Laois and Offaly Education and Training Board

QQI Contingency Planning Report

1st May 2020

Introduction

This Contingency Planning Report outlines LOETB's approach and plans to support programme delivery, methods of assessment and the processing of certification in the short to medium terms as a result to the current disruption to provision arising from the COIVD-19 pandemic. LOETB aims to assure QQI and stakeholders of the continued provision of essential further education and training services and certification as far as is practicable. The approach outlined has been prepared and approved by the FET Senior Management Team.

Closure of FET Centres and Maintaining Engagement with Learners

The FET Centres have been closed since 12th March in line with Government instructions. A concentrated effort has been made by management and staff to maintain engagement with learners on all FET programmes. Communication with learners is occurring on a regular basis by such means as is appropriate; online conferencing, phone calls, emails and texts etc.

Teaching staff have continued to deliver content to learners online where possible. Applications such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Screencast-o-matic and Skype have been used extensively to maintain content delivery. Provision at lower levels (Levels 1-3, and sometimes 4 depending on the learner cohort) is more difficult to maintain online so the most common approach here has been to have learning materials delivered to learners by post. This has been quite effective in maintaining learner engagement. Prior to the Easter break, learner engagement was at approximately 80% (according to a survey of centres). Reasons for reduced engagement include lack of childcare, limited access to IT/internet, lack of IT skills, illness or lack of availability due to employment (temporary or otherwise) in front line services.

Gathering of Information re Status of Assessments:

As the closures commenced in March, most of the class content for programmes that operate according to the academic calendar had already been delivered to learners so most modules were almost at the stage of assessment. However, much of the assessments that were to take place were now not possible as they would require learners to attend at centres to complete Written Examinations and Skills Demonstrations.

The FET Senior Management Team identified the Post Leaving Certificate courses and other courses where learners may be aiming for a major award with a view to applying to third level institutions through the CAO system as the priority cohort. Every effort will be made to ensure that these groups will be processed for certification on time for the June certification round. All teaching staff that were involved in teaching and assessing that priority cohort were surveyed in March to determine for each module the following information; what assessments had already been completed, whether all Learning Outcomes had been taught already, and what

had already been corrected. Teachers and tutors on all other programmes from Levels 4 to 6 were surveyed before Easter with a focus on completing programmes on time for the August certification round.

Approval of Alternative Assessments

The results of those surveys provided the QA Support Service with a snapshot of what assessments remained, and of those, what needed to be changed in order to facilitate completion on time for the June round of certification, and for subsequent certification rounds.

In relation to the administering of alternative assessments, it is LOETB's priority to ensure the following:

- Learners have the opportunity to provide evidence of their achievement of all learning outcomes specified
- Information relating to alternative assessments will be communicated to learners in a timely and understandable manner allowing sufficient time to prepare. Assessment deadlines must take into account that learners may struggle with access to or ability to use technology, learners may have childcare or other care commitments or may be unwell themselves (due to COVID-19 or other illness)
- The integrity of the assessments will be maintained; learners will be informed and reminded of rules in relation to assessment malpractice
- Proctoring arrangements will be in place to protect integrity of online exams.
- All learners will be encouraged to undertake alternative assessment arrangements where this course of action is deemed appropriate and feasible. Where a learner does not engage or requests to defer or postpone assessment this will be addressed on a case-by-case basis.
- Learners will not be disadvantaged by changes to assessment formats and timeframes.
- Learners will continue to be supported during this time when completing assessments in any different format.

Theory Examinations:

The focus was first on replacing the traditional written Theory Examinations, particularly for the CAO priority cohort. Each teacher/tutor that was teaching a module where a Theory Examination was left to be completed, was required to complete a Template form which proposed an alternative method of assessment. For the priority cohort alone, this involved 64 different modules being delivered to 116 class groups, with 38 different teachers involved. There were some modules that were taught by more than one teacher/tutor – in these cases, it was important to ensure a level of consistency and fairness.

Each proposal received was recorded on a template document which was presented to the FET SMT on a regular basis. Proposals were either approved, or returned to

teacher/tutor for further consideration or with a query, or were not approved (some of the reasons for proposals not being approved included if the assessment was not deemed appropriate, or if learners did not have access to relevant technology, IT packages, etc), and in some case proposals by teachers/tutors to postpone assessment until the learner could access the centre was deemed the most appropriate approach.

By 25th April, all teachers concerned had received approval for their alternative assessments and were being supported by their managers, the QA Support Service and the FET SMT to enable their learners to complete assessments in their respective areas. A Record of Approved Alternative Assessments is being maintained to track actions taken and decisions made. This will be made available for all authentication processes.

The most common alternative assessments that were approved were Assignments in lieu of Examinations, or online Examinations. The QA Support Service has worked closely with the relevant staff to familiarise staff and learners with the Moodle system used to conduct online exams. The QA Support Service assumed responsibility for monitoring / invigilating Online Examinations in order to protect the integrity of the assessments.

Skills Demonstrations and Projects:

Assessments which require specialist equipment and facilities have been deferred until learners can access the centres to complete them. Those learner groups whose course assessment require specialist software or equipment will be prioritised in the first instance. It is hoped that the assessments will be able to be completed on time for the June round of certification – however, if restrictions remain in place, the extra Certification round facilitated by QQI in July will be used.

Work Experience:

The QA Support Service surveyed centres again to determine how many learners that were aiming for a major award in June and August certification rounds were not meeting the full requirements for the module and for the major award that they were aiming for. The responses to the survey were quite positive in that most learners were meeting the requirements. However, there was approximately 30% of learners that didn't meet full requirements, to varying extents.

The QA Support Service submitted a proposal for Alternative Arrangements for Learners not meeting full Work Experience Requirements to the FET SMT for approval, as set out below:

Due to the current restrictions in place because of the COVID-19 pandemic, there may be some learners that are not fully meeting the requirements of the Work Experience module in order to achieve a major award. On analysis of the situation, four different cohorts of learners have been identified.

A. Learners who have completed the required number of hours but do not have a Supervisor's Report (SR) or the SR has not been verified
B. Learners who have completed 75% or more of the required hours
C. Learners who have completed 50%-74% of the required hours
D. Learners who have completed less than 50% of the required hours, or no hours at all

An alternative arrangement has been agreed and approved by the FET Senior Management Team in relation to each of the cohorts identified above.

A. Learner has completed required number of hours of placement but either have not received a completed SR or the SR has not been verified.

Teachers, Course Coordinators and Centre Managers should support learners in attempting to retrieve the Supervisor's Report from the Workplace Supervisor – in whatever format that may be presented. A paper version with original signature is not compulsory – a scanned copy, photograph is acceptable, or where this is not possible, the Teacher, Course Coordinator or Centre Manager may gather the feedback (including the ratings) from the relevant Workplace Supervisor over the phone and record the date and time of phone call on the Supervisor's Report – in this case, the requirement for signature of Workplace Supervisor can be waived. The Teacher / Course Coordinator or Centre Manager should sign their own name on the Supervisor's Report.

B. Learner has completed 75% or more of required hours

Where learner has completed 75% of the required hours, has returned a Supervisor's Report in respect of the hours completed, and submitted ALL assessments relating to the Work Experience module, they will be entered for certification for this module according to the marks they received for the work. Marks awarded for work experience diary and Supervisor's Report will be capped according to the amount of work experience they have completed – eg if they have completed 80% of work experience hours, the maximum number of marks they will receive for the diary and Supervisor's Report is 80% of the marks assigned to those elements.

If a learner who meets the criteria of Category B wishes to submit a Reflective Assignment (referred to in Category C below), in order to increase their chances of a higher grade, they should be given an opportunity to do so. In that case, the Marks for the Skills Demonstration will be capped at 30% (as opposed to 40%) and the remaining 10% will be assigned to the Reflective Assignment.

C. Learner has completed more than 50% but less than 75% of the required hours

Where learner has completed more than 50% but less than 75% of the required hours, has returned a Supervisor's Report in respect of the hours they have completed and submitted ALL assessments relating to the Work Experience module, they may be entered for certification if they complete the following assessment:

A Reflective Assignment which addresses the following:

- *A reflection on work experience completed and/or other insights gained throughout the course.*
- *An outline of what they have discovered about their professional subject, any personal strengths and weaknesses they discovered about themselves, resources or content that resonated with them, any new abilities acquired*
- *A description of how they have met the competencies aligned to the course.*

Marks for the Skills Demonstration will be capped at 20% (as opposed to 40%) and the remaining 20% will be assigned to the Reflective Assignment.

Teachers / Assessors will be required to set out an Assessment Brief for this Reflective Assignment, as the assessment requirements may differ depending on the nature of the major award the learner is aiming for. LOETB will provide a document outlining the Assessment Criteria and a Marking Sheet.

*D. **Learner has completed less than 50% of hours or no hours at all***

*Where learner has completed less than 50% of the required hours, and has returned a Supervisor's Report in respect of the hours they have completed and submitted ALL assessments relating to the Work Experience module; or where they have completed no work experience hours but have completed and submitted ALL other assessments relating to the Work Experience module, they may be able to qualify for the alternative provided for in Category C where they can show that they have **relevant** previous work experience that can be verified by a previous employer or line manager. Whether the previous work experience is relevant will be approved through QA governance procedures, on a case by case basis.*

Where learner has completed less than 50% of the required hours, and does not have any relevant previous work experience, they will not be entered for certification for Work Experience module until they complete the Work Experience requirement.

Certification Process:

The current situation has necessitated some changes to the certification processes for learner evidence that was due for submission in the June and August certification rounds. The June and August rounds (and the extra July round) are still the target rounds for this year for the vast majority of provision. We will however need to take a different approach this year – both in terms of the planned dates for IV and EA, and in the presentation of work.

At the time of writing, stringent Government restrictions are in place until 5th May. In the event that these restrictions are extended for a longer period of time, LOETB are putting in place a Contingency Plan for Learner Evidence which is currently in teachers' possession (because they are working from home) to be collected from their homes. This will enable the IV and EA process to continue, with limited number of critical staff conducting IV under strict social distancing conditions.

Internal Verification:

1.   Where centres are in a position to go ahead with Internal Verification on the original date(s) assigned, this will go ahead. Estimated numbers may be different to what was planned, where the centre closures have restricted assessments.

2.   The majority of centres won't be ready for Internal Verification on the planned dates. As soon as Learner Evidence is presented for assessment, Internal Verification can and will take place – so the IV process may be taking place on a weekly basis as opposed to for a block period.

3.   There will be flexibility in how the folders can be presented – in their usual paper format, in digital format or in a combination of paper and digital. A Guidance Document has been prepared and approved by FET SMT regarding how folders should be prepared for the certification process, and some forms have been amended to take into account the various ways that evidence will be presented. All information is available for staff are on the QQI Resources Section of the website, in a section called COVID 19.

4.   Internal Verifiers will be checking the marks of 100% of the folders this year to eliminate calculation errors. Calculation errors are more likely this year as teachers are working from home and may be working from a smaller screen so the likelihood of transcription errors is higher. To make the process more efficient, we are requesting that teachers' marking schemes, the marking sheets from the module descriptors and the Summary Results sheets are printed for each module.

External Authentication:

While arrangements have been in place for the June and August External Authentication processes since February 2020, the centre closures and current Government Restrictions have led to a situation where a) the learner evidence will not be ready for External Authentication on the dates assigned and/or b) the

External Authenticators will not be able to gain access to the centre. Contingency arrangements have been discussed and approved by the FET SMT as outlined below:

- Arrangements will be made whereby modules taught by new teachers will be externally authenticated – ideally the EA will visit the centre once restrictions have been lifted or eased – however, if this is not possible, arrangements will be made for either the evidence to be made available digitally to the EA, or for the learner evidence to be delivered by courier to and from the EA's home, with their agreement.
- For all other modules being submitted for June certification round, efforts will be made to engage EAs that are willing and have the capacity to conduct External Authentication remotely. This will be limited to where learner evidence is available digitally.
- The engaging of EAs for the July and August certification rounds is subject to review – based on whether the current Government restrictions will be eased or lifted in the coming weeks.

Results Approval Panel meetings:

Results Approval Panel meetings will take place, either face-to-face or through Microsoft Teams as planned on time for the June, July and August round submission deadlines.

Particular emphasis will be placed on the following:

- A comprehensive comparison of this year's results compared to previous years' results – in order to ensure that there is a level of consistency with the results awarded, taking various factors into consideration.
- Ensuring that the Record of Approved Alternative Assessments forms part of the records for certification processing.

Responding to urgent Labour Market Needs with Online Provision:

LOETB identified a number of opportunities to respond to training needs that have become urgent due to the current COVID-19 crisis. While LOETB's current suite of validated QQI programmes do not currently include online provision, it is our intention in the coming months to make applications for validation in specific areas in order to respond appropriately. Every effort has been made to ensure that the online approach being taken for the current approach provides an opportunity for learners to achieve the prescribed learning outcomes as effectively as if the programmes were delivered in the classroom.

Infection Prevention and Control:

Due to the current COVID19 outbreak, the HSE has made an urgent request for people in Ireland to register to be on call to help care for the people affected by the virus during this emergency. LOETB committed to attempting to respond to this urgent need, particularly in the Midlands region, by providing online training in Infection Prevention and Control to current QQI Level 5 (minimum) major award holders, and learners that are currently on QQI Level 5 Healthcare Support/Health Service Skills/Nursing Studies programmes.

The programme is delivered online, with a minimum duration of five days of course delivery. Learners receive access to online lectures, notes and workshops, on a flexible basis, and are supported on an ongoing basis by experienced, qualified tutors. Assessment are conducted during and on completion of the course content.

This programme was made available to attempt to respond to the HSE's need for staff. Course places will be allocated only for the duration of the COVID-19 crisis. Completion of this course does not, and will not, guarantee that the learner will receive a position, in either a paid or voluntary capacity, with the HSE or any other employer in the healthcare industry.

Entry Requirements:

In order to participate on this online programme, learners must hold a major award at Level 5 (or higher), or be currently working towards a QQI Level 5 major award in Healthcare Support / Health Service Skills / Nursing Studies.

Learners must be available to complete the programme (including participating in all prescribed activities and accessing all course lectures) over the period of three weeks (after three weeks, the course will close)

Learners must have access to:

- PC/Laptop with speaker
- Webcam / Video camera or camera phone that is capable of recording skills demonstrations
- Suitable space in home where skills demonstrations can be recorded

Proposed Plan for Delivery:

Once learners are enrolled on the programme, they will receive login details in order to access the relevant Virtual Learning Environment. A short tutorial will be provided to aid the learner to navigate the system. Learners will also receive a Course Manual / Pack (via post) which will contain course notes, resources, etc.

The content of the programme is released to the learner on an incremental basis, with new content added each day for five days. Content is delivered using a number of different modes, including (but not limited to);

- Online lectures
- Live lectures, with direct tutor support
- Video Demonstrations
- PowerPoint Presentations
- End of session quizzes
- Access to articles, case studies, etc

Assessment:

Learners will be required to successfully complete the following assessments in order to achieve a Level 5 Component Award in Infection Prevention and Control (15 credits):

- Skills Demonstration 40% - due to Government restrictions on travel etc, skills demonstrations must be recorded by learner in their own home and videos are to be sent to the Course Assessor
- Examination 40%: Two 20% online exams – one midway through the course, and one on completion of online course content
- Learner Record 20%

Remote Working:

In response to both the current COVID 19 pandemic and the future remote working opportunity, LOETB, in collaboration with IDA Ireland, SOLAS and Grow Remote, have developed two new online national training programmes that aim to develop the capability and capacity of those wishing to become Remote Workers, current Remote Workers and Line Managers nationally.

'Remote Work Ready' (https://www.loetb.ie/remote-work-ready) is aimed at employees and unemployed people hoping to transition to a remote working role and is fully funded. The programme consists of Workplaceless certification consisting of seven weekly workshops, and an online ECDL/ICDL programme, which is delivered through eCollege.

'Leading Remote Teams' (https://www.loetb.ie/leading-remote-teams) is aimed at Line Managers leading a team that includes remote workers. It consists of Leadplaceless certification and a QQI Level 6 minor award in Project Management.

Both programmes are delivered fully online, available nationally and are of 7 weeks' duration, (with additional time allocated to facilitate completion of ICDL in Remote Work Ready and for submission of assessment material in Leading Remote Teams).

The wholly online nature of this programme is due to the current restrictions in place. Once restrictions are lifted, it is LOETB's intention to explore a blended learning option.

Governance

LOETB's Governance structures are overseeing the consideration and approval of all contingency arrangements put in place as follows:

- Regular FET Senior Management Team meetings via Microsoft Teams to discuss proposals for alternative assessments and contingency arrangements regarding the Certification process.
- Where alternative assessments are proposed these are approved by the FET SMT and forwarded to the LOETB Senior Management Team for final approval. A Record of Alternative Assessments has been maintained to track actions taken and decisions made. This will be available for all authentication processes.
- Any areas for concern will be reported immediately to management on identification for follow up or action.
- Records of all decisions and changes required to existing Quality Assurance processes will be maintained and reviewed by Governance Structures and noted in all meeting minutes.

Conclusion:

LOETB wishes to acknowledge the dedication and commitment of all FET Centre management and staff (teaching and administrative), and the Quality Assurance Support Service staff who have worked tirelessly in sometimes less than ideal conditions to ensure continuity of FET Service delivery and assessment. The situation is constantly evolving and contingency plans are being developed and adjusted in response to HSE and Government advice on an ongoing basis. LOETB commit to maintaining a record of plans as they evolve and maintaining contact with QQI and other relevant bodies on an ongoing basis.