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Education & Training
Boards Ireland
*Boird Oideachais &
Oiliúna Éireann*

Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI)

Submission to the Joint Committee on Education and Social Protection

on the

FET Strategy 2014-2019

Wednesday 12th November 2014

ETBs and ETBI

The **Education and Training Boards Act** signed into law in May 2013 provided for the dissolution of the 33 VECs and the establishment of 16 Education and Training Boards (ETBs). At the same time, the representative body for the former VECs, IVEA, became ETBI. In the Act, the role of the ETB is set out: *“to plan, provide, co-ordinate and review the provision of education and training, including the provision of education and training for the purpose of employment, and services ancillary thereto in its functional area”*.

With the implementation of the **Further Education and Training Act** in July 2013, the training function of FÁS, following its dissolution, was transferred over time to the ETBs, with the aim of bringing local and regional coherence to FET delivery. The **FET Act** also established SOLAS, the Further Education and Training Authority, under the aegis of the Department of Education and Skills, to have responsibility for the strategic co-ordination and funding of the Further Education and Training sector, including ETBs.

The aim of these two Acts was to provide for the better co-ordination and delivery of education and training, leading to the development of a world-class integrated system of further education and training in Ireland.

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The **Further Education and Training Strategy 2014–2019** published in May 2014 provides the roadmap for the better co-ordination and delivery of education and training. ETBI and ETBs have a significant role to play in the realisation of the strategy as the main statutory authorities delivering Further Education and Training. Key to successful implementation of the strategy is the capacity and resources to efficiently manage the delivery of training and education. If the strategy is to fulfil its mission, ETBs need appropriate structures and supports and adequate resourcing.

The five strategic goals identified in the **FET Strategy** are:

- Skills for the Economy
- Active Inclusion
- Quality Provision
- Integrated Planning and Funding
- Enhanced Standing of FET

How the ETBs will assist in the fulfilment of these goals has been identified in the **Detailed Implementation Plan for the FET Strategy**. ETBI and ETBs are the lead agencies for 13 of the 53 actions proposed in the Plan. A summary of the actions identified for ETBI and ETBs are:

- Modify FET provision in accordance with the Skills Needs of Enterprise, based on research
- Develop local course design processes to reflect direct employer involvement
- Provide education and training inputs in entrepreneurship within FET provision
- Enable the development of the appropriate FET interventions and specific supports for active inclusion, identified by research
- Ensure that an effective education and training needs identification, matching and support service is available for all learners who need it

- Enable the development of a co-ordinated programme of continuous professional development in literacy and numeracy learning
- Develop a FET *Customer Service Charter* to include how ETBs will engage with learners in relevant decision making processes in terms of FET provision
- Ensure effective CPD is in place to support responsive and industry led programme development
- Enable the development of FET Strategic Partnerships e.g. DCU, FESS to support innovation in FET
- Devise and implement an integrated FET Guidance Strategy
- Provide career management skills to learners on FET courses
- Ensure staff skills are updated on a continual basis to deliver the relevant FET provision
- Internationalise FET to facilitate mobility across Europe and globally

There are a number of concerns regarding impediments to achieving the above actions. Issues that urgently need addressing include:

- A strategy addressing the agreed salary scales and career structure development for those delivering FET needs to be put in place urgently. The same need to be professionalised, with clear job specifications and conditions of service for tutors which reflect the need for flexible delivery modes.
- In order to deliver FET that is appropriate and responsive to the needs of industry, capital funding must be made available for providing and improving facilities and equipment to ensure they are up to date and equivalent to those in modern workplaces.
- The current moratorium on recruitment is adversely affecting the ability of ETBs to recruit staff to implement some actions in the FET Strategy that are not specifically teaching or tutoring. Critical in this context would be guidance and support staff.

- The Adult Guidance Service is seriously under-resourced. In order to develop and implement an integrated FET Guidance Strategy, the provision of information and guidance in FET needs to be seen as a front-line service, not subject to the moratorium on recruitment.
- Similarly, the type of development and planning required to ensure innovation, quality and responsiveness of FET to industry needs has to be resourced adequately as the current staffing structures in FET Colleges and Centres do not lend themselves to releasing staff from teaching or tutoring in order to get involved in what are termed non-teaching duties.

SOLAS and ETBs

One of the functions of SOLAS is to manage, co-ordinate and support the delivery of integrated Further Education and Training by the ETBs. One of the means by which it provides this support is by allocating funding to the ETBs. ETBs develop strategic plans and service plans in cooperation with SOLAS. This funding includes the costs of running the former FÁS Training centres plus grant aid to ETBs for a range of further education and training programmes (PLC, VTOS, BTEI, Adult Literacy, Community Education, etc.) for which the ETBs will have in place Service Level Agreements with SOLAS. However, it excludes the teacher pay element of the PLC programmes as well as the provision in ETB budgets allocated to support CPD.

SOLAS and the ETBs hold high level meetings as part of the collaborative process that is required and necessary in order to ensure implementation of the agreed strategies and the ***Implementation Plan for the FET Strategy***. This collaborative approach to planning FET provision reflects the complementary roles of SOLAS and the ETBs.

The ETBs welcome the involvement of SOLAS in the allocation of funding and the implementation of an Integrated Planning Process, which will set funding criteria that will inform allocations and plans of ETBs. The putting in place of funding agreements ensures that ETBs retain ownership over their own local planning within national guidelines, while ensuring consistency in approach and quality across the

regions. SOLAS, through a flexible approach, also ensures that ETBs have sufficient freedom to meet local needs but still within a clearly defined national framework.

Underpinning the ***FET Strategy*** is a commitment by ETBs and SOLAS to establishing an appropriate advisory infrastructure so that provision is informed directly by employers and responds to emerging needs at both national and local level. Following on from this is the commitment to develop and provide new courses and programmes that will cater for new and emerging industry and employer needs that are quality assured and adhere to the relevant Awarding Body quality system. There is also a commitment to advance the recommendations of the DES ***Apprenticeship Review*** and to establish new models of work-based learning within FET.

ETBI and ETBs will continue to collaborate with SOLAS to achieve the aims of the ***FET Strategy*** and advance the actions listed in the ***Implementation Plan***. But it is imperative that adequate resourcing and funding are put in place to allow ETBs to fulfil both those commitments and their mandate as set out in the **Further Education and Training Boards Act 2013**.

In conclusion, ETBI thanks the members of the Committee for your invitation to discuss the provisions contained in the ***FET Strategy***, in of which ETBI and our member ETBs are centrally involved.

ENDS