further control over their learning experience. Microsoft Teams breakout rooms are a key feature in online classes. In addition to this, video sharing tools such as Flipgrid and Padlet are used and online quizzing tools such as Kahoot help to offer an engaging learning experience.

The Board has directed significant investment to facilitate the integration of ICT in its FET programmes. Each teacher/tutor/instructor has been issued with a device (laptop, tablet) and significant PD supports have been put in place. Developments in this area continue, driven by the manager with strategic responsibility for TEL, resulting in the recent appointment of a TEL Coordinator.

TEL remains an ongoing priority for MSLETB, in particular, the development of blended learning methodologies, the availability of equipment across all programmes and the support of staff and learners. Due to fortuitous investment in 2018, 2019 and 2020, MSLETB was able to immediately implement wide scale emergency remote learning, building on existing work and accelerating the goal of including TEL within all facets of FET delivery.

The necessary wide scale adoption of the new approaches points to many positives which suit a more andragogical approach to delivery including, offering a framework applicable to teaching that allows FET to appeal to learners' different life experiences; personalise the students' educational experience; and tailor education to different types of adult learners. However, the rapid transition from face-to-face learning and work-based training to online learning is far from ideal for many FET learners. The aim is to return to on-site based blended learning whenever feasible.

Case Study - TEL During Covid-19

At MSLETB we are committed to using technology to enhance teaching and learning. We actively embed digital technology within our programmes to offer more engaging and flexible learning opportunities for learners. Our key goal is to produce learners who are skilled and confident in using technology as part of their work, study and home life. We have established and supported a number of core platforms, including Office 365 Education, Moodle and Microsoft Teams.

In 2020, we had further planned to roll out approaches for the adoption of these core platforms however, due to the Covid-19 global pandemic, our plans were expedited. We were faced with two key questions around upskilling a large number of teachers and tutors, firstly, how do we upskill our teachers and tutors to use our core platforms to provide emergency remote learning, and, secondly, how do we upskill our teachers and tutors to use a range of digital tools to create educational resources.

Key stakeholders, TEL and PD, collaborated to roll out a variety of digital skills courses inhouse, many of them 20 hours in duration. MSLETB enlisted the help of our strategic partners, Tara 365, Ennovation, inhouse experts, as well as external experts in the field of pedagogy, online learning and assessments to roll out a variety of digital skills courses. Between March and December of 2020 over 450 teachers, instructors and tutors took part in digital upskilling.

MSLETB also made available one-to-one and small group coaching sessions on Microsoft Teams and Office 365 products to teachers, tutors, instructors and staff. In addition to this, weekly online drop-in sessions ran. The drop-in sessions had an open-door policy and all staff were welcome to attend. In these session staff could discuss or ask questions regarding any of the Office 365 products. They found this particularly helpful for the rollout of emergency remote learning.

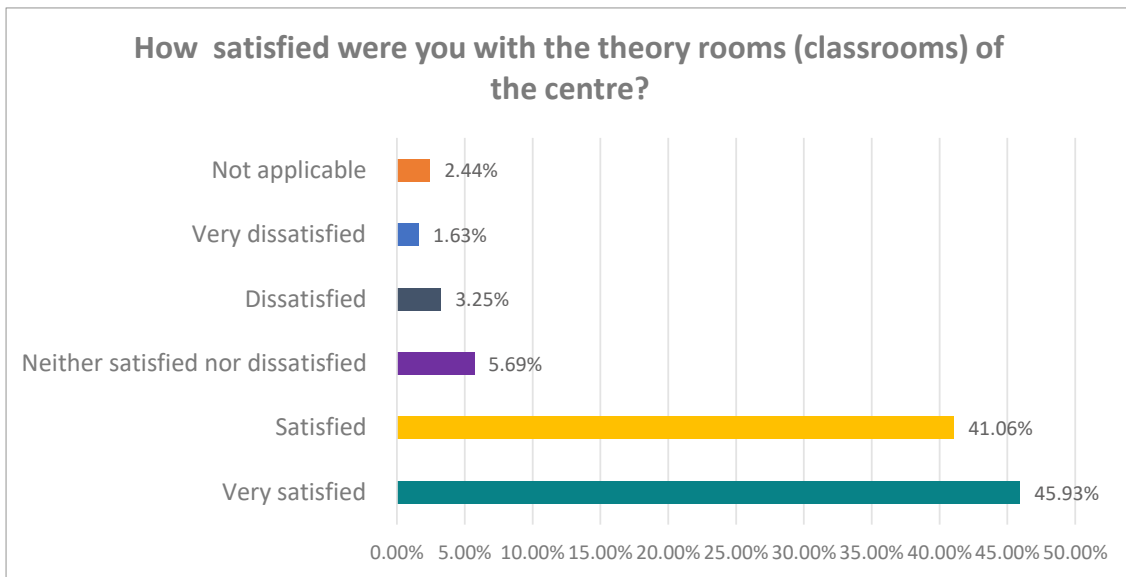
Other initiatives included:

- Establishment of the TEL Advisory Group (provide TEL direction)
- Creation of a TEL strategy (up for review by the TEL Advisory Group)
- Review of TEL policies and resource documents
- TEL Masterclasses (Microsoft Teams, Digital portfolios, Assessment and Feedback)
- TEL PD Monthly Webinar Series
- Internal TEL site for sharing TEL resources
- Moodle training (in particular, Moodle and Office 365)
- Dedicated TEL Support email for teacher/tutors
- Various device schemes to allow the learner to access devices

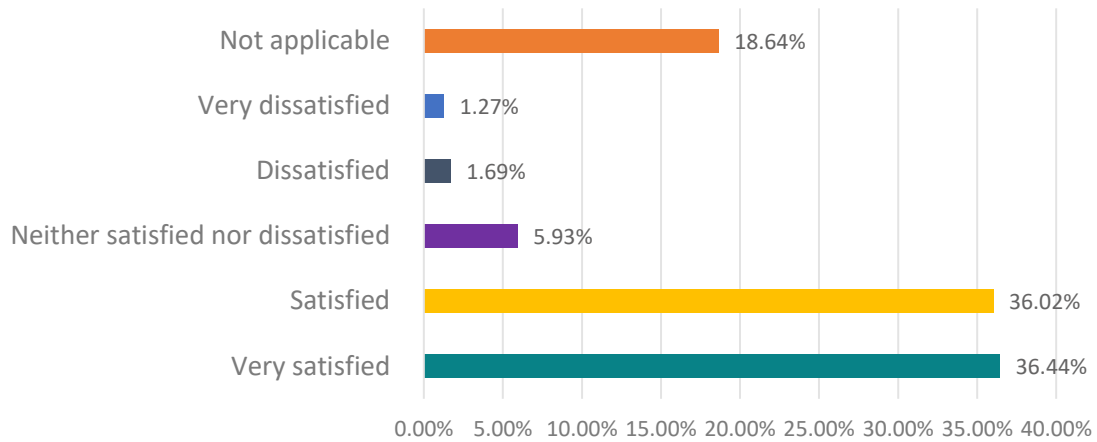
Case Study

3.1.2 Evaluation

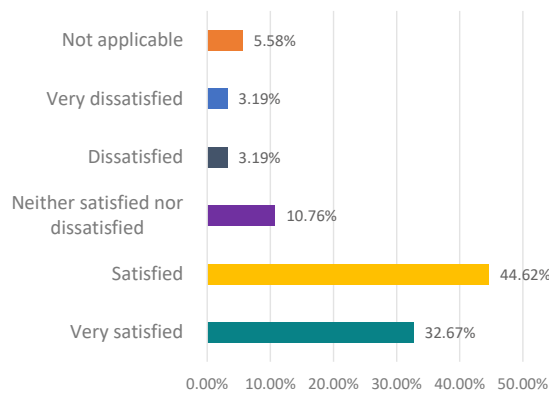
- MSLETB is continually upgrading its facilities. During the Centre Focus Groups, all participants agreed that the learning environment in MSLETB ensures the optimum learning experience for all learners (76.2% agreed, 23.8% somewhat agree).
- The strategic approach taken by MSLETB to invest significantly in TEL over the past number of years enabled the Board to act in a timely and effective manner to the modified teaching, learning and assessment requirements necessitated by the Covid-19 crisis. This was reflected in feedback from a range of stakeholders and documented in the report [Reflections on Covid-19 Modifications to Teaching, Learning and Assessment](#).
- Experience gained during Covid-19 in online teaching, learning and assessment has heightened the need to develop a blended learning framework and associated policy in order to develop, manage and monitor quality-assured blended delivery in the future.
- Recent learner consultation shows a high level of satisfaction with the facilities and services provided by MSLETB:



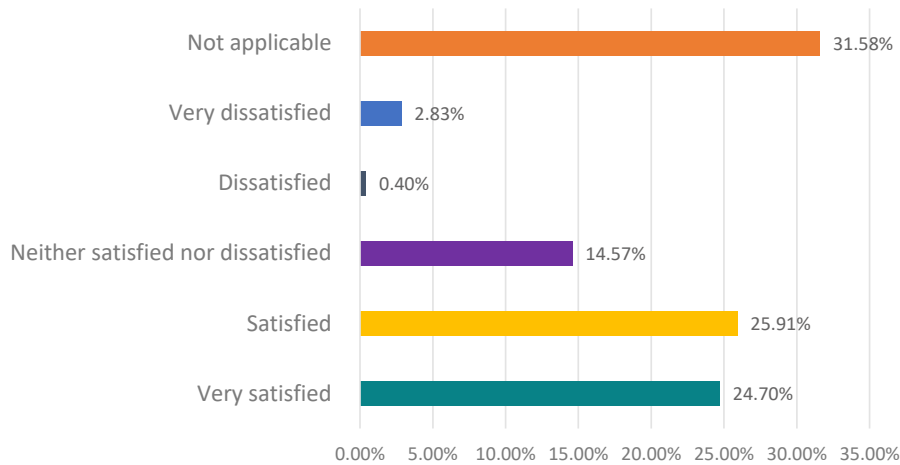
How satisfied were you with the computer rooms in your centre?



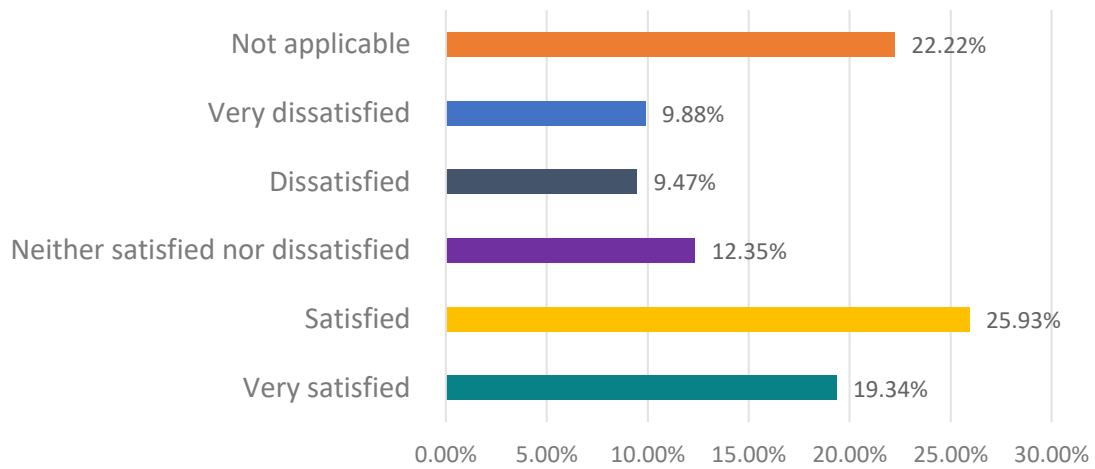
How satisfied were you with the communal areas (shared spaces such as corridors, reception, etc) in your centre?



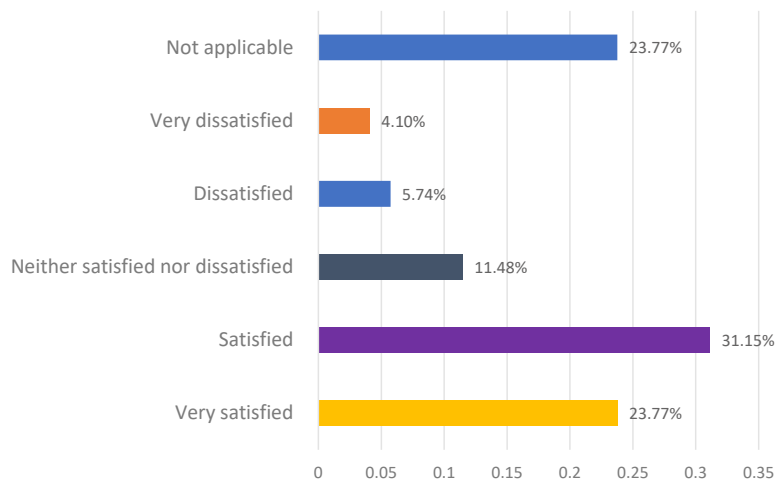
How satisfied were you with the disability services in your centre?



How satisfied were you with the car parking facilities at your centre?



How satisfied were you with the canteen or food or drink facilities at your centre?



- MSLETB intends to continue the implementation of building development programmes which will see the integration of facilities and provisions. In order to provide the highest quality education and training, significant investment is required by MSLETB to upgrade current FET facilities across the three counties. Many centres are in critical need of substantive upgrade. In addition, to deliver on the new FET Strategy and

particularly the 'FET College of the Future', MSLETB needs to develop at least two new campuses and upgrade existing campuses in Mayo and Sligo. Training Centre provision will continue to require upgrade and development to keep pace with growth in the highly skilled jobs required for automated factory facilities in sectors such as pharma and manufacturing. MSLETB must also respond to government climate and sustainability initiatives.

3.1.3 Conclusion

Strengths

- Investment in TEL in recent years resulted in the ETB being able to respond quickly and effectively to online teaching, learning and assessment necessitated by the Covid-19 crisis.
- High level of satisfaction from learners and staff in relation to centre facilities is evidenced by survey results.

Recommendations

- Continued investment in TEL infrastructure to provide optimum teaching and learning environment for learners.
- Post-pandemic, MSLETB must examine, in detail, the learning gained from experiences in online delivery in order to identify the elements of blended methodologies that can be adopted for future use.
- Cognisance must be taken of the fact that many FET courses have a highly vocational element to them and require face-to-face engagement. The need for a holistic approach to the learner experience also requires that face-to-face contact with learners is protected. In a learner survey around Covid-19, over 25% of respondents to the question 'What did you miss most about face-to-face classes?', said that they missed their friends and social interactions.
- MSLETB must align its current building programme to the national objective set out in the FET strategy for 'FET Colleges of the Future'.

3.2

Assessment of Learners

3.2.1 Description

Quality Assuring the Assessment Process

MSLETB is committed to the fair and consistent assessment of learners in line with the four existing legacy QA agreements, post-amalgamation. Robust assessment procedures are in place in all FET centres. Protocols are in place to ensure the integrity of:

- The assessment process in line with award standards
- The preparation and distribution of assessment instruments
- The provision of assessment related information to learners
- The conduct of assessment
- The consistency of assessment
- Assessment appeals
- Record keeping

Planning of Assessment

Centres are notified annually of key certification dates as issued by QQI. In order to ensure that there are no conflicting assessments scheduled, centres determine a schedule of assessments based on individual teacher/tutor/instructor's assessment plans.

Information to Learners

An overview of assessment regulations is communicated to learners at induction and are also set out in a centre's learner handbook. These regulations are reinforced on a continuous basis throughout programme delivery.

Guidelines in relation to individual assessment tasks are outlined in an assessment brief and distributed to learners prior to an assessment task. This sets out the criteria that must be followed, marking schemes, deadlines and other information relevant to the assessment.

A sample of learner handbooks can be seen [here](#) and [here](#).

Devising Assessment

Assessments are devised based on information contained in Module Descriptors (administered locally in FET Centres) and Assessment Instrument Specifications (Training Centres). Learning outcomes, as specified in published QQI component specifications, are mapped to specific assessment techniques. Learners are marked on their achievement of the learning outcomes and against sets of specific criteria.

FET centres use a system of locally devised assessment with teachers/tutors responsible for devising assessment instruments and associated marking schemes/rubrics. Training Centres use standardised Assessment Instrument Specifications (AIS) that include guidelines, marking schemes and other supporting documentation. These AISs are hosted and maintained at ETB level.

Conduct of Assessment

The process by which an assessment is conducted is dependent on the assessment type:

- **Assignment** – learners must adhere to submission dates as outlined on the assessment brief.
- **Skills Demonstrations** – learners must present for a skills demonstration at the allotted time and must follow specified requirements related to the safe execution of the skill, as applies.
- **Examinations** – exams are planned, conducted and concluded following established schedules and procedures.

Procedures are in place in centres to deal with incidents of suspected malpractice. Examples include:

- Plagiarism
- Impersonation of another learner
- Fabrication of evidence

Reasonable Accommodations

In the context of assessment, reasonable accommodation is the term for the adaptation of assessment as necessary to cater for the needs of learners whose personal situation means that assessment would otherwise be unfair e.g., a learner with a disability.

Adaptation to assessments may include the following:

- Modified assignment briefs/examination papers
- Scribes/readers
- Use of sign language interpreters
- Practical assistants
- Rest periods
- Adaptive equipment/software
- Use of assistive technology
- Extra time

If a learner requires special accommodation for assessment, they are requested to inform their FET centre as soon as possible and submit a written application. The needs of the learner are catered for as far as is practicable, without compromising the award standard.

Extenuating Circumstances

In the event of a learner requiring an extension to an assessment deadline or the deferral of a skills demonstration or examination, they may apply, under extenuating circumstances, to their FET centre outlining the reasons for the request.

Feedback

Feedback to learners is crucial in informing subsequent learning and improvement. Both formative and summative feedback is given to learners throughout the duration of their programme. In MSLETB, the issuing of summative feedback is a formal process, documented by both the assessor and the learner. This process is confirmed during the IV and EA stages.

Secure Storage

Upon completion of each assessment event, assessment materials are securely stored in the centre awaiting the IV and EA processes and thereafter until the appeals process is completed. Subsequent to the appeals process and the return of any requested materials, all assessment evidence is securely disposed of via a document destruction service.

Appeals

Learners have the right to appeal their assessment result should they be dissatisfied with either their result of the process of assessment. All learner appeals are managed centrally by the QA Unit. Information on the learner assessment appeals process is available on the MSLETB website.

Contingency arrangements during Covid-19

Change of Assessment Technique

This procedure describes the protocol for the change of assessment technique from theory examination or skills demonstration, as described in a validated programme, to an alternative assessment technique. This procedure was invoked by MSLETB centres where a module's theory examination or skills demonstration was not undertaken by learners prior to closure due to the COVID-19 crisis. This procedure was designed based on [guidance from QQI](#) and followed five principles that underpin alternative assessment:

1. **Learning Outcomes-based approaches** – the alternative assessment makes an evidence-based determination on whether the expected learning outcomes have been achieved.
2. **Integrity of assessment** - all alternative arrangements should be documented clearly including the plan and the approach as to how learner identity is verified.
3. **Proportionality** – priority and focus is given to award stage assessments.
4. **Support for staff and students** – time schedules need to encompass preparation, knowledge, training, practical requirements and practice in new assessment modes.
5. **Confidence and Transparency** – Alternative assessment methods are realistic and reliable; plans are communicated to learners and other stakeholders in a timely manner; digital recordings are used to verify and evaluate the assessment processes.

MSLETB IV & EA Contingency Planning Procedure

Following Supplementary Guidance on the Authentication Process published by QQI, ETBs had a number of options to implement a scaled back authentication process in 2020.

- The QA Unit provided centres the choice of continuing with the existing sampling strategy or following a less demanding approach, to reduce the burden of IV and EA on centres, for the June and July certification periods.
- An amended EA Guidelines and Procedures document was developed by the QA Working Group and approved by the FET Quality Council in response to the Covid-19 emergency. This assisted centres as they worked through a refined EA process. The document also contained guidelines and resources for external authenticators including updated report templates, claim forms and information on the FESS Advising EA service.
- Work Experience and Work Placement also required contingency planning. A number of learners did not have the opportunity to complete their work experience and placement before lockdown. The QA Unit also provided direction, in line with QQI guidelines, to facilitate learners achieve these modules.

part of their programme of learning. The Board makes every effort to ensure that the work-based learning environment of the learner is appropriate, safe and productive. Learners going on work placement will generally be overseen by a named person within each programme. This named person is responsible for all communications with workplace supervisors and the completion of the supervisor’s report.

In 2018, QQI work experience modules at all levels were reviewed and standardised following a national shared curriculum development project. This resulted in the development of a set of standard documentation, including a report template, marking rubric and associated guidance for workplace supervisors.

Employers engaged in apprenticeship training are approved by Senior Training Advisors to carry out on-the-job training and assessment, to ensure that these employers meet the minimum requirements to train apprentices. A similar approach to workplace assessment is seen in the traineeship model where learners must complete tasks which are assigned and approved by their workplace supervisor.

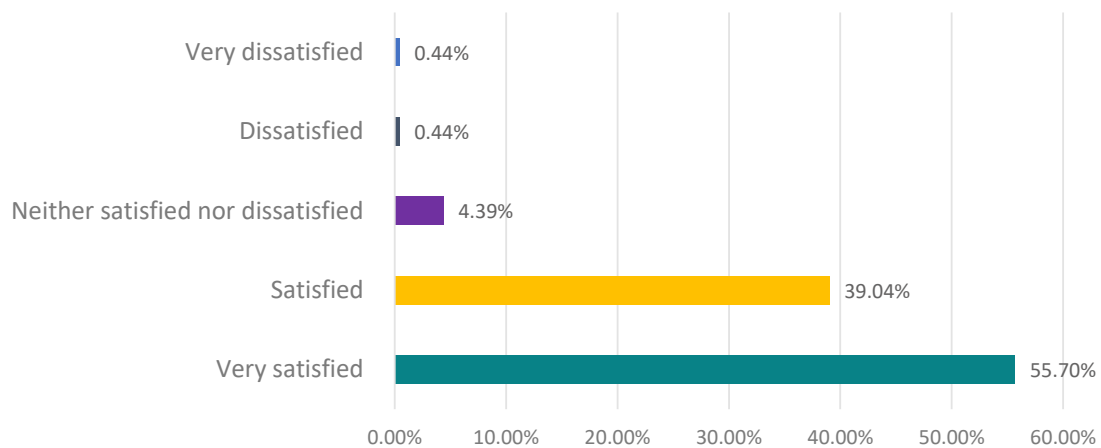
Work Placements

MSLETB is committed to the safeguarding of learners who undertake work placements as

3.2.2 Evaluation

- There are high levels of satisfaction in relation to assessments with over 95% of learners being satisfied or very satisfied with their experience.

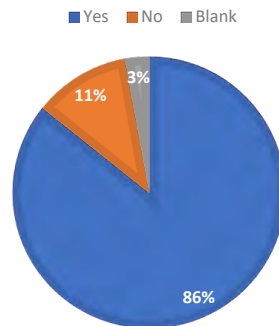
How satisfied were you with the fair and consistent assessment?



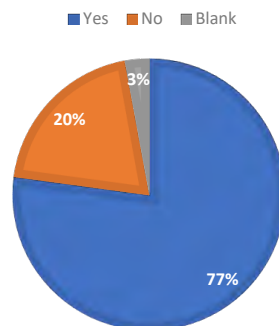
Additional feedback included:

- Level 4 learners were happy overall with their assessments. They suggested the use of more diverse methods of assessment.
- Level 5 learners were satisfied with the diverse assessment methods available to them and asked that this continue. Learners also asked for increased support with online forms of assessment.
- Learners are well informed of their assessment responsibilities as evidenced by feedback from an AONTAS Learner Forum event (2018). When asked, 'At the start of your course, did you receive the following information?'

THE TYPES OF ASSESSMENT (E.G. PORTFOLIO, TEST, ESSAY)



THE NUMBER OF ASSESSMENTS DURING THE COURSE



- Learners believed that course assignments were well explained and meaningful. They appreciated the balance between practical and theoretical learning.
- Learners did, however, request that more consideration be given to the distribution of assessment loads across the duration of the course.
- The quality assurance processes around assessment are rigorously applied as evidenced by feedback from EA reports. Below is a selection of EA comments from the certification periods June and December 2019.

Assessment Design		
Well-constructed briefs and marking schemes for module at QQI Level 4 national standard.	The range of assessments utilised addressed the learning outcomes.	Good practice of integrating the assignments with others
Very well devised skills demonstrations and exam	Practical assessment very good and fair assessment to all learners	High degrees of accuracy are needed in this component and the assessment material has been well designed to let learners demonstrate this.
Activities planned were detailed and great exploration of personal learning and reflection on the activities provided	The project /assignment briefs were very clearly designed with good guideline for the learner to follow and marking scheme was also well structured and easy to follow.	Assessment techniques and instruments were appropriate and consistent with the award requirements.
Instructions to Learners		
Students were clear on what was required	Briefs and guidelines were clear and concise. Learners who fulfilled the criteria were able to achieve good grades.	Clear range of briefs demonstrating to learners what is required.
Assignment briefs were clear, dated, in line with learning outcomes	Briefs to learners were clear and included all dates, times and requirements.	Clear guidelines in brief.
Briefs were clear and focused on scenarios relevant to the workplace which resulted in learners presenting good work which meets national standards at this level.	Briefs specific and clear and easy to follow for candidates.	Tutor has devised clear and specific briefs for candidates and evidence produced in line with brief requests.
Evidence Presented		
All evidence was available and marked according to the marking criteria. Very well laid out and clearly marked with good clear briefs and marking guidelines.	Photographic, video and similar evidence presented by candidates added to the transparency of assessment evidence for the 'practical work' carried out.	Overall very professional presentation of work and extensive marking sheets etc, very commendable.
There were some good detailed finished pieces showing progression of the drawing skills of the learners.	Great skill was evident in many the pieces of work on display.	The learners' evidence is carefully compiled and well presented.
Marking		
Great work in the extended marking scheme in providing clarity and accountability for marks.	Theory exam was well marked with marks awarded shown beside each question.	Detailed and transparent marking.
Marking consistent across grades and class groups with obvious differences in work between the grades.	There are 4 teachers involved in teaching and assessing different groups and their standards of marking are consistent.	Very thorough assessment material and marking scheme gives good transparency of marking and potential for learner achievement in all learning outcomes through the building of a portfolio of work.
Good feedback and evidence of correction on scripts which is good practice	Consistent marking across groups and tutors	Excellent break down of marks in marking scheme.
Marking schemes detailed and well laid out to coincide with module descriptor marking scheme.	Allocation of marks was broken down in detail for each section of each area. This gave accountable and transparent marking.	A detailed marking scheme was available which clearly showed where marks were allocated.
Feedback to Learners		
Excellent support and encouraging feedback reports to learners with thorough grading of material with comments on performance provided.	Excellent feedback at each step of the process with indicated grade standards provided to learners and signed by learners.	There was excellent feedback and evidence of correction on scripts.
Excellent evidence of feedback and very detailed marking of learners work evident	Great encouragement and positive feedback noted in video interviews with students by assessors, in general very professional and high standard of questioning etc.	Feedback to learners very constructive and was communicated in an encouraging manner. It included areas that are good and areas in need of improvement and affirming comments.
Grading		
Clear distinction of quality of work between grades.	Significant range of evidence and clear differentiation between grades	8 teachers involved in teaching and assessing and consistency of grading achieved through course booklets being used by all students.
The grades given reflect accurately the candidates' achievements.	Results are consistent with national standards.	Marking was appropriate and good spread of grades.

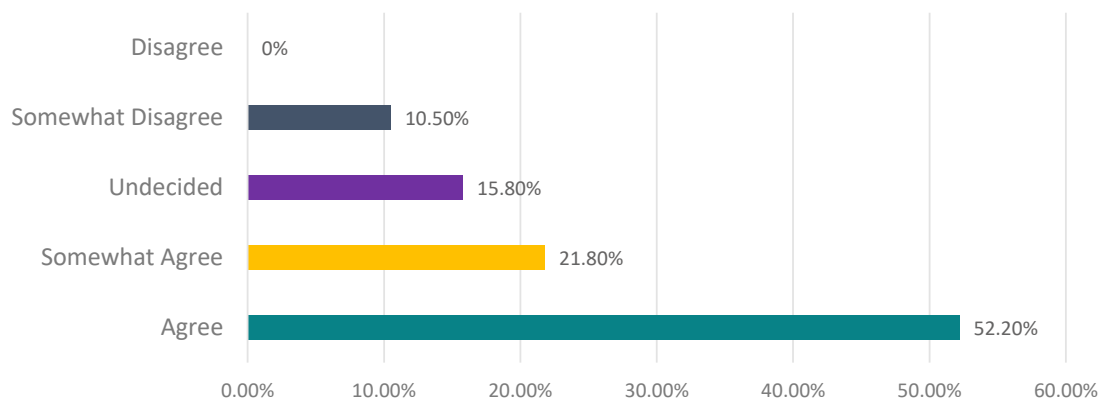
- Learner assessment appeal applications from the same certification periods were low indicating an overall satisfaction with the assessment process by learners:

June 2019 – Ten learner appeals (approximately 0.08% of all learner modules) were processed with only 3 applications resulting in an upgrade for learners.

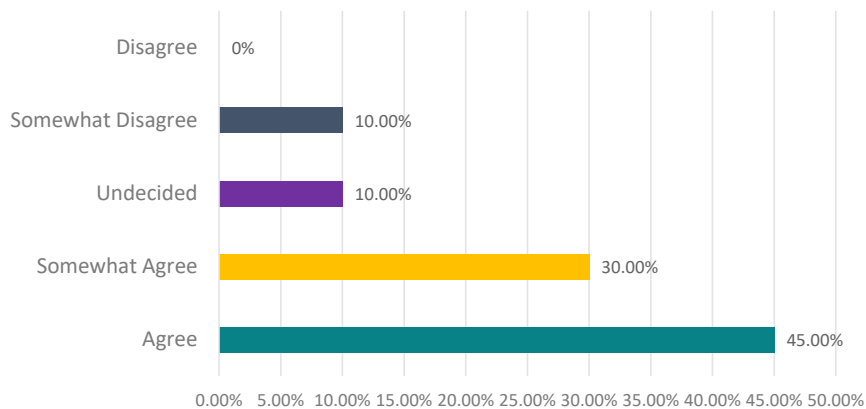
December 2019 – One learner appeal (approximately 0.09% of all learner modules) was processed and this application was not successful.

- Feedback from centre staff was largely positive in relation to work placements and the role of workplace supervisors.

All learners’ work experience/placement is quality assured



The briefing for supervisors in the workplace on their assessment role is comprehensive and well understood



3.2.3 Conclusion

Strengths

- There are high levels of satisfaction among learners with regard to the assessment process in MSLETB.
- Comments from EA reports reflect the level of rigour and good practice achieved in relation to assessments.

Recommendations

- MSLETB must continue to review its approach to the fair and consistent assessment of learners and implement a set of harmonised and integrated procedures as part of its new QA Manual to ensure consistency of approach across all provision.

- There is an opportunity for the QA Working Group to collaborate with the new Learner Support Unit in communicating information around assessment procedures to learners.
- MSLETB recognises the opportunity to reflect on its current approach to the quality assurance of work placement, to ensure consistency of approach across all services, with a focus on providing clear instructions to workplace supervisors in their role as assessors.
- In its ongoing engagement with employers, MSLETB aims to support workplace supervisors with comprehensive guidelines and briefing sessions.

3.3

Supports for Learners

3.3.1 Description

MSLETB is committed to providing:

Effective student support systems and policies that will enable learners develop skills to further their independent learning.

(Strategic Statement – Goal 1 and Goal 2)

In line with its statutory obligation, MSLETB makes every reasonable effort to support learners before admission and on programme commencement at one of its FET centres. All centres encourage learners, on application, to disclose any additional needs or disabilities they may have, so that appropriate supports or reasonable accommodations may be put in place. When a disclosure is made, a staff member meets the learner to discuss the nature of the support required and to request funding from the appropriate source.

All FET learners are advised that a designated person, such as the course coordinator, guidance counsellor, course tutor or other named person will be the point of contact for any programme related concerns that may arise.

Learner supports are actively promoted by all centres, to ensure learners are fully aware that they exist and how they can be accessed. A number of longstanding supports are available to all FET learners including:

- Reasonable Accommodations
- Literacy and Numeracy Support
- Adult Educational Guidance Service

In 2019, two additional Adult Guidance Counsellors were appointed to cover the areas of Mayo North and Mayo East & South. There are now six Adult Guidance Counsellors and three Information Officers across the three counties of Mayo, Sligo and Leitrim.

Active Inclusion

The MSLETB Strategic Performance Agreement 2018 – 2020 highlights active inclusion as a key priority. During this period, the ETB increased its commitment in this area through a number of specific actions:

- Integrating of literacy and numeracy into all FET programmes, thereby ensuring that relevant literacy and numeracy skills are developed as part of the subject specific learning
- Providing ESOL courses to migrants, and ongoing guidance, in order raise awareness of other services to support progression to FET programmes
- Commencing an integrated approach to initial screening and assessment of all adult literacy learners prior to starting a programme
- Introducing new programmes, through MSLETB's specialist training provision, for people with disabilities

Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

MSLETB is committed to promoting inclusive teaching, learning and assessment practices to support the learning needs and preferences of learners. Towards achieving this commitment in 2019 and 2020, the Board supported a PD initiative that introduced staff to the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework. On completion, staff received an Access and Lifelong Learning Digital Badge for UDL. This PD event was facilitated by UCD and AHEAD.

The Learner Voice

Towards ensuring learner supports remain adequate and relevant, MSLETB has engaged the support of AONTAS to capture the learner voice through its National Learner Forum events. Three events have taken place since 2018; an event in Sligo in 2018, an event in Mayo in 2019 and a virtual learner forum in 2020, attended by learners from all three counties.

- **2018** – Learners that attended this event reported being very happy with their course of study, ETB staff. Learners collectively stated that FET centres supported their learning and guidance services also received significant praise. One of the recommendations from this event was that learners would like more access to guidance services/career counselling. Since 2018, MSLETB has been building capacity in this regard.
- **2019** – Learners reported being happy overall with their experience and they believed that their courses were meeting their needs and felt supported by MSLETB staff. When asked how learners found out about the courses, many said they found out through a range of advertising methods. Some learners felt that obtaining information about certain courses was challenging and that accessing the correct point of contact could be complicated. Since 2019, MSLETB has launched a freephone number which has been heavily advertised and is manned by trained staff members who can direct callers to the appropriate service.
- **2020** – A virtual learner forum was held and a follow-up survey was designed in collaboration with MSLETB. The results of this survey are dispersed throughout this report.

Centre Based Learning Supports

The management of learner supports resides at local centre level. Comprehensive information is provided to learners at induction on the range of supports available and how to access them. The range of supports available may vary from centre to centre, depending on available resources and facilities.

The following are typical of the learner supports available at centres:

MS Office and Academic Support

Every MSLETB learner is provided access to an MS Office 365 account. This includes an ETB email address and access to a number of applications that will assist with their programme of study. Any learners encountering difficulties with the operation of these resources can access support through a dedicated ICT support person. Academic resources available to learners include:

- Referencing Handbook.
- Academic Writing Handbook.
- Study Skills Handbook for Apprentices.
- Study and Learning Handbook for FET.

In addition to resources supplied by class teachers/tutors/instructors (e.g. class notes, handouts, extra reading, etc), many centres keep a bank of textbooks relating to modules which are available to learners on a loan scheme. FET Centres have access to the ETBI-developed [digital library](#) that will provide access to digital resources to support teaching and learning practices and will enhance the educational experience for learners.

Learning Support

PLC centres have access to funding under the HEA Fund for Students with Disability (FSD) in order to provide supports for learners to enable them to access, fully participate in and successfully complete their chosen course of study. Examples of supports that may be provided under the FSD include:

- Personal Assistants
- Assistive Technologies
- Laptops
- Readers/Scribes
- Tutorials

All other centres requiring resources to support learners can apply through their line manager for funding or in some instances will acquire resources from their centre budget.

Laptop Loan Scheme

As part of the response to Covid-19, MSLETB proactively introduced a Learner Laptop Loan Scheme. This initiative was designed specifically to support the continuation of teaching and learning for MSLETB learners who required an ICT device. The distribution of devices was managed locally at centre level. It is estimated that in excess of 600 devices are being used by learners through this scheme. In addition, 230 devices have been distributed to learners through a special initiative to support learners who meet the eligibility criteria through a fund which enabled disadvantaged learners to access ICT devices..

In late 2020, MSLETB administered the Mitigating Against Educational Disadvantage Fund. This consisted of an open call for funding aimed primarily at local Community Education Providers/Groups. The purpose of the fund was to address educational disadvantage which may be experienced by adult learners and has a particular focus on supporting the engagement and reengagement of adult learners in the community. Specifically, the aim of the fund was to reduce barriers to participation in FET by facilitating wider access to digital technologies, equipment, materials and other supports. Over 42 community groups availed of €275,000 funding across MSLETB.

Supports for Apprentices

There are four part-time staff members assigned to supports for apprentices in MSLETB Training Centres - Sligo and Ballina. These supports include literacy and numeracy support, assessment for dyslexia and ESOL assessments. These supports are delivered through a partnership approach between the Adult Literacy Service and Training Centres and include referral of apprentices to literacy services in their geographical regions and in-centre supports such as literacy and numeracy. MSLETB is represented on the national Support to Apprentices Group (SAG).



Wellbeing Supports

The FET Strategy 2020-2024 notes that an increasingly prevalent characteristic in FET is the high proportion of learners citing mental health issues and MSLETB is working to ensure there are sufficient support mechanisms in place to support these learners. Over 50% of the responses from learners surveyed said their mental health has been affected by the current Covid-19 crisis.

Adult Education Guidance counsellors in MSLETB provide guidance, counselling and information services to individual clients and to groups and provide referral services to other agencies as appropriate. This includes counselling, psychotherapy and other mental health services.

It became evident to the AEGS during the first lockdown, from client feedback, that there was a need to address the mental health and wellbeing of learners. A series of wellbeing webinars have been rolled out on topics including:

- Positive Mental Wellbeing
- Nutrition and Wellbeing
- Resilience in Challenging Times

These webinars will conclude in March 2021, after which time an evaluation will be undertaken. Funding for this project was granted under the Innovation Fund which allocates funding to programmes and centres to deliver innovative projects which will enhance the learning experience and wellness of the learner.

In December 2020 all MSLETB FET Staff were invited to participate in an online forum with eminent mental health specialist Dr. Harry Barry. The event focused on good mental health and gave all colleagues insights, practical advice and tips on how to build and enhance resilience throughout our entire learning community.

A number of key staff members are trained in Safe TALK and Children First. Safe TALK is an internationally recognised training programme that prepares participants to recognise and engage with people who may be having thoughts of suicide and assist them connect to suicide first-aid resources. The Children First programme is based on The Children First Act 2015 and includes topics such:

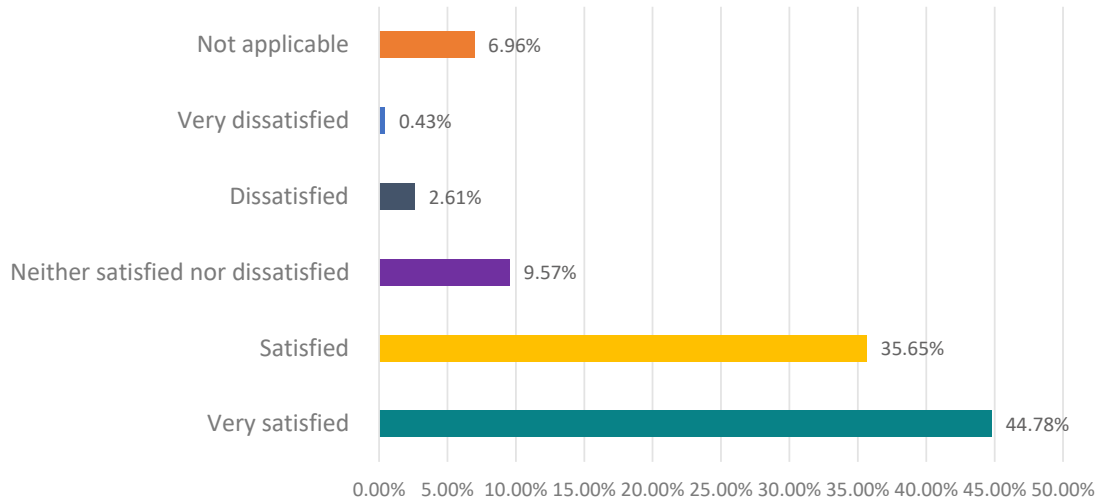
- Recognising and reporting child abuse.
- The role of the mandated person.
- The responsibility of organisations working with children and young people.

A number of wellbeing initiatives are in place at centre level throughout MSLETB including guest talks, seminars and other events. An example of a collaborative initiative currently taking place is a wellness and resilience-building module that is delivered to Youthreach learners in MSLETB through Achill Outdoor Education and Training Centre's Outreach Programme.

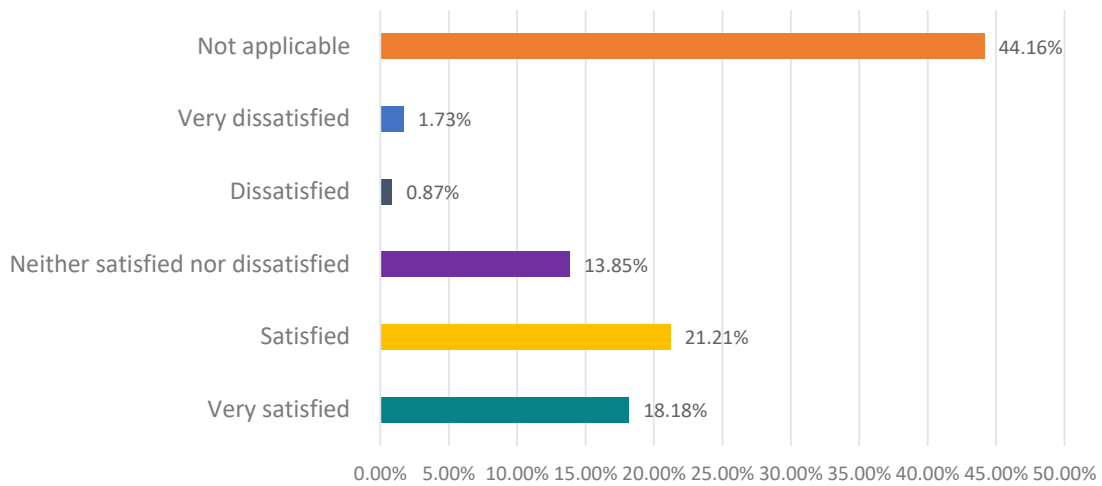
3.3.2 Evaluation

- MSLETB, is obliged to have regard to the elimination of discrimination, the promotion of equality and the protection of human rights. A working group has been established to carry out a data gathering exercise to identify issues or barriers that users of MSLETB services may be experiencing. The outcome of this project will be key in progressing MSLETB's Public Sector Equality and Human Rights responsibilities towards its staff and those who use its services.
- While feedback from learners shows a high level of satisfaction with learner supports currently in place across the region, the need for a more coherent and systematic approach to the planning and management in this area has also been highlighted. In this regard, MSLETB will establish a Learner Support Unit in order to provide learners with the supports required to allow them to fully participate and benefit from the educational opportunities available while participating on a programme.
- Learner feedback is a key component in fostering a culture of continuous development and improvement across the Board's FET provision. Currently, various approaches are engaged in this regard; the AONTAS Learner Forum events, mid-year and end of year surveys, exit interviews, focus groups, etc. This self-evaluation process has highlighted the need to have a consistent formal approach to capturing feedback from stakeholders. In the context of the new FET Strategy, and aligned with the theme for the Digital Transformation of FET, MSLETB will develop a 'Learner App' which will assist and improve the capture of learner feedback and track learner outcomes.
- Centres report that an increasing number of FET learners are presenting with behavioural, emotional and mental health issues. In its commitment to respond to the diverse needs of learners, noting that 'Fostering Inclusion' is a strategic priorities of the new FET Strategy, MSLETB has recently commenced a detailed survey and consultation into the possible establishment of a Psychological Support Unit in the ETB. The aim of this report is to identify various models of psychological service delivery for the ETB which would act as a consistent support mechanism for learners. Any proposed model of psychological service will reflect the core values of MSLETB by being 'learner-centred, professional, collaborative, proactive and of a high quality' (Strategic Performance Agreement, MSLETB, 2018 – 2020). In proposing various service delivery models, this report will also take into consideration existing support systems in the ETB.
- Feedback from learners shows a high level of satisfaction with learner supports currently in place.

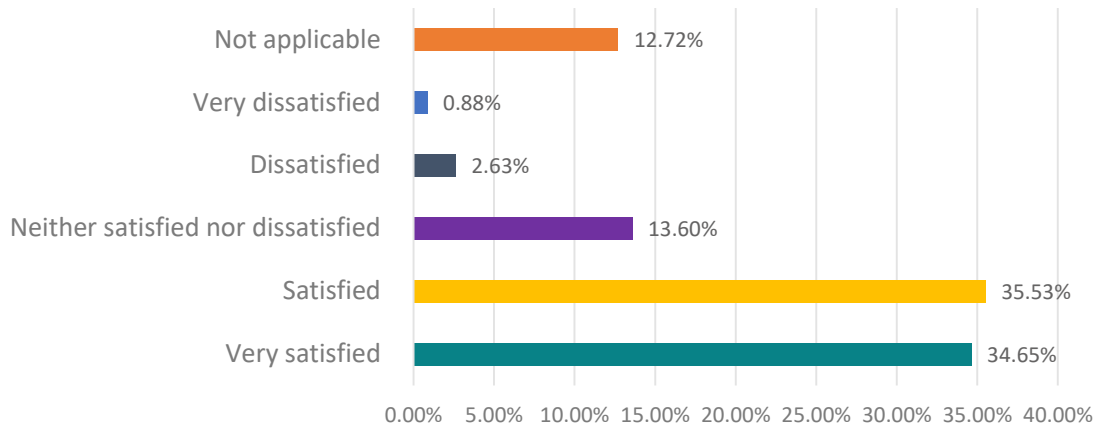
How satisfied were you with the learner supports on your course or at your centre:



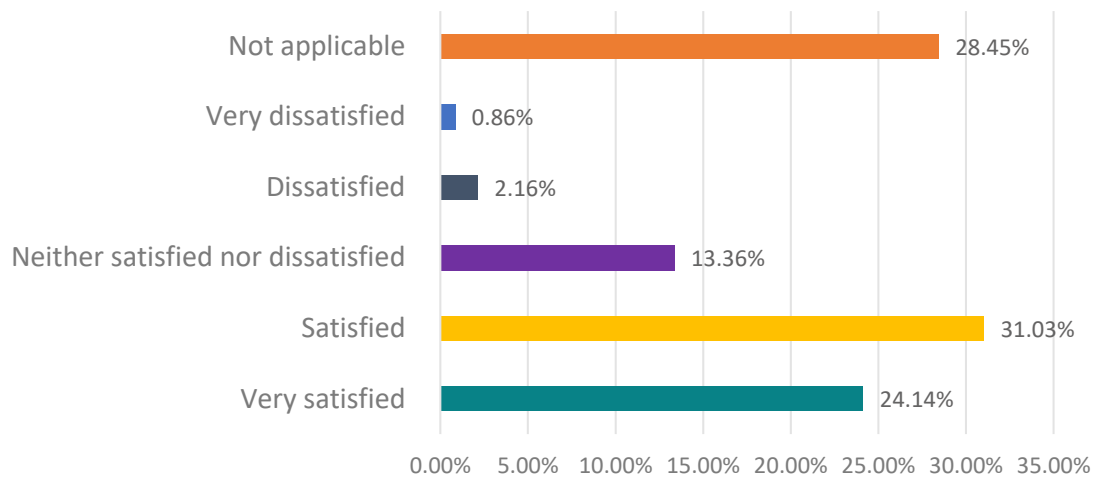
How satisfied were you with the disability supports on your course or at your centre?



How satisfied were you with the guidance service on your course or at your centre?



How satisfied were you with the specialist equipment or resources on your course or at your centre?



3.3.3 Conclusion

Strengths

- All staff who participated in the Centre Focus Groups agreed or somewhat agreed that reasonable accommodation procedures facilitate learner participation in MSLETB programmes.
- Learner feedback indicated a high level of satisfaction.

Recommendations

- Currently there is no learner representation on MSLETB QA governance structures. The ETB commits to engaging AONTAS to provide training for nominated learner representatives to successfully carry out their roles.

- The success and impact for learners of the Laptop Loan Scheme provides the opportunity to consider extending this, or a similar scheme, post Covid-19.
- Consideration should be given to the provision of online support and counselling to meet the wellbeing needs of learners.
- There is need to establish an Access and Disability Office to support learners and centres across all ETB provision.



Chapter 4

Self-evaluation,
Monitoring and Review

4.1

Self-Evaluation, Monitoring & Review

4.1.1 Description

MSLETB will:

Evaluate the suitability of our systems, structures and programmes to identify and implement opportunities for improvement.

(Strategic Statement – Core Value 1)

MSLETB is committed to the ongoing monitoring, review and self-evaluation of its QA system, its FET programmes and related services to highlight areas for improvement and innovation. FET provision, across the region, is subject to a range of internal and external evidence-based reflective processes that report on learner achievement and experience, stakeholder engagement and the effectiveness of the Board's QA system.

The Annual Quality Improvement Plan (QIP)

The MSLETB re-engagement process with QQI, in 2018, marked the commencement of comprehensive self-evaluation and reporting of FET quality assurance, programmes and services across the region. A process that informed the preparation of the Boards ESER, submitted to QQI. This was the initial phase in the submission of an annual QIP that includes comment on actions undertaken in the intervening period.

The Board's QA governance discusses and approves the annual report through the Quality Council before submission. The report is subject to external review and discussion at the annual dialogue meeting with QQI. It also contributes to the Board's annual quality improvement agenda.

External Authentication

MSLETB engages External Authenticators (EAs) to provide independent authoritative confirmation of fair and consistent assessment of learners, in line with QQI awards standards. EAs are selected from the National Panel, hosted externally by ETBI, and appointed to each centre by the QA Unit. The External Authentication (EA) process, external to the centre, is preceded by an internal verification (IV) procedure managed at centre level. IV and EA reports are considered by a Results Approval Panel (RAP) meeting, before a request for certification is made to QQI.

Results Approval Panel Meetings

RAP meetings, scheduled and facilitated for each certification period by the QA Unit, provide the opportunity to monitor and review collectively learner achievement, IV and EA reports for each centre. The QA Unit prepares a report after the meeting, for each centre, documenting strengths, recommendations and any issues that need to be actioned. It is noted that local centres have no input in the appointment of external authenticators or the scheduling of RAP meetings.

The QA Unit publishes a snapshot report of RAP meetings in the quarterly QA Newsletter and prepares a consolidated report for review and discussion by the FET Quality Council.

External Quality Assurer (City and Guilds)

Programmes certified by City and Guilds are subject to a visit from an independent quality assurer (EQA) appointed by the body. Appointees are generally SMEs in the areas to which they are assigned. The role of the EQA is varied and includes assessing and managing risk, checking compliance, ensuring accuracy and consistency, identifying quality issues and trends while supporting and developing centre staff. MSLETB has successfully completed numerous EQA visits, most recently for its programmes in Women and Men’s Hairdressing. MSLETB acknowledges the City & Guilds EQA process as a collaborative one, where a two-way channel of communication and information is maintained between both parties.

Informed Planning and Decision Making

A range of additional MSLETB monitoring and review mechanisms, that report on strategy progress and performance, inform the Board’s planning and decision making, enroute to achieving its vision, mission and goals, are outlined below:

[MSLETB Strategy Statement 2018-2022](#)

The ETB level strategy statement outlines the Board’s core values, mission and strategic goals for a defined time period.

[MSLETB SOLAS Strategic Performance Agreement 2018-2020](#)

This documents the agreement between MSLETB and SOLAS setting out the context, strategic priorities and the ETB’s contribution to the achievement of key national FET sector targets over the period 2018-20.

[SOLAS Response regarding Strategic Performance Agreement](#)

Letter from SOLAS to MSLETB containing feedback following the Strategic Performance Agreement interim review strategic dialogue meeting between SOLAS and MSLETB on 19th November 2019.



[Annual FET Service Plan](#)

This plan identifies actions, performance indicators and targets to meet MSLETB’s goals and priorities. The Board has a statutory obligation to prepare this plan on an annual basis.

[Quality Improvement Plans \(QIP\)](#)

The annual QIP submitted to QQI outlines the key development activities in MSLETB and defines specific tasks, expected outcomes, anticipated timescales and identifies the individuals responsible for implementing the plan. This plan forms the basis of the annual dialogue meeting between MSLETB and QQI.

[Risk Register](#)

MSLETB maintains a dynamic Risk Register. Risks are reviewed and updated on a quarterly basis by the Board, to determine the adequacy of existing systems in identifying and addressing significant risks to the achievement of target outcomes and to ensure that system update is actioned as necessary. The maintenance of the Risk Register is the responsibility of the EMT.

[Reflections on Covid-19 Modifications to Teaching, Learning and Assessment and what can be learned for 20/21, June 2020](#)

This report submitted to QQI in June 2020, outlines the contingency arrangements undertaken by MSLETB during the Covid-19 crisis. It provides analysis of qualitative feedback gathered from learners and staff on the effectiveness of modified arrangements to teaching, learning and assessment, during this period.

[Programme Development Reports](#)

These document the development process, reflections and learning gained from the following programme development projects:

- Craft Butchery Apprenticeship
- Agriculture Programmes
- Sales Apprenticeship
- SMART Driving Programme

[FET Director Report to the Board](#)

The FET Director regularly reports to the Board on progress in various activities in the FET pillar.

[FET Director Report to the Audit and Review Committee](#)

An annual report is submitted to the Audit and Review Committee of the Board by the FET Director.

[Annual Reports](#)

Annual Reports are prepared on behalf of the Board and provide an opportunity to highlight the comprehensive range of activities undertaken by MSLETB schools, centres and services in a given year. The reports, published on the Board’s website, also set out the related financial and corporate governance aspects of work carried out by the ETB.

[MSLETB TEL Strategy 2020-2021](#)

This document outlines the TEL strategy for MSLETB. It is informed by MSLETB’s Strategy Statement and the SOLAS Strategy for Technology Enhanced Learning in FET 2016-2019.

[MSLETB Literacy, Language and Numeracy Action Plan 2017-2020](#)

MSLETB’s Literacy, Language and Numeracy Action Plan 2017-2020 supports the implementation of the National FET Strategy, the MSLETB Strategy Statement, the DES Adult Literacy Programme Operational Guidelines for Providers 2013 and the SOLAS Overarching Planning and Funding Parameters and Requirements.

[MSLETB Adult Educational Guidance Service Strategic Plan](#)

This plan documents the MSLETB adult education guidance service plan, developed in line with the MSLETB Strategy Statement and related national policies and strategies.

Each of these reports is available on the SCORE site. A selection of the reports and minutes of meetings are available as public information, on the MSLETB website

4.1.2 Evaluation

- MSLETB welcomes the requirement to submit an annual QIP to QQI, with the associated timebound external agenda as a key component in fostering a culture of continuous development and improvement across FET provision.
- Currently, preparation of the annual QIP is heavily dependent on a top down approach. The QA Unit, in consultation with local management, is proposing that centres will have direct input to this process in the future.
- It is proposed that, in the future, all centres prepare and submit a Self-Evaluation Report for review by the QA Unit, with subsequent reporting to the FET Quality Council.
- Engagement with SOLAS through strategic dialogue meetings provides endorsement of what has been achieved by the ETB: *‘...we were particularly struck by the passion and commitment across the team, and the ability to articulate the value which FET activity brings for learners, communities and enterprises across Mayo, Sligo and Leitrim...Mayo, Sligo and Leitrim ETB has recognised that employer demand for basic skills create an entry point in building relationships and this ensures that the ETB is visible locally thus creating credibility and trust.’ - Andrew Brownlee, Chief Executive, SOLAS.*

4.1.3 Conclusion

Strengths

- Quality is recognised as a core value of MSLETB and is integrated into all strategy and planning documentation.
- The annual requirement to submit a QIP and report on the previous year's plan, ensures there is a constant focus on quality improvements and the implementation of associated actions throughout the ETB.
- The engagement of EAs external to the ETB ensure that assessments meet national standards and add an additional layer of validity to the process.
- Feedback and information gathered from RAP meetings form the basis of improvements at both centre and ETB level in relation to the assessment process.

Recommendations

- Implement a process to allow centres to feed into annual quality improvement planning.
- Consideration should be given to the inclusion of a Self-Evaluation, Monitoring and Review policy in the new QA Manual.
- There is an opportunity to strengthen reporting mechanisms to ensure that information gathered at centre or programme level is captured and reported in a consistent manner to the relevant governance groups.

4.2

Programme Monitoring and Review

4.2.1 Description

Programme and module review and maintenance

During 2018 and 2019, all MSLETB validated programme descriptors, module descriptors and training specifications were updated with MSLETB logos and branding. Following this process, the need for a mechanism to make amendments and minor revisions to module descriptors was identified. The entire suite of the Board's QQI programmes and related modules are stored on the SCORE site. The site also lists the programmes and modules that have been approved by the PAC for delivery at a centre.

Currently, centres have the opportunity to highlight any minor issues with individual module descriptors by completing a 'Module Descriptor Review Form' and submitting it to the QA Unit for consideration. Amendments that may arise are communicated to all centres via an email post on SCORE and in the QA Newsletter.

Centres also have the opportunity to request a comprehensive review of a module, to have the structure of a programme updated by adding a module or to have access to a programme not on their approved list. Any such request must be processed through the PAC in line with the Board's [Programme Delivery, Development and Validation Policy](#).

Assessment Instrument Specification (AIS) Review and Maintenance

Where issues are identified in individual AISs, it is communicated to the Training Standards Officer (TSO). The request is reviewed and where necessary the document is updated. The process entails the engagement of a Subject Matter Expert (SME) and a peer review of the finalised draft. Once approved by the TSO, it is version controlled and stored on the SCORE

site. Currently, many of the AISs are under active review as they are part of the legacy Training Standards Systems utilised in Training Centres.

Centre Based Monitoring and Review

The Principal or Manager at each FET centre is responsible for the ongoing monitoring, regular review and periodic evaluation of a centre's FET provision, with a focus on KPIs, learner experience, stakeholder engagement and local development and improvement. An example of best practice relating to programme evaluation can be found in [Appendix 6](#).

Currently, centres are not obliged to feed back to any QA governance unit, except on matters arising that are specifically related to overall QA policy or to a programme's structure and content. Such matters must be presented to the Programme Approval Committee (PAC) for discussion and approval before rollout at centre level. In certain circumstance the PAC may have to engage with the FET Quality Council, for its approval.

Considerable work has been completed to enhance current practices around monitoring and review of programmes, including the development of a centre-based evaluation process and associated tools. This initiative will commence once the undated QA System has been rolled out.

The procedure will include an on-site visit by an external facilitator, who will undertake interviews and meetings with centre management, staff, learners and employers. Feedback will be provided, including recommendations for quality improvements and programme enhancement. A final report will be furnished to the PAC and the FET Quality Council.

Revalidation of Newly Developed Programmes

Validation of programmes leading to a QQI award is normally for 3 to 5 years. Validation will then automatically lapse unless renewed through revalidation, following the outcome of a provider's programmatic review. During this review providers engage with programme stakeholders for feedback and focus on an evaluation of quality and awards standards.

MSLETB is cognisant of the fact that programme review will become a recurring item on the Board's quality improvement agenda in the future.

4.2.2 Evaluation

- The monitoring of programme-related documentation remains largely at centre level with ETB level reviews on request. MSLETB acknowledges the need for a systematic process for programme review and associated schedules.
- Significant work has been carried out in relation to the development of a process for centre-level programme review and tools to support this. This will ensure a comprehensive and consistent approach to programme evaluation across all provision in MSLETB.
- MSLETB is aware of the requirements associated with revalidation and to this end local programme development teams are engaged in the monitoring and review of newly developed programmes on an ongoing basis. These monitoring and review activities include collating learner feedback and review of assessment and curriculum which are presented to the relevant programme steering group.

4.2.3 Conclusion

Strengths

- There are procedures and processes in place for programme and module review.
- In order to meet demands associated with the revalidation process, MSLETB is currently upskilling a number of staff members in the area of [programme development and validation](#).

Recommendations

- The centre-based evaluation process should be piloted in a number of selected services prior to rollout across the ETB.
- A schedule for programme reviews should be established. There is an opportunity to link this schedule of programme review with the schedule for centre-based evaluation.
- There is a need to develop a revalidation process as part of the new QA Manual.
- AISs will continue to be reviewed as part of the harmonisation and integration of legacy systems under one Quality Assurance System within the ETB.

4.3

Oversight, Monitoring and Review of Relationships with External/Third Parties

4.3.1 Description

MSLETB is committed to exercising due diligence in proposing partnerships with third parties to support or enhance delivery of its FET programmes across the region. Every effort is made to minimise any potential associated risk to the reputation of the Board and, or to the integrity and quality of its programmes, services and standards.

Strong working relationships are in place with a wide range of statutory, not statutory, national and local stakeholders including SOLAS, QQI, DSP, Local Authorities, Local Enterprise Boards, Voluntary Bodies, the IDA, Community Training Providers, Secondary Providers (Contracted Trainers) and many more.

In addition, the Board engages and maintains close links with both National and International awarding bodies and institutions including QQI, City & Guilds, CIBTAC, CIDESCO, Pearson, Accounting Technicians Ireland, The Private Security Authority (PSA), the Pre-Hospital Emergency Care Council (PHECC), St Angela's College, IT Sligo and GMIT.

Collaborative Provision

As noted in Chapter 1, MSLETB has long established collaborative provision in community training programmes across the region:

- [Community Training Centres \(CTC\)](#)
- Local Training Initiatives (LTI)
- Specialist Training Providers (STP) for persons with a disability

Each of these initiatives offers some QQI certified programmes within the MSLETB QA framework, most often at Level 3 to Level 5. Collaborative provision is governed by [Operating Guidelines and Procedures](#) in each case. It is also subject to rigorous monitoring and review to ensure compliance with programme specifications, quality assurance and certification standards.

Currently, MSLETB is participating in the national review/evaluation of Specialist Training Provision (STP) for persons with a disability. The independent STP evaluation will generate evidence-based conclusions and propose recommendations about the quality, effectiveness, on-going relevance and overall value of vocational training that is currently delivered by Specialist Training Providers for Persons with a Disability.

Craft Apprenticeship

MSLETB has a [service level agreement \(SLA\)](#) with SOLAS for the governance and management of quality assured craft apprenticeship provision in the region. In this regard, The Apprenticeship Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) define the Board's support activities for employers and apprentices participating on an apprenticeship programme. The provision of craft apprenticeship programmes is subject to annual independent monitoring by the SOLAS based Quality Assurance Services (QAS) unit.

New Generation Apprenticeships

MSLETB is engaged in the provision of New Generation Apprenticeships, both as coordinating provider (Butchery and Sales) and as a Collaborating Provider (Commis Chef and ICT). These programmes operate within a quality framework defined by the [QQI Core Statutory QA Guidelines](#) and the [guidelines developed by QQI for Providers of Statutory Apprenticeship Programmes](#). New Generation apprenticeships are consortia led and have a range of approaches taken to programme delivery; blended, online and centre based.

Binding agreements between partners, MOAs/MOUs ([Memorandums of Agreement/ Understanding](#)) set out the roles and responsibilities for monitoring the quality and standards of the apprenticeship programme delivered by consortia members; Coordinating Providers, Programme Boards, Examination Boards, ETBI, Collaborating Providers, etc.

Ongoing monitoring of programmes ensures that learning opportunities available to apprentices enable them reach programme objectives, whatever the setting, On-the-Job, Off-the-Job, On-Line or Blended. Feedback is collated from EA Reports, employers, mentors, instructors, and the programme team, to inform ongoing development and improvement of programmes.

Contracted Training Partners (Second Providers)

Contracted Training (CT) refers to the structure, procurement and management of FET provision outsourced to contractors by MSLETB. All CT is governed by standard operational and QA procedures, as in Section 8 of the [Transition Quality Assurance System \(TQAS\)](#). The terms and conditions of outsourced provision are governed by the multi supplier framework of the Office of Government Procurement (OGP). Contractors must operate within the MSLETB QA system. Currently, MSLETB has five contracted training partners delivering programmes across [twelve technical categories](#).

On commencement, contractors complete a Course Plan Approval form, which on acceptance is signed off by the relevant budget holder. A Course Outcomes Report is submitted to MSLETB on course completion. This captures information on course completers, full and partial certification and progression to either Further or Higher Education and Training or employment.

Certification Audits

MSLETB completes certification audits on a routine basis throughout the year on programmes delivered by second providers. These are valuable monitoring and evaluation processes the key objectives of which are as follows:

- To determine if the second provider/contractor implements a fair and consistent assessment process for all learners on an ongoing basis.
- To verify that the required documented evidence is available and correct to support all certification requests made on behalf of all learners.
- To monitor for any quality issues or adverse trends which may arise.
- To liaise with the relevant contractor to identify and implement any corrective or preventative actions required to address any quality issues or adverse trends.

4.3.2 Evaluation

- The existing OGP Multi Supplier Framework concludes in December 2021 and is currently being renewed. In this regard, recommendations include strengthening of Training Partner KPIs around monitoring and continuous improvement and enhancement of programme development particularly in respect of initiatives such as Skills to Compete and Skills to Advance.
- The relevant operating Guidelines and Procedures for Community Training have been in place since 2014 and were originally created by FÁS/SOLAS as National Guidelines. These guidelines and procedures need to be updated, in collaboration with the other ETBs, to embrace the Core Statutory Quality Assurance (QA) Guidelines and the Sector specific Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines developed by QQI for Education and Training Boards.
- MSLETB welcomes the reengagement and monitoring by the SOLAS Quality Assurance Services (QAS) unit. It is particularly important to continue the External Authentication of all Phase 2 Classes. MSLETB would welcome a greater emphasis on continuous improvement and development of the Craft apprenticeships and in particular the assessment strategies employed.
- MSLETB awaits the commencement by ETBI, of External Monitoring and Enhancement activities in relation to the Butchery and the Sales apprenticeships. In the meantime, MSLETB has been engaging External Authenticators and feedback from employers, apprentices, mentors and instructors to informed continuous development and improvement of these programmes.
- MSLETB, is a collaborating provider with Kerry ETB (for the Commis Chef apprenticeship) and with FIT (for the ICT Associate apprenticeship). The Board has engaged with both of these providers, in their capacity as the coordinating providers of these apprenticeship, in relation to their QAPs and reports, and feedback has been provided when required.

4.3.3 Conclusion

Strengths

- There are strong working relations with statutory and non-statutory bodies with regard to monitoring and evaluation.
- There is a history of collaboration in relation to Community Training and strong links have been forged with these second providers.
- There are formal agreements in place with all second and external providers.
- Certification audits ensure that second providers are adhering to MSLETB quality assurance standards.

Recommendations

- MSLETB will continuously review its relationships, approaches and monitoring with all of its external/third parties.
- MSLETB will implement the findings of the national review into specialist training provision.
- MSLETB will conduct annual reviews of the quality of provision of its external/third parties.

Conclusion

This self-evaluation process, conducted by MSLETB as part of the Inaugural Review of Quality Assurance, has proven to be a very worthwhile and incisive analysis of our approach to quality and continuous improvement. The process of self-evaluation facilitated a deep, analytical and reflective review of all the Further Education and Training activities of MSLETB. The feedback gained by compiling the report gave us deep insights into organisation wide approaches to quality and the impact of mission, strategy, governance and management on the overall effectiveness of our quality assurance systems.

While compiling this report, we were in the eye of the storm with the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic is therefore, a constant theme throughout, as our quality assurance and governance systems were tested as at no time in our history. During the pandemic our primary mission was to flexibly support our learners, whilst at the same time maintaining standards and ensuring the quality of our provision was not compromised. Fortunately, prior to the pandemic, in line with our strategic goals, we had significantly invested in Technology Enhanced Learning and Professional Development. This empowered our MSLETB community to successfully continue learning remotely and complete programmes. The support of learners, colleagues and stakeholders, including QQI and SOLAS, was instrumental in this success and we want to thank each and every one of them.

Recommendations for improvements are captured under each thematic area throughout the self-evaluation report. These recommendations are essential milestones to consider, as we continue to improve the impact and reach of our ETB. Many of these improvements revolve around the learner, including improving communication to learners; supports for learners; capturing the learner voice; the outcomes for learners; the development of teaching and learning; programme development; to name but a few. Other improvement areas highlighted refer to

the continued organisational development of MSLETB as a learning organisation, including the continued development and harmonisation of our QA governance, policies and systems of work. This demonstrates that the learners are at the epicentre of decision making at MSLETB and this bodes well for our future.

The report also captures the essence of MSLETB as an evolving ETB, currently active in creating and building a continuously improving, agile and flexible organisation. The report substantiates this through the feedback gathered and through the internal and external consultations conducted. Recent feedback from learners demonstrates that they are very satisfied with MSLETB, "Learners felt that staff went 'above and beyond' to support them during the transition to remote learning". The many key strengths identified exhibit that there is a continued focus on excellent teaching and learning throughout our ETB and we are very proud of this.

The inaugural review process to date, although challenging, has added an immense amount of knowledge and provided us with key insights. These will guide our organisation as we continue to provide innovative and high-quality education and training services. Team MSLETB look forward to the next stage of this process and welcome the External Review Panel.

MSLETB Self-Evaluation Steering Group

Appendix 1

Staff Membership of National and Regional Groups/Committees/Networks

- Advisory Committee for Youthreach
- Board of ETBI
- Board of Home Youth Liaison Service
- Board of Youth Action Project Sligo
- Board of Youth Action Project Sligo
- CARO (Climate Action Regional Office)
- Castlebar Autism Town Friendly Project
- CYPSC Education & Learning Sub-Group
- Erris Interagency Group
- ETBI Chief Executive Forum
- ETBI Directors of FET Forum
- ETBI National OETC Group
- ETBI Organisation Support Development (OSD) Forum
- ETBI Principals of College of Further Education Network
- ETBI QA Network
- ETBI, Finance Audit Risk Committee
- Gaisce Award National Steering Group
- Galway Mayo Institute of Technology – Board of Management
- GMIT Castlebar (Outdoor Education)
- GMIT Governing Body
- Gno Máigh Éo
- Higher Education for All
- IBEC, North West Steering Committee
- ILS CHW Independent Living Skills Community Healthcare West Project
- LAWPRO (Local Authority Waters Programme) Water Framework Directive
- Leave No Trace Ireland
- Leitrim Development Company
- Leitrim Sports Partnership Board
- Lough Carra Catchment Association (LIFE Programme)
- Mayo County Childcare Committee
- Mayo County Council (Tourism section) Walks and Recreation
- Mayo Suicide Prevention Alliance
- Mayo Traveller Interagency Support Group (LCDC Mayo)
- Mayo's Age Friendly Alliance (LCDC Mayo)
- National Association of Principals and Deputies FET Committee
- National FET Stakeholder Group – COVID-19
- National Skills to Compete – Steering Group
- National Specialist Training Provision Review- Steering Group
- National Traineeship Steering Group
- National Training Centre Managers Network
- National Water Forum on Education,
- North West Regional Enterprise Action Plan
- North West Regional Enterprises Committee
- North West Regional Skills Forum
- NPWS National Parks and Wildlife Service
- Planning Resource and Reporting Group – Directors of FET ETBI
- Principals and Deputy Principals Association
- Regional Skills Forum – North West
- Regional Skills Forum – West
- River Moy Trust
- Sligo Institute of Technology – Board of Management
- Sligo Local Community Development Committees
- Sport Ireland (ETBI National)
- West Regional Enterprise Action Plan
- Work-Based Learning Group – Directors of FET ETBI
- World Skills Ireland Committee

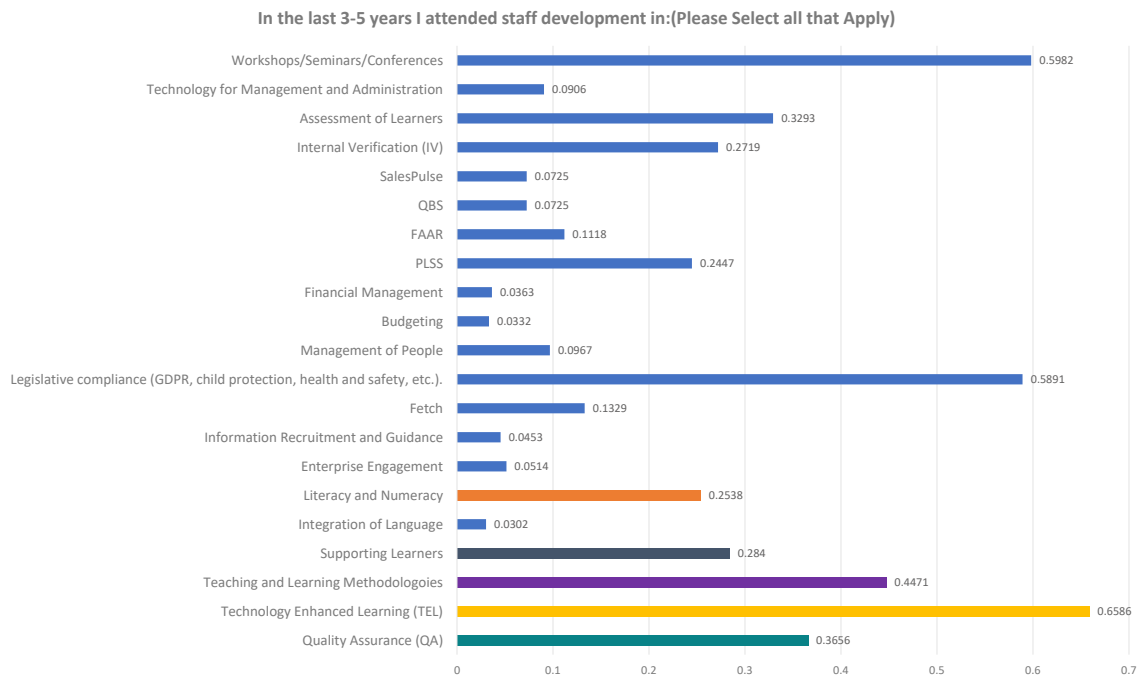
Appendix 2

Schedule of meetings

Meeting	Date	Location
External Review Management Group	10.10.19	Swinford
QQI Briefing with Phase 1 ETBs	29.11.19	Portlaoise
External Review Management Group	06.01.20	Carrick-on-Shannon
Meeting of Phase 1 ETBs	24.01.20	Kilkenny
External Review Management Group	05.02.20	Claremorris
MSLETB Self-Evaluation Steering Group	28.02.20	Swinford
Centre Survey Working Group	06.03.20	Teams
Meeting with Review Coordinator IT Sligo	12.03.20	Sligo
External Review Management Group	20.03.20	Teams
Internal Marketing Working Group	25.03.20	Teams
Centre Survey Working Group	25.03.20	Teams
Learner Consultation Working Group	25.03.20	Teams
External Stakeholder Working Group	25.03.20	Teams
External Review Management Group	06.04.20	Teams
Internal Marketing Working Group	08.04.20	Teams
External Review Management Group	20.04.20	Teams
Centre Survey Working Group	22.04.20	Teams
External Stakeholder Working Group	27.04.20	Teams
Learner Consultation Working Group	27.04.20	Teams
Internal Marketing Working Group	28.04.20	Teams
Centre Survey Working Group	01.05.20	Teams
External Review Management Group	08.05.20	Teams
Centre Survey Working Group	22.05.20	Teams
External Review Management Group	02.09.20	Teams
MSLETB Self-Evaluation Steering Group	17.09.20	Teams
Centre Survey Working Group	21.09.20	Teams
Learner Consultation Working Group – meeting with AONTAS	28.09.20	Teams
External Stakeholder Working Group	29.09.20	Teams
Internal Marketing Working Group	01.10.20	Teams
Learner Consultation Working Group	05.10.20	Teams
MSLETB Self-Evaluation Steering Group	23.10.20	Teams
External Review Management Group	06.11.20	Teams
MSLETB Self-Evaluation Steering Group	02.12.20	Teams
Centre Survey Working Group	11.12.20	Teams
MSLETB Self-Evaluation Steering Group	25.02.2020	Teams

Appendix 3

PD undertaken by MSLETB staff in the last 3-5 years



Appendix 4

Programme Approval Committee Outcomes

Date	No of applications	Applications for full awards	Applications to add components	Application to review programme or component	Applications to develop new programme	No of approved applications
09.09.19	10	2	6	1	1	9
10.10.19	1	1	0	0	0	1
21.11.19	15	7	7	0	1	14
25.02.20	21	18	2	1	0	21
30.04.20	4	1	3	0	0	4
19.05.20	3	1	2	0	0	3
30.06.20	1	1	0	0	0	1
03.07.20	5	4	1	0	0	5
25.09.20	1	1	0	0	0	1
14.12.20	7	4	3	0	0	7
11.01.20	9	2	7	0	0	9
13.01.21	11	7	4	0	0	11

Appendix 5

MSLETB FET Building Projects (planned and in-progress)

Swinford FET Centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carpark & Groundworks • Works completed • Development of New Open Plan Offices
Kiltimagh FET Centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Installation of a new fire alarm – procured services of Fire Consultant
Achill OEC & FET Centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Replacing Flat Roof with new roof at OEC Building • Replacement of Windows • Reconfigure property for OEC and FET programmes
Ballinrobe FET Centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New Kitchen on ground floor of centre for Youthreach use
Ballina Training Centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning for additional Workshop space and modernisation of Centre
Ballina FET Centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Re-housing many FET Services (BTEI, Adult Learning, Workplace Learning, Guidance) to a more prominent location
Ballina FET Centre (VTOS & Youthreach)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Installation of a new fire alarm
Ballina PLC Provision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Re-housing PLC provision in a purpose-built location
Quay Street	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Redesign of Quay Street premise to meet the needs of FET & OSD provision
Sligo College of FE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand capacity for PLC provision on campus
Sligo Training Centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extending / Conversion of existing Production Kitchen to Catering Kitchen workshop • Upgrading Storage Facility • New integrated Fire alarm system for TC
North Connaught College – Tubbercurry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whole campus upgrade of current premises • Repairs to Roof
Mohill Old Vocational School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feasibility study underway for development of FET services
Ballinamore Old Vocational School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fire alarm installation

Appendix 6

Case Study

Programme Self-Evaluation at North Connaught College

The monitoring and evaluation of any programme or intervention is vital to determine whether it works, to help refine programme delivery, and to provide evidence for programme relevance and continuation. As such, Programme self-evaluation is an integral part of the academic calendar at North Connaught College.

What distinguishes Programme self-evaluation from ongoing informal monitoring is that Programme self-evaluation is conducted according to a set of guidelines, a process. Since adopting this practice in the academic year 2012/13, the process for conducting the evaluation has remained relatively consistent. Each Programme is evaluated and reviewed on a three-year cycle and all new courses are evaluated after the first year of implementation.

The process aims to capture the voice and opinions of as many stakeholders as possible. The success of the process is gauged by the quality of engagement with same stakeholders. Every effort is made to ensure that the process provides a quality Programme Improvement Plan upon completion, reflective of the collective input of all stakeholders.

The process involves four steps:

1. Learner Questionnaire. This phase aims to capture the learner voice. The data can be collected in the format of individual learner questionnaires or as a collective response from a learner focus group (per Programme). Learners are asked to rate, and provide feedback on the following areas:
 - a. Communications
 - b. Equality
 - c. Programme – teaching and learning
 - d. Assessment
 - e. Miscellaneous to include: admissions, services, resources and supports.
2. Self-evaluation Checklist. This phase is facilitated by the College Quality Assurance Coordinator. As a collective, teachers within the Programme Department are asked

to complete the self-evaluation checklist. Responses provided must be evidence based, and include data gathered from the learner questionnaire, External Authentication Reports, feedback from work experience providers etc. Participants are asked to reflect on, and evaluate areas of practice including:

- a. Communications
- b. Equality
- c. Staff Recruitment and Development
- d. Access, Transfer and Progression
- e. Programme Development, Delivery and Review
- f. Fair and Consistent Assessment of Learners

3. Programme Evaluation Report. During this phase responses from the Self-evaluation Checklist are collated by the College Quality Assurance Coordinator. This allows for the identification of areas of strength and weakness, and highlights recommendations based on same.
4. Programme Improvement plan. This phase outlines how the Recommendations from the Programme Evaluation Report will be actioned. The plan highlights the action agreed, when it is to be completed by, and who will be involved in or responsible for implementing the action.

The Programme Improvement Plan is then reviewed by College management and a Quality Assurance Representative of MSLETB. Once the process has been completed the Programme Improvement Plan is adopted by the Programme Department.

To conclude, this process provides opportunities to reflect, and a systemic mechanism for meaningful evaluation. The outcomes of the process have resulted in numerous changes to programmes over the years; from component offerings to the provision of academic supports. Fundamentally, it ensures an opportunity for voices to be heard. If about us, not without us!