FETAC

Further Education and
Training Awards Council
Comhairle na nDámhachtainí
Breisoideachais agus Oiliúna

Quality Review
of the **Further Education
and Training Awards Council**

Self-Evaluation Report

Self - Evaluation Report

July 2007

Contents

Executive Summary

This report is the outcome of a process undertaken by FETAC over the last six months. The process evaluated:

(i)   how successfully FETAC has performed its functions as identified under the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act, 1999;

(ii)   how effective the processes established by the Council have been to date;

(iii)   the extent to which it has been successful in achieving the objectives set by the Council itself in 2003;

(iv)   the level of compliance with the European Common Quality Assurance Framework;

(v)   what its plans should be for the next five years.

This report is part of the Quality Review Process of FETAC, being undertaken by the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland. The Authority has appointed an External Panel to conduct the review on its behalf and this report will form the basis of their work.

The Council is committed to addressing any recommendations made by the Authority arising from the review.

Section 1 provides the context within which the review is taking place. It provides background information on FETAC and the further education and training sector. It outlines the methodology of the review and the approach adopted by FETAC to carry out the self-evaluation and planning processes.

The Council is pleased with the level of involvement by stakeholders. The various approaches adopted resulted in significant contributions at several levels from our key stakeholders. Their willingness to participate was in keeping with the largely positive impact FETAC is seen to have had to-date.

Section 2 describes what FETAC has done in respect of each of its key legislative functions, how stakeholders considered FETAC's effectiveness in these endeavours and our conclusions.

Introducing a single awarding system for the diverse further education and training sector has been acknowledged as a complex and long-term task. FETAC chose to prioritise the placement (and subsequent classification) of awards and the agreement of provider quality assurance (QA). This key strategic decision has facilitated significant change. In 2001 there was no connection between the awards being made in the sector; there was no unified quality assurance of providers and the sector itself was dispersed and uncoordinated. Today over two thousand award types are fully classified and placed on the framework, providing a structure and coherence which facilitates access, transfer and progression for learners, and all providers offering FETAC awards will be formally registered with FETAC by the end of this year.

FETAC has achieved recognition for its awards; all stakeholders agree that the brand is firmly established. In addition it has enabled the recognition of prior learning (RPL) and of other awards.

Working through the processes of the former awarding bodies in the initial establishment and policy development phases enabled FETAC to carry out its other functions while maintaining continuity for learners and exploring optimum directions for the future in partnership with new and former awarding bodies and other key stakeholders.

The most significant challenges identified for the future are: to develop new awards that meet the emerging demands of learners, providers and industry in a timely and coherent fashion; to balance the need for improved learner assessment, programme design and delivery with the flexibility and responsiveness required by the

sector and to embed and extend best practice throughout the sector. The need to recognise awards which are currently outside the Framework has also been identified as a significant issue that needs to be addressed.

Section 3 identifies the overarching processes and principles that underpin all of FETAC's activities as being learner-centred, partnership orientated and quality assured. Stakeholder feedback confirms the effectiveness of this approach and looks forward to greater levels of delegation in the future with the embedding of FETAC policies and the growing maturity of the sector.

The Council considers its Corporate Governance to be in line with best practice. The Council's Committees have been a significant factor in its effectiveness. The internal staffing structure has served the Council well to date, but would now benefit from a review in the light of the Council's future plans and strategies. While internal processes and management systems have been effective in delivering a quality service to date, they will need constant review and renewal to ensure continuous improvement.

Section 4 outlines the objectives set by the Council for itself in 2003, and the extent to which they have been achieved from both internal and external perspectives. The Council concludes that all of the targeted milestones were met, while considerable progress was made in respect of all of the objectives. This is supported by external feedback. In general, the Council considers it has been meeting the needs of learners by working in strong partnership with quality assured providers. It has built the quality of awards and promoted widespread awareness.

Section 5 considers the European context of the functions of FETAC. FETAC has played a critical role in shaping the future directions of quality in vocational education training (VET) in Europe since 2002. FETAC has, in particular, influenced the construction of the Common Quality Assurance Framework. Feedback from Europe emphasises the high level of success achieved and allows FETAC to conclude that it is in full compliance with the framework. FETAC has benefited from this process and intends to build on it in the coming years to bring more direct benefits to learners and providers.

The terms of reference for the Quality Review require FETAC to develop a plan to implement the Authority's recommendations. In approaching this task the Council decided, with the Authority's agreement, to draft a plan based on its own self-evaluation, its vision for the future five years and how it can best bring that vision to reality. This approach avoided duplication and dovetailed two significantly resource intensive activities into one.

Section 6 highlights the issues emerging from the review process and the challenges arising now for FETAC. These, taken in conjunction with the external environmental factors identified here and the vision the Council has adopted for itself and the sector in 2012, formulate the basis for the draft Strategic Plan.

This Plan will be reviewed and finalised on receipt of the Authority's recommendations. The Plan's centrepiece is a new vision for 2012, which gives rise to seven strategic goals and a series of related objectives and actions.

Overall Conclusions

After six years in business, from the establishment phase to policy development, and now to the implementation phase, the Council considers that it has:

(i)   performed all of its statutory functions successfully;
(ii)   established, reviewed and improved its processes to ensure its overall effectiveness;
(iii)   achieved all of its objectives within the targeted timeframe;
(iv)   complied with the Common Quality Assurance Framework.

The Council has reached these conclusions having considered fully detailed internal staff contributions, extensive external feedback from ten learner groups, four hundred providers, three hundred individuals and twenty key national stakeholder bodies.

In reaching these conclusions, the Council has also identified the key issues and challenges arising and, looking forward, proposes its preferred strategy to ensure the outcomes envisaged for 2012 are achieved. The Council looks forward to engaging with the panel and the Authority before finalising its Strategic Plan towards the end of the year.

Section I
Introduction

Background to FETAC

FETAC was established on 11 June 2001 under the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act, 1999. Its specific remit was to become the single national awarding body for the further education and training sector in Ireland. In addition to unifying the awarding function of the sector, this role involves the determination of standards, promotion of awards and monitoring the quality of programmes and assessment.

FETAC is committed to promoting enhanced access to learning to increase the opportunities for progression while ensuring that all modes of learning are valued and recognised. FETAC is making the ideal of lifelong learning a reality for learners.

Over the last six years, the Council has developed and approved all of its key policies and so effectively, it has moved from its establishment phase on to development, and now it is firmly in the implementation phase.

Background to the Sector

Further education and training in Ireland is provided by a wide range of organisations through a variety of courses and programmes.

Further education centres encompass a broad span of course providers, including Vocational Education Committees (VECs), secondary schools, comprehensive schools, community schools and colleges, as well as a variety of adult learning and community education centres. Programmes offered by further education centres cover all fields of learning. There are currently 1,200 centres registered with FETAC.

FÁS offers training programmes nationwide, including apprenticeships, training for the unemployed and training in the workplace. FÁS has 20 training centres. They also operate temporary centres and procure programmes from a wide variety of training providers. Apprenticeship training is delivered in partnership with the Institutes of Technology.

Teagasc provides education and training through 33 centres. The programmes cover all aspects of agriculture, including horticulture and food science, and are targeted to meet the specific needs of farmers and the food industry in addition to broader vocational certificate programmes. Teagasc also operates temporary centres and delivers programmes in partnership with the Institutes of Technology.

Fáilte Ireland has four training centres. Programmes are provided in the fields of hotel and catering and tourism. The programmes are a mix of theoretical and work-based learning. They include Craft training (e.g. professional chef), adult training and training targeted at enterprises (e.g. safety programmes). Fáilte Ireland also operates temporary centres. The Craft programmes are delivered in partnership with the Institutes of Technology.

Bord Iascaigh Mhara operates three permanent centres, in addition to two mobile coastal training units. Programmes are provided in fisheries and encompass commercial fishing, aquaculture, communications and health and safety.

Learning and training in the workplace takes place in many companies and businesses throughout Ireland. It is coordinated through a range of schemes developed by various agencies, including Fáilte Ireland, FÁS, Skillnets and by individual firms.

FET programmes are also available through the institutes of technology, the National College of Ireland, Tipperary Institute, professional bodies and a range of private colleges.

Procedures for FETAC

The Qualifications Act provided that FETAC could continue to use the processes and procedures of the former awarding bodies as necessary so as to maintain continuity for a transition period of up to five years. In December 2001, following advice from the Council, the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland established procedures under Section 8(2)(c) of the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act, 1999, for the Council. These were reviewed and updated in 2005 by the Authority to extend the transition period. The procedures are due for review shortly.

These procedures have facilitated the Council in maintaining continuity in the overall operation of issuing awards, a service which is crucial to learners, while gradually reducing dependence on the processes and procedures of the former awarding bodies as the Council's own policies, processes and procedures were being developed and implemented.

It is the Council's view that it has operated in accordance with these procedures in all matters since 2001. The evidence for this is contained throughout the report.

Review of FETAC

Under Section 9 of the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act, 1999 the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland may from time to time review the performance by the Council in its functions.

In March 2007 the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland adopted terms of reference for the review of FETAC. The review of FETAC has three elements:

- the review will evaluate the effectiveness of the performance by the Further Education and Training Awards Council, since its establishment, in its principal statutory functions, taking into account the objectives established by the Council for performing these;
- the processes of the executive of the Council for performing such functions;
- the review will benchmark the extent to which the Council in the performance of its relevant functions complies with the Common Quality Assurance Framework for European vocational education and training.

The review of FETAC comprises:

- self-evaluation by the Council;
- evaluation by a panel of experts;
- consideration of the report of the panel by the Council and the development of a plan by the Council to implement the recommendations in the report;
- consideration of the review report and the Council's plans by the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland.

Strategic Planning in FETAC

FETAC commenced the preparation of a Strategic Plan during 2002 in accordance with Section 58 of the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act, 1999 which provides that: *"The Further Education and Training Awards Council shall, by such date as the Authority may from time to time determine, require its chief executive to prepare a plan which shall set out the proposals of the Council for carrying out its functions during the period, such period being not less than two years, to which the plan relates."*

The Council's first Strategic Plan covered the period 2003–2006. The first plan was reviewed twice. The first review was published in January 2005 and included an outline plan and milestones up to December 2007. The second review was published in May 2006 and included an outline plan and milestones up to December 2008.

Methodology for the Review

In view of the overlap in methodology and tasks between the review and strategic planning the two activities are being carried out in a unified way. The outcomes of the review will inform FETAC's second Strategic Plan 2007–2012.

The review of FETAC and the development of the Strategic Plan were set up as projects under FETAC's Programme Office. The Programme Office was established in 2003 to ensure FETAC delivered on the extensive range of commitments made in its first Strategic Plan. As a result both projects are subject to the governance and planning procedures of the Programme Office.

The review and Strategic Plan projects are managed by two senior members of staff, sponsored by the chief executive and 'steered" by the Senior Management Team. Together the two projects are referred to as the Strategic Review.

A Cross Functional Group of six senior members of staff was formed to oversee the work of the Strategic Review. A further five task groups representative of the organisation, as a whole, were responsible for reviewing the functions of the Council. In addition, all staff members were briefed regularly and took part in all staff workshops.

Internal Consultation

Five task groups were set up within FETAC to review the functions of FETAC, evaluate performance to date and suggest strategic directions for the future.

Group	Functions
Group 1	Making awards (Certification)
	Determining Standards
	Recognition of Other Awards
	Delegation of Authority
	Promotion – brand, status and image
	Facilitate and assist the Authority
	Consult and advise the Minister

Group 2	Validation of programmes
	Quality assuring providers (programmes and services)
	Monitoring and evaluating quality of programmes
	Recognition of Prior Learning
	Ensuring providers carry out fair and consistent assessment for learners
	Facilitating Access, Transfer and Progression
Group 3	Awards
Group 4	Relationships
	Role in Europe
	Research
Group 5	Organisation
	Structures and processes including ICT

Each group was required to produce a report detailing:

- a clear analysis of the current situation;
- a set of options for FETAC with key issues/risks and implications identified;
- a preferred option.

The contributions of all staff in relation to the same tasks were gathered together through a series of workshops.

Council Consultation

The process commenced with Council members completing a detailed questionnaire which asked them to identify what FETAC had done well, work yet to be completed, strengths, weakness, opportunities and threats. The questionnaire simultaneously explored members' priorities for the future. The information gathered through this process was collated, summarised and presented to the Council for discussion in March 2007. The resulting document informed the discussions and workshops with the Senior Management Team, senior staff and the task groups.

A workshop in May focused on the vision for FETAC but was also an update on progress in relation to the review. A first draft of the self-evaluation report was circulated to the Council and discussed in detail at their meeting in June where it was approved.

In addition, many Council members were interviewed as part of the external consultation phase in their role as representatives of key stakeholder organisations.

External Consultation

External consultation was carried out involving:

- the general public;
- stakeholders in general;
- all providers;
- European stakeholders;
- learners;
- key national stakeholders;
- FETAC evaluators.

An advertisement seeking public submissions to the FETAC Strategic Review process was published in The Irish Times, the Irish Independent, Iris Oifigiúil and Foinse.

A notice seeking submissions was published on FETAC's public website www.fetac.ie

An online survey for stakeholders and members of the public wishing to contribute to the Strategic Review was published on FETAC's public website.

The online survey was provided in Irish and English.

There were 307 respondents to the FETAC online survey. The respondents identified themselves as:

- administrator (1);
- award representative (2);
- counsellor (1) ;
- employer (6);
- evaluator/external examiner (122);
- holder of FETAC award (9);
- learner (11);
- member of the public (10);
- parent (1);
- professional body (1);
- provider of programmes (83);
- teacher/tutor (5);
- third level institute (1);
- user of FETAC's website or publications (108).

Emails were sent to contacts in our databases advising them of the online survey.

As part of ongoing research into Customer Satisfaction a survey which included a specific section relating to the Strategic Review was administered on our behalf to all providers. 400 providers responded to the survey.

Our European stakeholders were surveyed.

Key stakeholders were identified with whom FETAC wished to consult directly regarding its Strategic Review. Consultative meetings were undertaken with the following stakeholders:

- AONTAS;
- Department of Education and Science;
- Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment;
- Dublin Institute of Technology;
- Fáilte Ireland;
- FÁS;
- Forfás;
- Higher Education and Training Awards Council;
- Higher Education Authority;
- IBEC;
- ICTU;
- Institutes of Technology, Ireland;
- IVEA;
- NALA;
- National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals;
- National Qualifications Authority of Ireland;
- NLN;
- Skillnets;
- Teagasc;
- The Wheel.

Learners from a variety of provider types were consulted. Meetings took place with learners from:

- Crumlin FE College;
- Fáilte Ireland;
- Irish Rail/ICTU ;
- Larkin Unemployed Centre;
- Letterkenny Vocational School;
- St Johns Central College;
- St. Basil's Senior Traveller Training Centre;
- Teagasc;
- Youthreach;
- FÁS.

Submissions were received from two key stakeholders:

- Fáilte Ireland;
- NLN.

Section 2
Evaluation by Function

Introduction

FETAC is responsible for developing appropriate policies and procedures to enable it to carry out its functions as outlined in the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act, 1999 [Section 14 (1)].

FETAC's main functions under the Qualifications Act can be summarised as follows:

- making awards;
- determining standards;
- promoting awards;
- assuring and monitoring the quality of programmes leading to a FETAC award;
- validating programmes;
- ensuring fair and consistent assessment of learners;
- recognising other awards;
- facilitating access, transfer and progression.

In June 2001, FETAC adopted the processes and procedures of the former awarding bodies for the duration of the transition phase (2001–2006). Given the diversity and complexity of the sector and the challenges involved in introducing a single awarding system the Authority agreed that these arrangements be extended until such time as FETAC developed its own processes and procedures. Initially those associated with quality assurance, programme validation, setting standards, assessment and monitoring were adopted. New policies and procedures are being introduced on a phased basis to ensure continuity for learners and providers on the one hand while ensuring its functions under the Act were being implemented on the other.

This section of the report considers specifically how FETAC has performed its functions under the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act, 1999 since its establishment.

Awards and Standards

The Qualifications Act requires FETAC *"…to establish and publish policies and criteria for the making of further education and training awards…"* [S 14 (1) a].

Making Awards

FETAC has made over 500,000 awards through the processes of the former awarding bodies since its establishment in 2001.

The National Framework of Qualifications was launched by the Authority in 2003.
FETAC henceforth would make awards at levels 1 to 6 on the new framework.

Placement of Legacy Awards

Following the establishment of the framework, the Authority requested FETAC to advise it with regard to the placing of its legacy awards[1] on the ten-level framework, so as to assure award holders that their learning achievements continued to be valued. The Council established a process for placing legacy awards, which was carried out in collaboration with the former awarding bodies.

The process culminated in over 300 awards being placed on the framework at levels 3, 4, 5, and 6. The placement of legacy awards was agreed with the Authority in early 2005.

Classification of Awards

Later in 2005, FETAC commenced a process classifying all placed awards as major, minor, special purpose or supplemental awards.

A year later, in April 2006, FETAC published a listing of the newly classified awards in the form of a directory. From July 2006, all new awards were issued according to the new classification. The directory contains 2,222 named awards including over 200 major awards and over 1800 minor awards. All FETAC awards are now part of the framework and are coherent in their structure and in their relationship to each other. The directory was updated in late 2006 and is updated at regular intervals as new awards are developed.

All FETAC awards are currently issued with a designated level (number) and title: Certificate (major); Component (minor); Specific Purpose (special purpose) and Supplemental.

The processes of the former award bodies for developing new awards remain operational until the end of 2007. FETAC has recently commenced implementation of the Common Awards System (see below). It will be implemented for all new awards developed from 2008.

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[1]Legacy awards are defined by the Authority as *"awards that were made either before the determination of the framework, or after its determination, but prior to implementation of the new framework"*.

Common Awards System

In December 2005, following extensive consultation, FETAC published its new Common Awards System setting out the structure and features for the new awards. The Common Awards System is the single way of developing and describing FETAC awards. Over time this system will be implemented for all awards' development. All existing awards will, over time, be harmonized through the Common Awards System, removing duplications and making them available to all providers.

In 2006 FETAC launched the first new awards developed through the Common Awards System at levels 1 and 2. Awards at these levels aim to meet the needs of learners, young and old, adults who may be returning to education and training or who may be engaging with learning for the first time and learners with few or no previous qualifications.

These new awards were developed through extensive consultation and with the assistance of an Expert Working Group. The features, characteristics and standards for each of the awards are published in the form of an Awards Specification. A key feature of each certificate is that it comprises a number of components (minor awards) which learners can achieve at their own pace and accumulate over time towards one of the named certificates (major awards). This provides significant access opportunities for learners to achieve a major award. There are two major awards at level 1 and one major award at level 2 currently available. There are 45 minor awards available at levels 1 and 2.

FETAC will identify new award areas for development at all six levels of the framework in the Awards Plan. The first Awards Plan, which is being developed in consultation with the former awarding bodies and other key stakeholders, is due to be published shortly. The plan will be reviewed on an annual basis. New awards will be developed within the Common Awards System and will be based on standards determined through a single and transparent standards development process.

Determining Standards

FETAC is required under the Qualifications Act *"to determine standards of knowledge, skill or competence to be acquired by learner, before a further education and training award may be made…"* [S 14 (1) b].

Since 2001, FETAC determined standards through the processes and procedures of the former awarding bodies. To assist and inform the development of its own policy for Determining Standards FETAC commenced a formal consultation phase in 2004. A Standards Forum, representative of a wide range of key stakeholders, was established in January 2004 to assist and advise the Council in the development of its policy.

Policy

Following extensive consultation, the policy Determining Standards was agreed by the Council in 2005. The policy focuses on a strategic and planned approach to the development of awards and standards. It is based on a partnership approach, with significant involvement from key stakeholders.

The policy provides for the establishment of:

- a Standards Advisory Board, representative of key national stakeholders, to quality assure the process;
- a number of Standards Development Groups to develop and review standards for awards at levels 1 to 6.

Guidelines for the Standards Advisory Board and Standards Development Groups, and criteria for the development of new award standards were developed in 2006.
The Standards Advisory Board was established in March 2007. There are 21 members on the Board representing a range of key stakeholders. The first Standards Development Group was established in April 2007, in partnership with the Road Safety Authority to develop standards for a new award in 'Driving Instruction'. New Standards Development Groups will be established in line with the awards plan.

Promoting Awards

The Qualifications Act requires FETAC *"to promote the further education and training awards of the Council"* [S 14 (1) f].

Since its establishment in 2001 significant work has been undertaken initially on establishing and promoting the FETAC name and brand and subsequently on promoting FETAC awards.

A communications strategy was devised in 2001 which focused on building an identity through a logo and creating awareness of the FETAC name. In 2003, this focus shifted to creating an understanding of FETAC's role and functions whilst continuing to build brand awareness and promote FETAC awards.

FETAC's Strategic Plan 2003 – 2006 included an external communications strategy. FETAC has implemented this strategy through a range of media.

A customer charter was published in 2004. This was supported by a comprehensive action plan which introduced a variety of steps to ensure that the services FETAC provides meet the needs of stakeholders.

FETAC's communications and promotional strategy will continue to evolve as the organisation develops and stakeholder needs change. The following summarises the key promotional activities which are undertaken on an ongoing basis.

FETAC has continued to build brand awareness and promote its awards through advertising. Initially only press and outdoor media were used. The transition into more complex media began with the launch of the radio campaign in 2003.

Qualitative research undertaken in 2004 showed that although awareness of FETAC had grown, the benefits of a FETAC award still needed to be explained if people were to place a real value on the award. Television was identified as the most powerful medium available to achieve this. In late 2004, FETAC produced a television advertisement designed to build on existing awareness and understanding of FETAC awards and highlight the tangible personal benefits of a FETAC award.

There has been ongoing research since 2003 to gauge the level of public awareness of FETAC and the role of the organisation. The results indicate a huge increase both in brand and role awareness since the research commenced. In September 2003, 16% of respondents had heard of FETAC, this increased dramatically to 53% by February 2006.

Judging from the increasing website traffic and the number of calls to FETAC and an overall increase in awareness directly after each wave of advertising activity, it is clear that the advertising campaign has had a direct and positive impact.

FETAC hosted two major events in 2005. A European conference entitled *"Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training: Building Sustainable European Co-Operation"* was held in October 2005 and the first Quality Assurance Agreement event followed in November of the same year. FETAC hosts a range of briefings on a regular basis and FETAC staff attend award ceremonies, external conferences and exhibitions etc. In addition, FETAC is actively involved in sponsorship of a range of relevant events.

The FETAC website is a key channel of communication and features prominently in all promotional material and publications. The site was updated in December 2005 to improve navigability and provide a more user-friendly and contemporary look and feel. New features include targeted content and an improved search facility.

Stakeholder Feedback - Awards and Standards and Promotion of Awards

Key stakeholders agreed that FETAC has made a large number of awards. 81% of respondents to the online survey felt that FETAC currently has an extensive range of awards in various fields of learning. 87% of providers agreed.

The placement of legacy awards was identified by respondents as a significant process which has had a positive impact in bringing coherence to further education and training awards. The placement of legacy awards was cited as having provided significant opportunities to learners who wish to use these awards for progression.

The successful classification of awards was also seen by stakeholders as a significant achievement.

The former awarding bodies' processes for developing awards are still being operated. This results in some duplication of effort and of awards. Also, some providers do not have access to all awards because they cannot use the processes of the former awarding bodies. While harmonising over 2000 awards to the Common Awards System, and moving the related processes to a singular coherent process is recognised by stakeholders as a complex task, it needs to be tackled soon.

The development of awards at levels 1 and 2 are seen as having a significant impact for learners. Awards at these levels provide, for the first time, opportunity for, and access to, learners who historically have been unable to access national certification. Feedback from stakeholders has been extremely positive in relation to the availability of these awards.

In general, 86% of respondents to the online survey agreed that FETAC has set standards for knowledge, skill and competence to be acquired by learners, while 83% of providers agreed. Respondents felt that it is important that the needs of learners take precedence over the needs of any single/particular stakeholder in any process for the development of standards.

Stakeholders acknowledged the effective and high quality setting of standards by FETAC. It was stated that setting standards which are outcomes-based provides a guarantee that they will be used by employers and others.

Feedback from stakeholders indicates that the establishment of the Standards Advisory Board and the approach to standards development, through the establishment of Standards Development Groups, is to be welcomed and commended.

70% of online respondents and 53% of providers agreed that FETAC had informed itself of the training, skills and qualification needs of various sectors. While the 53% positive response may seem low, only 7% disagreed and 40% indicated that they did not know. It was noted by some respondents that as Ireland is rapidly becoming a service-led economy, it is important that FETAC ensures an appropriate range of awards are available to this sector. The implementation of the National Skills Strategy was identified as representing a significant challenge to the development of new awards. FETAC needs to consider how the development of new awards will facilitate the up-skilling requirements of the strategy.

Feedback from learners indicates that learners are aware of FETAC as the awarding body for their programmes. In the main, the feedback indicates that, though most learners do not have a deep understanding of FETAC beyond its role as an awarding body, learners receiving FETAC awards seemed to have a high level of awareness and a good understanding of the benefits of the award.

Learners overall had mixed awareness of FETAC's role in relation to determining standards. Most felt that it was a combination of FETAC and their own centre/provider and tutor that were setting the standards. They associated FETAC with certificates and awards. This is to be expected and reflects the holistic learning experience of the learner within a centre, in relation to the programme and curriculum, as opposed to the standards and the awards.

All key stakeholders cited the promotion of awards by FETAC as very effective. The general view of stakeholders was that the advertising and media campaigns have been very effective in building FETAC brand awareness. 80% of online respondents agreed that FETAC had carried out an effective campaign of promoting awards, 74% of providers agreed with this. 85% of online respondents and 84% of providers agreed that FETAC has enhanced the status, recognition and currency of FETAC awards nationally. The corresponding figure was smaller for international recognition, with 45% of respondents and 53% of providers agreeing. This low level of agreement can be better understood in the context of the high level of 'don't knows'. 40% of online respondents and 38% of providers indicated that they did not know if FETAC had enhanced the status recognition and currency of FETAC awards internationally. This is an issue which FETAC is committed to addressing through its work in Europe.

The extent to which FETAC awards are recognised by employers was identified as an issue. For example, government departments still cite the Leaving Certificate as a minimum entry requirement for employment as opposed to a Level 5 Certificate. Recruitment advertisements for apprenticeships often refer simply to the Junior Certificate as a minimum entry requirement without reference to level 3. There is still work to be done on achieving parity of esteem nationally.

One key stakeholder stated that the general public, employers and learners are not fully aware of how FETAC awards link with the framework. It was suggested that there is an issue around the promotion of the framework and that FETAC, HETAC and the Authority need to work closely together to promote the framework and to ensure clarity in relation to how the awards fit in and the significance of this for learners.

There is still a large number of learners in the further education and training sector who are currently accessing foreign awards. In the main these are from UK awarding bodies. Many of these awarding bodies are well established in the sector and there is a perception that their awards may have higher value in terms of recognition. FETAC needs to continue to promote and build the credibility of its own awards to change this perception, or work with these bodies to ensure equal recognition of related FETAC awards. Some stakeholders advise that FETAC should consider the option of joint certification to fast track some of this work.

Conclusions

Having evaluated the information gathered and issues raised during the review, FETAC draws the following conclusions in relation to making awards, determining standards and promoting awards.

FETAC made a key strategic decision on its establishment in 2001 to prioritise continuity of service to learners over the setting up of new systems which is acknowledged as a long-term and complex task. The making of awards and the determination of standards for those awards was made possible through this approach. FETAC believes this to have been the right decision. It has ensured continuity for learners and providers while providing an opportunity to assess the situation in relation to existing awards and to explore new directions in partnerships with the former and new awarding bodies. At the same time as acknowledging the benefits of using the processes of the former awarding bodies FETAC must also recognise that it also inherited the limitations associated with those same systems.

FETAC has made a large number of appropriate awards in a wide range of areas. The introduction of the framework had a significant impact on awards and standards within the further education and training sector. FETAC's placement and classification of awards on the framework brought coherence and structure to the awards within what is a very diverse sector. It has brought together, successfully, the awards of the five former awarding bodies.

It is currently estimated that there are approximately 300,000 learners per annum in the further education and training sector; on average, over 100,000 of these are receiving FETAC awards annually. Whilst this figure illustrates the substantial impact FETAC has made at national level, the Council recognises that there is significant opportunity for FETAC to develop and grow the number and range of awards it makes in the future. The Council is also keenly aware of the challenges presented in meeting the requirements of the National Skills Strategy.

FETAC has recently commenced the determination of standards under the common award system. It will test this approach and carry out a review by end December 2007. FETAC is confident that the proposed process will enable the development of quality assured, relevant awards that have status and value for the learner. Harmonising will also have a significant impact. FETAC has in the meantime begun to explore how access to awards across the former awarding bodies can be achieved as a mid-term solution.

FETAC has successfully promoted its awards. The FETAC brand is firmly established. Stakeholders including learners, have a high degree of awareness of FETAC and FETAC awards. FETAC acknowledges that it must continue to promote its awards to ensure their status and value and to strengthen the association with the levels of the framework. FETAC is committed to addressing the issue of international recognition through its continuing work in Europe.

Through the implementation of its functions FETAC has brought structure and coherence to the awards within the further education and training sector. It has contributed significantly to the recognition of the emerging sector and has provided learners with clarity and understanding of what their award stands for. FETAC has enabled access for learners at levels 1 and 2, levels which were previously outside the framework and has promoted the status and value of all FET awards.

Quality Assurance

Provider Quality Assurance

Section 18 of the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act, 1999 states that: A provider shall *"establish procedures for quality assurance for the purpose of further improving and maintaining the quality of education and training provided, organised or procured by that provider… and shall agree those procedures with the Council."* [S 18 (1)].

Policy

Following a consultation period of more than two years, FETAC published a policy to enable this section of the Act to be implemented in the further education and training sector. The provider quality assurance policy was agreed with Council in June 2004.

Under the policy any provider wishing to register with FETAC for the purpose of offering awards at levels 1 to 6 of the National Framework of Qualifications must agree its quality assurance procedures with FETAC. This requirement applies to all new providers from the date of implementation of the policy in January 2005; existing providers were required to have applied for agreement of their procedures before the end of 2006.

The policy is set out in *Quality Assurance in Further Education and Training: Policy and Guidelines for Providers.*

The main points of the policy are:

• FETAC recognises the primary role of providers in the establishment and operation of quality assurance;
• all providers must demonstrate the capacity to quality assure their further education and training programmes. While providers' quality assurance systems will vary according to the context and scale of the provider, all must address the same aspects of provision;
• agreement between FETAC and the provider on the provider's quality assurance procedures is a criterion for provider registration with FETAC;
• registered providers can submit programmes for validation against new awards;
• FETAC will monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of a provider's quality assurance procedures and will review the agreement within a maximum period of five years.

Since the process of provider registration began in January 2005, approximately 700 providers, including 136 new providers, have applied to have to have their quality assurance agreed with FETAC. Of this figure, almost 60% have agreed their quality assurance procedures and are now registered providers; the remaining are currently in the process of evaluation and will be completed by Autumn 2007. These providers represent approximately 1,200 education and training centres.

Protection for Learners

Part VII, Sections 43–47 of the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act, 1999 stipulates requirements for "Protection for Learners". It states that FETAC *"will not validate, make or recognise an award in respect of a programme of education and training of three months duration or more which is offered by providers who intend to operate programmes on a commercial and profit making basis"* unless FETAC *"is satisfied that the provider*

concerned has arrangements in place which make provision for learners where that provider ceases to provide the programme concerned".

FETAC published a policy on protection for learners 2004. All providers are required to include with their quality assurance application their policy and where appropriate, procedures on protection for learners. This process enables providers either to identify programmes to which learners can transfer or appropriate financial arrangements for the return of fees should they cease provision.

There are currently 29 registered providers who have programmes on the protection for learner register and who have protection for learner arrangements in place for these programmes.

Monitoring

The functions of the Council outlined under Section 14 of the Qualifications Act include *"to monitor and evaluate the quality of programmes of education and training in respect of which awards are made or recognised"* [S 14 (1) d].

The Council shall *"….from time to time…in consultation with the provider...review the effectiveness of procedures established under [S18 (1)] and the implementation by the provider concerned of the findings arising out of the application of those procedures"* [S 18 (4)].

The national monitoring processes and systems of the former awarding bodies were adopted by FETAC on establishment and will continue in operation until full implementation of FETAC policies and procedures. These processes are generally centred on a two stage-approach of centre approval/registration and external examining/monitoring of assessment.

Policy

In developing its policy on monitoring, FETAC had regard to the existing systems of the former awarding bodies.

Following a consultation process FETAC published a policy on monitoring in March 2006. The new monitoring policy will be implemented in Autumn 2007. The policy will apply to all registered providers and programmes leading to awards at levels 1 to 6.

FETAC will monitor providers and their programmes and services in a systematic and planned way. FETAC will produce an annual monitoring plan identifying priorities in terms of provider types, programmes and awards. The initial stage of monitoring will focus on providers' quality assurance and the attainment of national standards. When new programmes have been validated by FETAC, monitoring will include specific reference to programmes.

FETAC is in the process of developing tools and procedures for monitoring. These are currently being tested through a pilot project with a small number of diverse providers. The experience gained from this pilot will inform the full implementation of the policy.

A critical part of monitoring is self-evaluation. Providers self-evaluate the programmes and services they offer to learners with a view to identifying strengths and areas for improvement. Action plans must then be put in place and progress against plans continuously monitored.

Providers are required to initiate their self-evaluation process within a year of achieving quality assurance agreement with FETAC. The first self-evaluation reports and improvement plans were received by FETAC in late 2006. By May 2007, a total of 36 such reports have been received and evaluations are currently in progress.

An important aspect of FETAC monitoring is to ensure that provider self-evaluation is taking place and that the improvement plans developed by the providers are substantive and, crucially, implemented.

Stakeholder Feedback - Quality Assurance and Monitoring

In the feedback, stakeholders identified the process for agreeing quality assurance as rigorous and demanding. Stakeholder feedback suggests that implementing the quality assurance process has been a learning experience for providers, but overall it has buy-in from within the sector. This is clearly obvious from the warm response expressed by providers at the quarterly presentation ceremonies hosted by FETAC.

The quality assurance (QA) process is seen as comprehensive and elaborate. Some stakeholders state that it is "easier having done it once". The process is also seen as a successfully implementation of the policy as it enables very different providers in terms of size, range, funding etc. to register successfully.

Feedback from the Institutes of Technology was very positive and conveyed a growing mutual respect between two sectors for each other. It was suggested from the national perspective that, in the future, it should be possible to have more overarching national agreements that eliminate all duplication of effort. FETAC would be happy to work towards this.

Feedback from stakeholders suggests that FETAC has been very effective in establishing transparent processes for evaluation and monitoring. The focus on self-evaluation by providers is welcomed and the approach which allows a "testing of the waters" from both FETAC's and the provider's perspective is seen as positive. Stakeholders highlight the resource implication of the introduction of monitoring. Detailed guidelines and support will be required to ensure uniformity of practice in relation to self-evaluation of programmes. The community and voluntary sectors emphasise the importance of sharing information and expertise.

Conclusions

Having evaluated the information gathered and issues raised during the review FETAC draws the following conclusions in relation to provider quality assurance and monitoring and evaluating the quality of programmes.

The implementation of provider quality assurance presented a genuine challenge for the further education and training sector. FETAC acknowledges that the new processes present significant demands and challenges to providers. However, provider quality assurance marked a significant watershed in the sector, recognising the primacy of providers' own quality assurance systems as the mechanism to maintain and improve the quality of programmes. It places, for the first time, nationally, the primary responsibility for quality assurance on providers. This fact, allied with the requirement for all current providers to formally register with FETAC before the end of 2006 generated a new and concentrated focus on quality assurance across the FET sector.

The full impact of the implementation of provider quality assurance will take time to assess and evaluate. Almost 60% of existing providers have agreed their quality assurance and are now beginning the process of self-evaluation. The remaining proportion of existing providers in the sector is in the process of agreeing their quality assurance. New providers have entered the sector for the first time and are only beginning to access national certification.

The approach taken has been successful. It has enabled a large range of diverse providers to register as FETAC providers.

FETAC is committed to continuously improving its approach and this will be achieved through regular reviews. FETAC is also happy to work with other awarding bodies and institutions towards the development of overarching national agreements in relation to provider Quality Assurance.

To-date, FETAC has monitored and evaluated the quality of programmes through the continued operation of the processes of the former awarding bodies. Monitoring under the new policy commenced recently with the receipt of self-evaluation reports from providers who were the first to register with FETAC.

Full implementation of the monitoring policy will commence next year following an evaluation of an initial pilot project. The outcome of this process will enable a more measured assessment of the impact of provider quality assurance on individual providers and on the sector overall.

Through the implementation of these functions FETAC has provided a benchmark for quality assurance in the sector. Previously undocumented and informal quality arrangements have been solidified and a large number of providers are now recognised as operating under a national quality assurance framework. Learners are now participating in programmes offered by a quality assured provider.

The implementation of provider quality assurance, self-evaluation and monitoring will contribute to building capacity and expertise within the further education and training sector. Experience suggests that providers are collaborating, sharing best practice and building networks within their own specific sectors. It is envisaged that as the sector grows in expertise and confidence, such collaboration and networks will extend across all providers for the benefit of learners nationwide.

Programme Registration and Validation

Under the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act, 1999, FETAC is required to *"establish and publish… policies and criteria for the validation of programmes of further education and training"* [S 14 (1) a].

Validation is the process through which FETAC evaluates a programme of education and training. It ensures that learners on the programme will have the opportunity to reach the standards for the award to which the programme is designed to lead.

Programme Registration

Since 2001, programmes leading to awards at levels 3 to 6 were validated through the processes and procedures of the former awarding bodies.

Following the classification of awards in 2005, the Council decided to register all programmes leading to its awards by gathering and capturing specific programme details e.g. awards, programme title, duration and delivery mode. The Registration of Programmes applies to all new and existing providers offering programmes leading to FETAC awards at levels 3 to 6 on the framework. It represents the Council's first step towards a national validation process for the sector.

Registration involves gathering programmatic information through electronic systems. The online electronic programme registration system was opened in March 2006 and input of information continued through to the end of May 2006.

In 2006, over 700 centres from the further education sector registered almost 5,000 programmes with FETAC, 2,000 of which lead to a major award and 2,800 to one or more minor awards.

Following submission of this data a systematic analytical process was implemented. The programmes submitted were evaluated against a set of broad criteria relating to:

(i)   compliance with award requirements;
(ii)   title issues;
(iii) duration issues.

Issues were identified in relation to a very small proportion of the programmes. These are being addressed at the moment.

FETAC is working with FÁS, Fáilte Ireland and Teagasc with a view to including their respective programmes on the FETAC Register.

The registration of programmes will continue until new programmes are developed for the new awards under the Common Awards System. These new programmes will be validated in accordance with the Council's policy of March 2006.

Policy

During 2004, FETAC developed a draft policy for consultation with the assistance of a technical working group. Following a validation test phase, the policy on Programme Validation was agreed by Council in March 2006.

The validation of programmes policy applies to programmes leading to FETAC awards developed within the Common Awards System.

The policy will ensure that all programmes offered by registered providers leading to FETAC awards will provide learners with appropriate opportunities to reach the standards for the award. FETAC will require providers to submit programmes for validation before commencement of programme delivery.

FETAC recognises the capacity and expertise of a range of organisations including higher education institutes, VECs, FÁS, Fáilte Ireland, Teagasc and BIM in relation to programme design, development, evaluation and approval. The policy on programme validation provides for the establishment of Programme Approval Agreements with such organisations. FETAC will ensure through Programme Approval Agreements that these organisations have structures, processes and procedures in place for the evaluation and approval of programmes in accordance with FETAC guidelines and criteria. It is intended to have the agreements in place by the end of 2007.

FETAC will enable providers to develop programmes for use across a range of registered centres in order to facilitate the sharing of validated programmes. Programme Approval Agreements and shared programmes recognise both the significant expertise within the sector and ensure efficient use of resources while avoiding duplication of effort.

Standards for named awards at levels 1 and 2 have been available since 2006. The validation policy is being implemented for programmes leading to these new awards. The first programme submissions at levels 1 and 2 were received in April 2007 from a small number of providers and are currently being evaluated.

In the coming years, as new awards are introduced and as existing awards are replaced across levels 1 to 6, providers will be required to have their programmes leading to these new awards validated. FETAC will manage this process, having due regard to the impact on all stakeholders and with the fundamental objective of improving the quality of programmes for learners.

Stakeholder Feedback – Programme Registration and Validation

Providers following the registration of programmes found the system, in general easy to use and straightforward.

Stakeholders involved in the development of validation guidelines and procedures feel these to be of high quality and comprehensive.

Stakeholders recognise that the introduction of the validation process will require significant resources, which is seen as a challenge both for providers and for FETAC. They warn that these new systems must be accompanied by support and training.
In designing these new processes FETAC should consider the implications of the turnaround times involved and

the need for a highly responsive system. The community and voluntary sector question the relevance of these processes for them.

Conclusions

Having evaluated the information gathered and issues raised during the review, FETAC draws the following conclusions in relation to programme validation.

Since 2001, FETAC has relied on the processes of the former awarding bodies in relation to programme evaluation and approval. The adoption of these processes has enabled a smooth transition and a continued service to learners.

The Registration of Programmes established, for the first time, a central, national database for further education and training programmes. Given the diversity in provision and the number and range of programmes which existed across the five former awarding bodies, this was a significant piece of work for FETAC, that will be completed shortly.

FETAC will implement the new validation policy for programmes leading to new awards. This will ensure that future programmes will be developed and evaluated against a common set of standards and criteria.

FETAC is mindful of the challenges the new validation process will bring to the sector. Programme validation will be implemented on a phased basis, in parallel with the awards plan; this will enable providers to develop and share expertise and ensure efficient use of resources. It will enable a smooth and gradual transition for providers. FETAC is committed to facilitating collaboration and sharing of best practice across the sector.

Through the implementation of this function FETAC has maintained continuity for providers and learners. Confusion has been avoided. A comprehensive picture of the volume and range of existing programmes has been formed which will inform the implementation of the new policy.

Assessment

Under the Qualifications Act, the Council is required to *"ensure that providers…establish procedures for the assessment of learners which is fair and consistent and for the purpose of compliance with standards determined by the Council…"* [S 14 (2) e].

The Qualifications Act firmly identifies providers as responsible for the fair and consistent assessment of learners.

In June 2001 FETAC adopted all of the processes and procedures of the former awarding bodies in relation to assessment.

These process and systems will continue until full implementation of FETAC assessment policy in 2008.

FETAC is assured of the quality of assessment processes of the former awarding bodies. The characteristics of best practice identified across these bodies significantly informed the development of FETAC policy on assessment.

These characteristics have been identified as being in line with international practice. They include:

- internal assessment procedures;
- standards based and criterion referenced assessment;
- guidelines for assessors and verifiers;
- internal monitoring/verification procedures;
- independent external verification/examining procedures.

Policy

In 2005, FETAC established an Expert Group to advise and assist the Council in developing a national policy on assessment. This resulted in the publication of a consultation document followed by a formal and extensive consultation process.

FETAC contributed to a National Qualifications Authority of Ireland document, *National and International Practices and Trends in Classification or Grading of Awards in Further and Higher Education and Training.* This research contributed to FETAC's policy on grading which was agreed by the Council in December 2005.

The policy on quality assuring assessment was agreed by Council in March 2006. This policy identifies a framework for the quality assurance of assessment. This framework includes the publication of Award Specifications, the Quality Assuring Assessment Policy, Guidelines for Providers, and Guidelines for Internal Verifiers and External Authenticators.

Since the publication of the policy, FETAC has developed guidelines to assist providers in the development and implementation of procedures for fair and consistent assessment. These guidelines were available since May 2007.

The guidelines set out the role and responsibility of the provider with regard to quality assuring all aspects of their assessment practice, including:

- assessment of learners;
- verification and authentication of assessment;
- approval of results;
- processing appeals;
- requesting FETAC to make awards to learners.

By 2008, all registered providers will be required to have in place quality assured assessment procedures to oversee, verify and authenticate their assessment procedures.

As outlined in the monitoring policy FETAC will monitor providers' activities on an ongoing basis, including those relating to assessment, to ensure consistent application of the requirements and to safeguard the integrity of FETAC awards.

Stakeholder Feedback - Fair and Consistent Assessment

78% of online respondents and 80% of providers agreed that FETAC has ensured providers have established procedures for assessment of learners, within existing processes, that are fair and consistent.

Some providers, teachers and external examiners have expressed concerns regarding the implementation of the new policy, the resource implications and the possible impact on standards. FETAC recognises these concerns and acknowledges that it needs to put in place improved communication lines with providers. It also needs to highlight its benefits to providers and learners and its positive impact on the quality of programmes.

New provider guidelines issued recently are being viewed positively by stakeholders. They are seen as a "code of practice that will stand up globally". They are seen as capturing the best of what is out there; the challenge is to implement them on the ground.

The fact that guidelines have been designed to be implemented as appropriate in each provider's context is seen as positive.

Some stakeholders feel that the different assessment methodologies are focused on traditional forms of provision and do not take into consideration the learner in the workplace.

Conclusions

Having evaluated the information gathered and issues raised during the review, FETAC draws the following conclusions in relation to the fair and consistent assessment of learners.

The Qualifications Act states that providers are responsible for establishing procedures for fair and consistent assessment of learners. FETAC's role is to ensure that they do this. Since its establishment, FETAC has been able to rely on the assessment procedures of the former awarding bodies in fulfilling this role. Though best practice is evident within these processes, they include a variety of approaches across the various systems.

The introduction of the new policy will involve changing some current practices including the external examining process in the FE sector. FETAC appreciates the concerns raised by stakeholders in relation to resources and timing. These issues are currently being discussed with all relevant parties.

FETAC is confident that the new assessment policy will ensure fairer and more consistent assessment of learners than was possible heretofore. It is built on best national and international practice and incorporates key quality features including: improved internal quality systems; external authentication; self-evaluation of systems; action plans outlining areas for improvement; ongoing FETAC monitoring and 5 year reviews of the provider's quality assurance systems. Stakeholders can be assured that the quality of programmes and services will be enhanced and continuously developed over the next few years.

Recognition of Other Awards

The Qualifications Act requires FETAC to *"recognise further education and training awards given ..to persons who apply for those awards and who, in the opinion of the Council have achieved the standards determined by the Council"* [S 14 (1) c].

The Treaty of Rome (1957) established the right of every citizen of the European Union (EU) to practice a profession, provide a service or set up a business in any other member state. Several European Council directives dealing with recognition of qualifications are now in place. The Council of Europe/UNESCO Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning higher education, also known as the Lisbon Convention, was adopted in 1997. The Lisbon Convention aims to facilitate the recognition of higher education qualifications granted in one State in another State. It requires that requests for recognition should be assessed in a fair manner and within a reasonable time.

In the area of vocational education and training, the Copenhagen Declaration (2002) called for increased co-operation between member states in order to promote mutual trust, transparency and the recognition of competence and qualifications. Recognition of qualifications is a concrete objective set by the European Commission in order to facilitate worker and learner mobility.

It was within this context that FETAC developed a policy and process for the Recognition of Other Awards in order to promote greater employability, social inclusion and lifelong learning as noted in the objects of the Qualifications Act. The Council, following a period of consultation, published its policy in November 2003.

Policy

The objective of FETAC's recognition policy is to enable learners to gain recognition for previous learning attested to by the award they hold. The policy led to the development of two distinct processes for award recognition, each depending on the purpose for which recognition is sought. The processes identified were to enable :

• access to employment or learning opportunities;
• transfer of previously certified learning to gain credit towards a FETAC award.

FETAC established the process relating to access in 2004 and the process relating to transfer in 2005.

Recognition Processes

The implementation of the two processes enables award holders to apply for formal recognition from FETAC of their award. The efficiency of the processes has been substantially enhanced by the completion of the placement of legacy awards on the framework, the agreement on the alignment of Irish and UK awards, the Authority's policy on award inclusion and alignment and the emerging European Qualifications Framework.

Regarding enabling access, FETAC provides advice to the Authority relating to international further education and training awards. Advice provided is in the form of an Award Comparability Statement which, in the main, is used by those seeking recognition for employment purposes. FETAC's role in devising Comparability Statements diminished in 2006 with the Authority taking increased responsibility in this area.

Over 2,000 learners, who hold awards through other awarding systems, have their learning recognised by FETAC every year. FETAC enables learners to transfer from one provider to another usually by granting exemptions from the assessment process. This process initially operated for FETAC awards arising from the NCVA processes.

In 2006 the recognition process was extended to include applicants holding awards issued by the former awarding bodies, Irish higher education awards and international awards.

FETAC has a role in promoting the recognition of its own awards internationally. One of the means of achieving this is through the issue of EUROPASS certificate supplements for FETAC major awards. High take up awards were initially targeted at certificate supplement development, with 20 certificate supplements developed for level 6 Craft awards. In 2007 it is planned to develop further certificate supplements for the new level 1 and 2 awards and for awards at levels 3 to 6. As they are developed, certificate supplements will shortly be available for download from the FETAC website.

Stakeholder Feedback - Recognition of Other Awards

85% of respondents to the online survey agreed that FETAC has recognised the awards of other bodies, while 72% of providers agreed.

A key stakeholder stated that FETAC has made great progress in recognising other awards. The issue of recognising vendor specific awards was raised; recognition of some vendor awards in further education appears to be causing problems, in relation to duplication or double credit, in higher education. It was noted that FETAC and the Authority had worked closely and very successfully together in the framework alignment process.

Some stakeholders suggested that FETAC could do more to promote the service it offers in the Recognition of Other Awards. One questioned FETAC's capacity to fulfil this function, citing the need for strategic agreements with other EU Governments and agencies.

A stakeholder advised that the process itself must be more responsive in terms of the range and volume of applications and the time taken to respond.

Some stakeholders would like to see greater recognition of FETAC awards in Northern Ireland, Scotland, England and Wales.

Conclusions

Having evaluated the information gathered and issues raised during the review FETAC draws the following conclusions in relation to the Recognition of Other Awards.

FETAC has successfully established a policy and implemented a process for the Recognition of Other Awards and has made some progress on increasing international recognition for FETAC awards.

Holders of awards can for the first time, as a result of the FETAC process, have their awards from other countries recognised in a formal way here.

The process needs to be refined to ensure ease of use and to provide faster response times to meet the increasing demands from foreign nationals, international employees etc.

FETAC is close to finalising a definitive policy in aligning FETAC awards with those in Northern Ireland, Scotland, England and Wales and is working with NQAI, HETAC and other national awarding bodies in progressing this.

Learner mobility has been enhanced through the implementation of this function. Learners with FETAC awards which carry certificate supplements can use these awards abroad and other award holders can expect to have their awards recognised in Ireland.

Access, Transfer and Progression

The Qualifications Act requires FETAC to *"ensure that procedures for access, transfer and progression determined by the Authority under section 8(2)(d) are implemented by providers of programmes"* [S 14 (2) d].

The Qualifications (Education and Training) Act, 1999 set out for the first time in legislation a central role for learners within a national context of lifelong learning. The Authority has a specific role to determine the procedures to be implemented by providers for access, transfer and progression. The Act requires FETAC to assist the Authority in facilitating access, transfer and progression by ensuring that providers have adequate procedures in place.

In October 2003, the Authority published *'Policies, Actions and Procedures for Access, Transfer and Progression for Learners'*. Four themes were set out in this document – credit, transfer and progression routes, entry arrangements and information provision.

The roles and responsibilities of the Authority, awarding bodies including the Awards Councils, and providers are identified in the context of the National Framework of Qualifications.

FETAC's role is to ensure that procedures for access, transfer and progression are implemented by providers of validated programmes.

The FETAC Strategic Plan 2003–2006 set out a vision for the embedding of access, transfer and progression features into diverse functions, and includes particular objectives for meeting learner needs and promoting awards.

Policy

The Council agreed a policy on access, transfer and progression in June 2004. This policy considered both the consolidation of existing pathways, appropriate to the purpose of the existing legacy awards and the development of an infrastructure that would support access, transfer and progression arrangements.

The policy aims to:

• ensure coherence with regard to access, transfer and progression across all the Council's functions such as quality assurance and programme validation;
• comply with the legislation and the determinations of the Authority;

- develop national, transparent, equitable and inclusive opportunities for award holders, which reflect the parity of esteem with which each award is viewed and respecting the different purposes of awards.

Facilitating access, transfer and progression has underpinned and has been embedded into all of the agreed policies of the Council.

The publication of the Directory of FETAC Awards in 2006 supports the transparent articulation of transfer and progression routes at local level for existing awards.

The introduction of new awards at levels 1 and 2 in 2006 provides access to the national qualifications framework for a range of learners who formerly were excluded from having their learning recognised. These awards have been designed with transfer and progressions opportunities in mind.

The agreement of provider's quality assurance systems is a key mechanism whereby FETAC ensures access, transfer and progression arrangements for learners at local level. Providers are required to agree their systems for information provision to learners, entry arrangements, arrangements to facilitate diversity, and for the recognition of prior learning. Access, transfer and progression requirements are reinforced within providers' policies for programme development, delivery and review and for the fair and consistent assessment of learners.

In the context of recognition, implementation of FETAC's recognition process provides a mechanism through which exemptions may be granted towards the requirements of an award on the basis of other certified learning.

FETAC continues to co-ordinate the Higher Education Links Scheme ensuring progression to other programmes of education and training for holders of particular FETAC awards at levels 5 and 6. This scheme has continued to expand since its inception over a decade ago, and most recently, there has been a significant increase in the number of universities participating. The current number of participating institutions including the universities is 36. This has grown from 21 in 2002.

During 2005 FETAC and the Institutes of Technology initiated what is called the Pilot Scheme. This scheme built on the previously operated HELS and facilitates progression to courses leading to Higher Certificate (level 6), Ordinary Degree (level 7) and Honours Degree (level 8) for holder of any FETAC (NCVA) level 5 or 6 awards. Both of these schemes are operated through the Central Applications Office (CAO).

Stakeholder Feedback - Access, Transfer and Progression

73% of online respondents and 66% of providers agreed that FETAC has ensured that procedures for access, transfer and progression are implemented by providers.

The provision of access to awards at levels 1 and 2 in the framework was cited as extremely positive. However, stakeholders considered that much remains to be done by all parties in relation to access, transfer and progression at higher levels, for example, access to and progression from a Craft Certificate at level 6 and lack of progression opportunities from many other awards which originated in FÁS.

Some stakeholders noted that the difficulties around access had to do with other factors such as geography and whether employers support education and training in the workplace.

Stakeholder feedback suggests that there are a range of well established courses/programmes, in some cases certified programmes, being offered by providers which are not recognised by FETAC at a level or for the purpose of credit assignment within the framework. This was cited as a barrier to access transfer and progression for learners on these courses.

The Higher Education Links Scheme and the associated pilot scheme are viewed extremely favourably by the stakeholders. There is a call for this scheme to be extended to all FETAC awards.

Conclusions

Having evaluated the information gathered and issues raised during the review FETAC draws the following conclusions in relation to facilitating access, transfer and progression.

The completion of the placement of legacy awards in 2004 and the subsequent classification of awards in 2005 provides a transparent platform for the enhancement of transfer and progression routes pertaining to existing awards.

All further education and training awards in Ireland are set out clearly according to level and type and are clearly relative to each other in volume and breadth. This information supports greater trust, openness and understanding among stakeholders in relation to expanding opportunities across similar kinds of awards. It implements one of the key objectives of the National Framework of Qualifications, enabling comparability of awards through the provision of information.

The Common Awards System will in future ensure that major awards, which will be organised into minor and/or specific purpose awards, will facilitate the easy transfer of knowledge, skill and competence across major awards. This will encourage accumulation of learning over time and at the learner's own pace. Minor awards will be developed in relation to common core learning areas, for example, interpersonal development, health and safety. These and other minor awards can be 'transferred' across a range of FETAC major awards as required by the learner.

Through the implementation of this function FETAC has improved access for learners previously outside the levels of the framework; improved the mobility of learners within the framework levels and at the boundaries between further and higher education and training: and made significant progress in embedding the principles of access, transfer and progression in providers policies and procedures. FETAC acknowledges that there is much work to be done in this area and is committed to playing an active role in building further pathways and enhancing mobility for learners.

Recognition of Prior Learning

The Qualifications Act authorises FETAC to *"request a provider of programmes… to assist the Council in forming an opinion as to whether a person has achieved the standard determined by the Council… for the purpose of making or recognising a further education and training award…"* [S 14 (3)].

Recognition of prior learning (RPL) refers to the process of recognition of the knowledge, skills and competence an individual learner already has, however acquired.

FETAC is required by the Authority to ensure that providers implement the procedures for access, transfer and progression. The recognition of prior learning is a significant mechanism to help improve access, transfer and progression for learners and is essential for the promotion of lifelong learning.

Recognition of prior learning is described by the Authority as *"prior learning that is given a value, by having it affirmed, acknowledged, assessed or certified"*.

The Authority determined that the recognition of prior learning will be applicable to learners gaining:

• entry to programmes;
• credit towards an award or exemptions from some programme requirements;
• eligibility for a full award.

In late 2004, the Authority convened an advisory group to devise a set of national principles for the recognition of prior learning in further and higher education and training in order to underpin the introduction of policy and procedures for the recognition of prior learning in Ireland. FETAC, HETAC and other stakeholders in further and higher education were represented on this advisory group. In June 2005, on the basis of its advice, the Authority agreed principles and operational guidelines for the recognition of prior learning in further and higher education and training.

Policy

Following consultation a policy on recognition of prior learning was agreed by the Council in 2005. The policy requires providers who register with FETAC to facilitate learners through the recognition of prior learning for access to programmes, credit or exemptions from requirements of a programme and access to full awards in so far as they can subject to the availability of guidelines on recognition of prior learning.

Draft guidelines on recognition of prior learning were devised and a project commenced in late 2005 with a group of providers with the objective of piloting the implementation of RPL in accordance with the FETAC policy and guidelines. An evaluation and review was undertaken of the pilot in March 2007.

The agreement of providers quality assurance systems is a key mechanism whereby FETAC ensures the recognition of prior learning at a local level. All registered providers who had agreed their quality assurance with FETAC are aware of RPL as it is identified in the Section B4.3 (Access, transfer and progression) of the QA Guidelines.

Stakeholder Feedback - Recognition of Prior Learning

Feedback indicates that providers do not have a detailed understanding of how the process of RPL operates and that advice and support is required to raise their level of understanding.

Stakeholders identified the need for qualifications, through RPL, in particular sectors for employment purposes. Childcare, construction, hospitality and security are sectors where there is currently a particular focus on formal recognition for workers.

Some learners raised the issue of the amount of work involved. In some cases they suggest it might have been easier to go through the formal programme. Developing a portfolio was identified by learners as the most difficult aspect of the process.

Providers need time and resources to effectively develop and introduce RPL for access, for exemptions and for awards appropriate to the context of their service provision. Critical factors for effective implementation identified by providers include time, need for activity planning and development of RPL tools, the need for skilled professional staff and the need for employer commitment.

Conclusions

Having evaluated the information gathered and issues raised during the review FETAC draws the following conclusions in relation to the recognition of prior learning.

FETAC made a key decision to operate the function of recognition of prior learning through providers and not directly itself. This is in keeping with the principle of subsidiarity and it recognises the expertise of providers in assessment of knowledge, skill and competence.

As a result of the current pilot work a small number of providers are equipped to implement the process for the recognition of prior learning. FETAC is committed to the further extension of this work to include more providers spread geographically and to build capacity in the sector to recognise informal learning.

Through the implementation of this function the sector is expanding its capacity to recognise informal and prior learning under the guidance and support of FETAC.

Facilitating and Assisting the Authority

The Council is required *"to facilitate and assist the Authority in carrying out its functions"* [Section 14 (1) (g)].

Since 2001 FETAC has facilitated and assisted the Authority in carrying out its functions in a range of different areas, as outlined in the Qualifications Act, which include to:

- establish and maintain a framework;
- establish and promote the maintenance and improvement of the standards of education and training awards;
- promote and facilitate access, transfer and progression;
- determine the procedures to be implemented by providers for access, transfer and progression;
- liaise with bodies outside the state which make awards for the purpose of facilitating the recognition in the State of awards made by these bodies;
- facilitate recognition outside the State of awards made in the State.

Between 2001 and 2003 the FETAC executive worked closely with the Authority when the latter was in the process of establishing policies and criteria on which the National Framework of Qualifications would be based. FETAC strongly supported the need for a coherent means of measuring and relating all learning achievements. The FETAC executive took part in a number of bilateral and other meetings and seminars organised by the Authority towards the development of the framework policies and criteria. FETAC made a detailed response to the Authority's consultation process.

In 2004 the Authority requested FETAC to place all its existing and legacy awards on the new National Framework of Qualifications which had been launched in October 2003. FETAC put in place a policy and detailed process, including the establishment of a Council Advisory Group. The activity was completed by January 2005 so that all FETAC awards were placed with the agreement of the Authority.

The executive continues to assist the Authority with regard to (a) the development and review of its policies and (b) establishing national approaches on specific key areas including access, transfer and progression, credit and the recognition of prior learning.

FETAC has assisted the Authority, when requested to do so, by representing Ireland at a number of national and European fora.

In order to assist the Authority with regard to facilitating international recognition of awards, FETAC has developed a recognition policy and set up an internal Recognition Unit, which processes all requests from the Authority's recognition service Recognition Ireland. To date FETAC has processed 256 requests.

FETAC facilitates the Authority in their role as the National Europass Centre by issuing certificate supplements for 20 major awards. Work is ongoing in this regard.

The Authority has a clearly defined role in promoting the National Framework of Qualifications. In its own promotional strategy, FETAC initially promoted the FETAC brand, but more recently has moved to incorporating the concept of the framework in its radio commercials. The intention is to extend this "building of the framework" understanding further in the future, in conjunction with the Authority.

An extension of this work is the close collaboration of the two bodies, and others, in promoting the use of the framework in recruitment advertisements for the Public Service. The two organisations continue to liaise closely.

FETAC collaborated with the Authority and FÁS in a very successful project of promoting the framework across all FÁS centres. A similar joint project has been initiated with the further education sector.

In response to the Authority's alignment and inclusion policies published in July 2006, FETAC has recently commenced a consultation process with regard to developing its own policy on alignment and inclusion. In the Authority's policies FETAC is named as a processing body for the receipt of applications from a range of statutory, regulatory or overseas awarding bodies.

FETAC recently assisted the Authority in its own self-evaluation exercise and has previously done likewise with HETAC in its review by the Authority.

Stakeholder Feedback – Facilitating and Assisting the Authority

The Authority indicated that FETAC and NQAI work closely together; there is a feeling of working in partnership towards the same goals. The relationship has been positive, open and extensive.

In relation to the recognition of international awards, the Authority acknowledges FETAC's role in enhancing their service and enabling them to deliver timely responses.

The Authority recognises FETAC's willingness to engage and would like to continue to build the relationship in the future to further enhance collaboration particularly in the tripartite setting of FETAC, HETAC and the Authority.

Conclusions

Having evaluated the information gathered and issues raised during the review FETAC draws the following conclusions in relation to facilitating and assisting the Authority.

A strong interactive and mutually beneficial relationship exists with the Authority. FETAC is committed to building on this relationship and will continue to advise and assist the Authority in the future.

Consulting and Advising the Minister

The Council is required *"to consult with and advise the Minister or any other Minister, as the case may be, on such matters in respect of its functions as the Minister or any other Minister may request or as the Council thinks fit, and to inform the Authority of any such consultation and advice"* [Section 14 (1) (h)].

Since 2001 FETAC has advised the Minister of Education and Science and the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Employment with regard to the development of policies and their planned implementation arrangements. This includes the need to continue to build capacity in the sector in order to ensure full and successful implementation of the new arrangements with regard to quality assurance, new awards and improved services to learners.

Section 61 (1) states that a relevant body shall charge, receive and recover fees *"in relation to the performance of its functions"*. In 2003 in a report commissioned by the Department of Education and Science, FETAC, HETAC and the NQAI jointly advised the Minister in relation to the level of fees referred to above. The bodies are awaiting the Minister's decision in this regard.

The Department of Education and Science and FÁS were joint former awarding bodies for the National Craft Certificate (NCC) and as a result both were consulted regarding the placement of the NCC on the National Framework in 2004.

The Minister of Education and Science and the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Employment attended a range of public events hosted by FETAC including the National Awards Ceremony in 2002, the European Conference on QA in VET in October 2005, at which the European Network on QA in VET was launched, and the National Awards Ceremony in 2007 which celebrated the issuing of 500,000 awards by the Council since its inception.

The Department of Education and Science and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment requested FETAC in December 2006 to carry out national consultation on ECVET on their behalf. ECVET is a European Commission initiative to enable learners to gain credit in one country for learning achieved in another country. FETAC drafted a consultation paper, organised a consultation process, hosted a consultation seminar and finally drafted the National Response.

FETAC presents to the Minister of Education and Science as required in Section 57, 1, 2 the annual financial accounts together with a copy of the report of the Comptroller and Auditor General. A copy is forwarded to the Authority.

FETAC has consulted both Ministers' Departments with regard to the funding implications of FETAC policies. In particular, the advice given concerns the activities required of providers relating to the implementation of specific FETAC policies. Such consultations are ongoing.

Stakeholder Feedback - Consulting and Advising the Minister

The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment acknowledges that FETAC has met with the Minister, but suggests that FETAC should proactively pursue meetings with the Department.

The Department of Education and Science acknowledges the advice provided by FETAC to the Department across a range of matters. The Department indicated that FETAC should seek to build relationships at a variety of levels within the Department.

Conclusions

Having evaluated the information gathered and issues raised during the review FETAC draws the following conclusions in relation to consulting and advising the Minister.

FETAC has effectively consulted with and advised the Ministers. FETAC is committed to improving its relationship with both departments and will review its current communication strategy in this regard.

Delegation of Authority

The Qualifications Act provides for the formal delegation by FETAC to make awards. Section 19(1) states that *"An Foras, CERT or Teagasc may request the Council to delegate to it the authority to make further education and training awards".*

On the establishment of FETAC, the relevant bodies considered their position in relation to delegation and all three decided that they would not pursue this course of action for the time being. None of the bodies has since indicated their intention to request delegation.

Stakeholder Feedback – Delegation of Authority

Feedback from meetings with key stakeholders indicates that none intend to request delegation at this point. The view of one key stakeholder was that while FETAC is not required to have a process for delegation until there is a request, if FETAC was to set up a policy, providers considering the option of delegated authority would be better informed.

Conclusions

Having evaluated the information gathered and issues raised during the review FETAC draws the following conclusions in relation to delegation of authority.

Should any of the bodies request delegation in the future, FETAC will draft the relevant criteria and put in place a process, with the agreement of the NQAI, to enable it to happen.

Overview of National Stakeholder Feedback

A large number of stakeholders provided feedback to FETAC through a range of methods. These included interview, submission, questionnaire and group meetings. This section draws together a flavour of the stakeholder feedback to provide a sense of its nature and range.

HETAC stated that the roles of the three bodies as outlined in the legislation had the potential to create very difficult relationships between the three. However, this has not been the case in reality, mainly due to the approach taken by the people involved in each of the bodies. A spirit of co-operation has underpinned the work to-date and ensured that the legislation was enacted successfully.

Bearing in mind the differences in constituencies, the FETAC approach has been far more detailed. There is a very direct relationship with providers whereas HETAC has opted for more delegation. HETAC and FETAC appear to count awards differently; it would be useful in the future to work out a way of having comparable statistics. HETAC, in common with other stakeholders, see the provision of new awards as a key priority for the future and recommends moving rapidly to provide those awards.

The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland recognises that FETAC has been involved in extensive consultation processes. They see the level of consultation as a key element of FETAC's approach and acknowledge it as a factor in the time taken FETAC has taken to reach implementation stage. They raise an issue around the depth and breadth of penetration of FETAC's messages and consultation process into various key stakeholder organisations. The Authority and FETAC have had substantial interactions and have supported each others' work. There is a need for the Authority and the two Councils (HETAC and FETAC) to work more closely together in certain areas. The Authority has indicated this in its own self-evaluation report.

The Authority recognises that many functions are being implemented through interim arrangements. This it sees as a reflection of the complexity of moving to a new awards system within a diverse sector. The Authority supports FETAC's selection of placement and quality assurance as the first processes for implementation.

FÁS is concerned that many awards are still outside the framework through foreign, mainly UK, agencies. Grappling with the cohort that needs up-skilling represents FETAC's greatest opportunity. FETAC needs to make an impact for people at work to assist the national competitiveness endeavour. FETAC needs to set up a process with governments in other countries so that processes of recognition work faster. "The Higher Education Links scheme is highly innovative and hugely successful; we need more of that."

Fáilte Ireland believes that FETAC has dealt with a large range of awards in different fields of learning, with a variety of providers in a professional, consultative and flexible manner. Much activity in terms of making awards to date has focused on recognition and placement of existing awards at levels 3 to 6. This has been a challenge in some respects but has been largely successful.

Fáilte Ireland commented that FETAC has been comprehensive in its publication of policies, procedures and associated guidelines and other resources, and is committed to wide-ranging consultation. The sheer volume of documentation associated with this can sometimes be perceived to be overwhelming. This is not necessarily reflective of a weakness in FETAC; it reflects the enormity of the task that has been given to FETAC. Fáilte Ireland would welcome any activities that would encourage and support the higher education institutions in implementing more flexible approaches to provision.

Teagasc has some concerns around the absence of new awards. The awards being made by FETAC are those of the former awarding bodies. Nonetheless the placement of former awards has been a tremendous achievement and has enabled progression for some learners to third level. Teagasc sees legislation as being a major driver for new awards over the coming years. The ability to provide appropriate awards with flexible arrangements for migrant workers will be important.

IVEA sees FETAC as effective in making awards and in the recognition of the awards of other bodies. It sees the quality assurance processes as demanding but "easy to use when you have been through them once". IVEA believes that FETAC needs to be proactive in providing awards in areas where vendor awards are currently used and raised concerns about the shortfall of awards at level 6. They have high praise for the people working in FETAC, but raise a concern about FETAC's familiarity with "what is happening on the ground". IVEA indicated that FETAC has been highly effective in promoting FETAC awards and suggests that there is a need to continue promotion by carrying out a campaign to get industry to accept these awards.

The NAPD is concerned about FETAC deadlines and the ability of providers to meet these. They fear that FETAC is not providing awards to meet all the needs of the sector. They emphasise the role of monitors in maintaining quality and standards in the future. They advise against FETAC becoming remote from teachers. Nonetheless NAPD thinks "it is fantastic that we have our own Irish awards" and are proud of what we have. NAPD sees FETAC as responsive in its operations. "FETAC has a good organisational structure, you always get a response!". NAPD in common with several other stakeholders, notably FÁS, Forfás, Fáilte Ireland, Teagasc and ICTU, see up-skilling as the major issue for the future. This will lead to more demand for flexibility of assessment in support work-based and part-time learning.

The Department of Education and Science indicated that FETAC should seek greater support at senior levels within major stakeholder organisations. More work is needed on enabling access and progression to the higher levels of the framework. A scheme similar to the Higher Education Links Scheme should be available to all award holders.

The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment see the recognition of prior learning, particularly informal learning, as an important area and it would be good if FETAC were seen to provide support for this.

Forfás identifies implementing the National Skills Strategy by FETAC as a big challenge. This involves delivering certification to match upskilling in the workplace. Private providers will have a significant role to play in the implementation of the National Skills Strategy. The process and language around QA may be a deterrent to private providers getting involved. The placing of awards on the framework is a very helpful selling point for Forfás policy and in negotiation with employers etc. Forfás is concerned about FETAC's capacity to meet the needs of diverse providers with a diverse range of award needs. On the international front, it is a strength of FETAC's that they have interlinked with and often lead Europe.

Institutes of Technology, Ireland indicated that one of FETAC's major strengths is the coherence that it has brought to the awards in the sector. FETAC has also managed to embed FETAC awards in the public consciousness and this can be seen in learners' comments that "I have my FETAC in…" The Institutes would like to see a reciprocal recognition agreement between HETAC, FETAC, NQAI and IUQB Quality Assurance processes.

Dublin Institute of Technology acknowledged FETAC's achievements in relation to access, transfer and progression but indicated that FETAC has limited control regarding progression from further education to

higher education and that the two sectors need to liaise more closely to ensure s seamless transition is provided to all users. The Institute suggested that FETAC should rationalise with a view to gaining wider recognition for fewer award titles.

HEA indicated that FETAC has brought coherence to making of awards in the further education and training sector. FETAC awards are increasingly being used for access to higher education but perhaps there would be an advantage in building a provision into all awards that supports entry to higher education. HEA suggests that while there is a bewildering array of awards there are many areas not addressed and has particular concerns in relation to awards for non-nationals attending English language courses.

ICTU would like to see all awards meeting the needs of learners and the economy, particularly in relation to up-skilling. ICTU sees a need for FETAC to have greater direct connection with learners and with the "modestly skilled" non-national workers. ICTU sees access as a concern in this regard but the restriction on access is often not due to the awarding body but to the absence of paid educational leave. ICTU indicated that it sees delivering on the needs of learners as a priority for the sector over the next few years. In this context FETAC has a very important role of providing awards that are relevant, accessible and of value to those learners. FETAC needs to invest in its ICT system and this may allow more frequent assessment opportunities for learners.

IBEC indicated that FETAC has made tremendous strides in relation to making awards and this has put FETAC on the map, but raised concerns about the coherence of the range of awards and the duplication which exists.

Skillnets indicated that there has been a big improvement in FETAC's engagement with industry and stated that consultation is FETAC's way of doing things. The quality assurance processes are onerous but stand up to scrutiny. Skillnets raised questions about the provision of assessment opportunities which are not frequent enough to support work-based learning.

AONTAS expressed the view that capacity building is required for the community sector. There is a fear amongst providers in this sector concerning their capacity to comply with FETAC requirements. This is seen as a threat to the kind of provision that they offer. There is a danger it "may disappear because of this".

The National Learning Network highlighted the level of consultation and interaction by FETAC with stakeholders as worthy of particular praise. NLN regards the development of awards at levels 1 and 2 to be worthy of great praise in ensuring that "everyone regardless of their ability can now access FETAC certification". FETAC has been effective in managing the transition processes involved in assuming the functions of former awarding bodies while paving the way for the adoption of new functions.

NALA finds it easy to engage with FETAC. They are concerned to ensure that levels 1 and 2 are treated as an integral part of the framework. While there is a wealth of experience around awards at levels 3 to 6, there is very little experience in relation to levels 1 and 2. There is a need to capture the requirements of those operating at levels 1 and 2. FETAC awards give learners a sense of ownership and this can be seen when they refer to "My FETAC…" NALA believes that FETAC can be in a position of leadership in Europe in relation to levels 1 to 3 of the framework.

The Wheel sees the framework as very important to the Community Voluntary sector, providing alternative pathways to progression for those people who have either missed or not succeeded in mainstream education.

They see a need for many awards that have capacity building as their aim. Awards in the area of community development represent significant progress in meeting the needs of the sector, but there is a need for more awards in generic leadership, management, training, HR and facilitation.

Learners are aware that FETAC is the awarding body for their courses. Most of them did not have a deep understanding of what FETAC does. They think that FETAC could increase awareness amongst employers, the general public and other potential learners. FETAC should be increasing the perceived value of the awards. One group felt the programmes leading to FETAC awards were excellent and they had great support from the centre and in particular their co-ordinator. Another considered it a necessity to have a FETAC qualification to enable them to succeed in gaining employment. In a third group the learners felt that FETAC accreditation meant that the course they are enrolled in had met particular standards or requirements.

Among providers there was a high level of agreement in respect of FETAC performing its functions. 80% to 90% of providers agreed that FETAC performed its functions well in relation to awards, quality assurance, recognition, assessment and the setting of standards. Other functions such as the delivery of a quality system to providers and ensuring the quality of the awards fared relatively well scoring around 70%.

Two areas were, however, identified by providers for careful monitoring. Firstly, FETAC's responsibility for keeping itself informed of the education, training, skills and qualifications requirements of all sectors and secondly, its promotion of awards internationally. Both of these demonstrated a large number of 'don't knows' - almost 40%.

Some teachers, evaluators and external examiners who responded through the online questionnaire praised progress to date but expressed concerns about the impact that changes to the assessment processes may have. These concerns focused on the independence of external authenticators. Some of these respondents advocated the retention of external examiners as a means of maintaining standards.

Conclusions

The Council is pleased with the level of involvement by stakeholders. The various approaches adopted resulted in significant contributions at several levels from key stakeholders. Their willingness to participate was in keeping with the largely positive impact FETAC is seen to have had to date.

The Council concludes that it has performed all of its statutory functions successfully.

However, throughout the external consultation phase of the review two key themes, in relation to the future, emerged time and again:

* meeting the requirements of the economy and in particular those highlighted by the recently published document *Towards a National Skills Strategy;*
* the changing profile of the learner.

While many issues were raised by stakeholders through the review process the five most significant were:

* the need for a comprehensive suite of awards to meet the needs of the learner, providers and social and economic needs;
* FETAC's capacity to meet the demand for new awards;

- the recognition of FETAC awards as awards with status and value, in particular with employers and industry groups;
- the full implementation of all FETAC functions and the challenge of achieving this through partnership with others;
- the need for a system of assessment and certification which supports diverse modes of learning.

These issues are further explored in Section 6, where the challenges they represent for FETAC are identified and linked to the draft Strategic Plan.

Section 3
Evaluation of FETAC Organisational Structures and Processes

In evaluating its organisational structures and processes FETAC looked at three main areas:

   a)   overarching principles and processes;
   b)   governance and organisational processes;
   c)   business processes.

Overarching Processes and Principles

FETAC is required by legislation to carry out a broad range of functions. In its first Strategic Plan 2003 - 2006 FETAC identified a number of principles and values which would underpin how it would approach this work. These principles and values reflected the objects of the Qualifications Act, the range of functions to be carried out and the diversity of the further education and training sector. They can be identified as placing the learner at the centre of all developments, working in partnership with others and promoting quality. FETAC set about carrying out its work in a transparent and open way.

In taking a learner-centred approach FETAC undertook to underpin all of its work with the needs of the learner. This approach meant that the benefits and effects for the learner would be explored in relation to policy development and implementation. It also set FETAC the challenge of building the status and recognition of FETAC awards.

FETAC recognised that if it was going to succeed in implementing its functions within the diverse further education and training sector it would have to do so in partnership with the key stakeholders and especially the former awarding bodies. Acknowledging the experience and expertise of others, FETAC involved stakeholders in policy development through consultation which took a variety of forms including consultative groups, expert groups, web consultation etc. The principle of subsidiarity has had a significant bearing on the approaches adopted in FETAC policies. Memoranda of Agreement with key stakeholders have been drafted to establish clear roles and responsibilities within each of the functional areas. When finalised, these agreements will benefit all concerned.

FETAC set out to underpin all of its work with a quality approach. Through its work with providers FETAC must ensure quality of provision, of programmes and of awards. In addition, FETAC as an organisation set out to do its business in a quality assured way. As with partnership, the principle of quality is embedded in the development and implementation of all FETAC policies. To ensure quality of approach in its own processes and procedures FETAC developed an internal quality management system. The achievement of the internationally recognised Quality Standard ISO9001 2000 is confirmation that FETAC has achieved its aim.

Stakeholder Feedback – Overarching Principles and Processes

Stakeholders acknowledge that continuing "business as usual" through the operation of former awarding body processes benefited the learner. The learner-centred approach taken by FETAC is seen to be a major strength.

It is felt by the key stakeholders that FETAC has worked closely with the former awarding bodies in a transparent and collaborative way and that engagement has been open and positive. "A spirit of co-operation has underpinned the work to date." The feeling of working in partnership with FETAC is strong.

To implement all functions fully, FETAC will need to continue to work through others, in particular through

providers. In this regard there are issues in respect of capacity building and resources that need to be addressed.

In relation to consultation, FETAC is a body which is recognised throughout the sector as one which consults. Stakeholders feel that it is important to ensure the effectiveness of this consultation. The mode of consultation may need to be adapted depending on the organisation being consulted.

There is agreement that FETAC can not do the job alone. Stakeholders suggest that as with any catalyst for change FETAC must oversee the transfer of expertise and knowledge to the organisations to which a function or process is delegated.

Key stakeholders see FETAC as an organisation which is striving to implement a quality approach. It is seen as an organisation which delivers a quality service. Some areas for improvement were suggested, including the ICT interface for providers used for the certification process, improved communications with providers and more support for providers.

Conclusions

Having evaluated the information gathered and issues raised during the review FETAC draws the following conclusions in relation to its overarching processes and principles.

The success to date of FETAC in the further education and training sector has been achieved because FETAC has approached its legislative mandate in an inclusive, consultative, open and transparent way. Stakeholders feel that they have been partners in this process. The gains made by FETAC have been gains for the learner, the providers and the sector as a whole.

FETAC has made a good start. The full implementation of all its functions over the next five years will only be achieved through continued partnerships and further embedding of the culture and ethos which FETAC developed since its inception.

It is worth noting that the Council developed its policies in respect of standards, assessment, programme validation, in keeping with the principles of subsidiarity. The outcome is a form of delegation which was intentional and suited to both the tradition and the future of the further education and training sector. It facilitates a delicate balance between the need for national, coherent and consistent processes on the one hand, with flexibility and individuality in local, regional and sectoral provision on the other. Furthermore, it is an approach which will be reviewed in conjunction with the relevant bodies in the light of evolving practice and progress.

FETAC is at the beginning of a new phase of its evolution as an organisation. Implementing its policies through partnership with others will not be easy. The practicalities and resource implications of this approach will only emerge over time. For instance the current process for the development of standards through standard development groups has just commenced. The work of the first groups is being carefully monitored. There will be a substantial review of this work at the end of 2007. Human resource and financial implications, time frames, level and degree of input required will be examined and recommendations made for the future. This testing and reviewing process will be implemented for each area where providers and other organisations take responsibility for particular areas such as programme approval, recognition of prior learning etc.

For FETAC to achieve its objectives over the next five years, roles and responsibilities for various processes must be clarified and agreed with providers and other organisations with proven expertise and capacity. In order to do this, FETAC will continue to work with all concerned in a proactive, consultative and inclusive way.

Governance and Organisational Processes

Council

The principles described above relating to corporate and organisational government are also applied internally within FETAC.

The Council itself is a model of partnership, including representation from the social partners, the former awarding bodies, the providers, learners and the two parent Departments (Education and Science, Enterprise, Trade and Employment). It is a corporate body and adopted the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies in November 2001. The Code informs FETAC Council members and staff on the standards applicable in performing their duties and functions.

The first Council of FETAC held office from June 2001 to June 2006. Following this first term a review of the committee structures was undertaken. A new Council was appointed in December 2006.

The Council has established four Committees of Council to which authority is delegated on certain key policy and operational matters:

- the Policies Committee ensures that policies for all of FETAC's key business functions are developed in a structured manner to meet requirements;
- the Finance Committee oversees financial management and control in FETAC to ensure that resources are used efficiently and effectively;
- the Audit Committee is responsible for the internal audit function including risk management and for ensuring corporate governance compliance in FETAC. The annual Statement on the Systems of Internal Financial Control is signed by the Chairperson of the Council on behalf of the Council as a key responsibility;
- the Standards Advisory Board role is to quality assure the standards development process in FETAC and reports to the Council in an advisory capacity.

Staff

FETAC staff are responsible for delivering the processes of the Council including results processing and certification, financial management, human resources policies and procedures, ICT systems and security.

Structure

The organisational structure for FETAC was agreed and approved by the Department of Education and Science in 2001 following an assessment of the needs of FETAC in taking over the role of the former awarding bodies and additional functions specified in the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act, 1999.

The Department agreed staffing for FETAC to consist of 44 permanent positions as follows:

- Chief Executive;
- Director of Awards and Standards;
- Director of Services;
- Head of Administration;
- Development Officers (10);
- Executive/administrative support staff (30).

The thirty executive/administrative staff are operating on the following grades:

Grade VII	2
Grade VI	2
Grade V	6
Grade IV	9
Grade III	11

By 2003 FETAC had recruited its full complement of permanent staff (Appendix 2). In order to meet specific skills needs and manage periods of peak operational activity, FETAC employ a number of staff on a temporary/contract basis.

Initially, FETAC established seven sections - Policy Development, Certification, Information Technology, Human Resources, Communications, Corporate Services and Finance.

Development is responsible for the development, implementation and review of FETAC policies. In addition Development co-ordinate and facilitate consultation and partnership. The section is subdivided into four main areas: awards and standards, recognition, monitoring and registration and validation of programmes.

Certification manages the various certification and related processes operated by FETAC. This includes the issue of over 100,000 certificates a year and the operation of a dedicated helpdesk which provides support to centres.

Communications is responsible for implementation of FETAC's Communications strategy and ensures that all promotional activity supports the achievement of the strategic milestones. In addition to managing FETAC's advertising campaigns, Communications also manages sponsorship, attendance at a range of promotional events, FETAC's panel of Award Representatives and facilitation of a wide range of international groups who request briefings on FETAC.

Corporate Services manages the processes required to ensure effective administration and co-ordination of Council and its Committees. They are also responsible for data management, co-ordination of expert and technical working groups and administrative support to the executive.

Human Resources is responsible for a range of organisational processes to support the business and ensure effective staff management, staff development and employee participation and engagement across the organisation. The publication of the Employee Handbook in 2003 identified the organisational legislative and non-legislative policies and procedures within FETAC. These policies and procedures broadly outlined key

delivery processes within HR: these include recruitment; performance management; training and development; employee welfare; and employee well being.

Finance is responsible for the operation of a range of financial processes to ensure effective financial management of the organisation. These include standard financial accounting controls, monthly management accounts, bi-monthly reporting to NQAI and DES, and the production of the Annual Financial Statements. An internal audit function and the annual Comptroller and Auditor General audit confirm FETAC's strong financial management approach.

The recent commencement of policy implementation necessitated a change in this structure and a new section to manage the Quality Assurance Provider Registration process was introduced in early 2005.

Provider Registration is responsible for managing the provider registration process. Initially work focused on providing support and information for providers. The section currently manages the registration process. Almost 700 providers representing approximately 1,200 centres have submitted their quality assurance policies and procedures for agreement to date.

IT is responsible for the development and maintenance of FETAC's Information and Communications systems which are central to FETAC's business processes.

As more FETAC policies are implemented over the next few years an organisation review to ensure that the structure and skills meet this demand will be initiated. Appendix 3 shows the current organisation structure.

FETAC is committed to best practice in relation to internal communications. A formal structure of meetings permeates the organisation. The senior management team and various sections meet weekly, a cross organisational group meets at monthly planning sessions and there are regular all staff briefings. These meetings are further enhanced by regular meetings of the programme office steering group (project management) and meetings relating to FETAC's Quality Management System (QMS).

FETAC has introduced and supports flexible working patterns within the organisation. Arrangements are made on the basis of a balance between the needs of the individual and the needs of the organisation.

Performance Management and Development

FETAC introduced a Performance Management Development System (PMDS) in 2005. PMDS enables FETAC to achieve organisational success by optimising each individual's contribution, by:

- aligning an individual's contribution to sectional and organisational goals;
- clarifying expectations within the section;
- facilitating equitable recognition and feedback;
- encouraging personal and career development.

Training and development needs of staff are identified through PMDS and ongoing analysis of the skills and competencies needed to meet the changing demands of FETAC.

PMDS will be reviewed in November 2007 to ensure it is achieving its objectives.

Partnership

Under the terms of *Sustaining Progress 2003–2005 and Towards 2016*, FETAC's staff have consistently delivered on all of the commitments made under those agreements. Working with the internal partnership group established in 2003, and reporting to the Performance Verification Group of the Department of Education and Science, FETAC has been awarded all the national pay increases through the delivery of significant organisational improvements, such as cross-functional working and flexible working time.

Location

FETAC moved into its current offices in East Point in 2002. In December 2003, the Government announced a decentralisation plan for a number of civil service departments and state agencies. FETAC was listed to decentralise to Edenderry, Co Offaly. This is a significant issue for the Council and staff and raises concerns about the impact such a move will have on the operational effectiveness of FETAC, particularly in relation to organisational knowledge and capacity to maintain high quality service.

FETAC is working closely with HETAC, NQAI, the Department of Education and Science and OPW with regard to decentralisation.

Quality

FETAC committed in its Strategic Plan 2003-2006 to build its capacity as an organisation so that it would achieve its mission by delivering a comprehensive and effective service to its stakeholders.

A key strategic objective and milestone was to implement a quality management system within the organisation and to obtain an internationally recognised standard.

FETAC developed a systematic process for managing its many processes using the structure of the ISO9001:2000. Approximately one hundred processes were documented. An internal audit and management review was established and this led to the setting of quality objectives and metrics for FETAC for 2007. Staff from across the organisation were involved in the project and participated in a cross function project team, attended training and information briefings.

In March 2007, FETAC was audited by SGS Ireland against the requirements of the ISO9001:2000 standard. After the audit, SGS confirmed that FETAC's quality management system met the requirements of the ISO9001:2000 standard.

This means that FETAC has in place a systematic way to manage and improve its processes. This includes new tools such as Corrective Action, Root Cause Analysis, Process Metrics, Internal Audit and Management Review all of which will help FETAC to maintain and continuously improve the service it provides to its customers and stakeholders.

As part of this quality management system, and in line with the requirements of the ISO9001:2000 Standard, continuous surveillance audits of FETAC will be carried out every six months by SGS Ireland to ensure compliance.

Planning

The introduction of a project management approach to FETAC in 2003 ensured that the Strategic Plan 2003–2006 would be implemented within an agreed timeframe.

A portfolio of projects critical to the success of the plan was identified; project managers were nominated and trained. 34 strategic projects have been successfully completed under the management of the Programme Office.

A review of the Programme Office was undertaken in 2005. Amendments made to the process and documentation have improved the effectiveness of the Programme Office in supporting the implementation of the Strategic Plan.

To further support the achievement of FETAC's strategic objectives and milestones an operational planning process was introduced in 2004. This process ensures that all operational activity leads to the achievement of strategic milestones. As it is coordinated across all sections of the organisation and monitored quarterly it allows for speedy identification of areas of concern and supports the effective management of resources.

Stakeholder Feedback – Governance and Organisational Processes

A number of the stakeholders were concerned about FETAC's capacity, as currently structured, to meet the challenges of the implementation phase.

Staff in FETAC are seen by stakeholders as a key strength. Feedback indicates that the staff at all levels of the organisation are informed, helpful and willing to engage, "the people are very professional and approachable", "always willing to help". The expertise, knowledge and experience held within the organisation is acknowledged and commended.

The staff themselves in the internal Communications Survey 2006 indicated that FETAC equips them with the knowledge and support to do their job (92%). 83% agree that they know how their role contributes towards FETAC's overall strategic objectives - this represents an improvement in role clarity of 12% since 2005 and 100% of staff are confident that they know where to go to get the information they need.

Staff have some concerns about the lack of progression opportunities in a relatively small and flat organisation, the appropriateness of grading and levels of responsibility and the level of reliance on contract staff. All staff state the need to revisit and review the staff structure as the implementation phase progresses. The need to continuously improve internal communications was also raised.

There is strong positive feedback from staff for conditions of work, in particular, flexible work arrangements and the initiatives undertaken by FETAC to implement a work/life balance. In addition, staff feel that FETAC promotes and encourages training and development of its staff through various arrangements including the education assistance programme.

One stakeholder, aware of FETAC's recent achievement of ISO standard, warned about becoming less flexible as a result.

Conclusions

Having evaluated the information gathered and issues raised during the review, FETAC draws the following conclusions in relation to governance and organisational processes.

FETAC is committed to best practice in governance and organisational processes. The level and structure of staffing has been appropriate for the initial phases of establishment and policy development. FETAC has met the changing demands of the sector and of its stage of development through training, development, up-skilling and review of organisational structure. The organisation has met its commitments under partnership and the formal meeting structures have enabled smooth operation to date.

Commitment to enabling people and valuing learning has underpinned staff training and development and the staff are acknowledged as key to the current and future success of the organisation.

The structure of the organisation will be reviewed as the implications of the implementation stage become clearer. Staff training and development will remain a priority.

Project management, quality and PMDS process will be subject to ongoing review to ensure continuous improvement and appropriate linkages.

Business Processes

Certification

Since its establishment in June 2001 FETAC has taken over the certification and results processing functions from the former awarding bodies. This has been done on a gradual basis with the co-operation of FÁS, Fáilte Ireland and Teagasc. FETAC has also taken over the certification of the Foundation Certificate previously awarded by NCEA to learners within higher education institutes. In addition, FETAC inherited the processes of NCVA.

FETAC has adopted the relevant processes and procedures of the former awarding bodies and adapted them as appropriate. In practice, this involves a labour intensive effort of mixing paper-based and IT systems to deliver awards to learners. This is an ongoing task as each of the former awarding bodies had their own individual systems of certification and results processing in place.

The demands on Certification have changed over the last 5 years. The volume of awards made has increased from 30,000 in 2001 to approximately 130,000 in 2006. The frequency of certification has increased to meet the demand of key industry sectors. For example FETAC now issues over 2,000 certificates on a fortnightly basis to FÁS to meet the specific needs of the construction industry, where certification is mandatory for workers to apply for employment cards/licences. This is in addition to the twice yearly major results processing requirements in June and December. All of this adds to the scope and complexity of the IT systems required to support these processes.

A service desk was introduced in 2005 to provide dedicated support to providers for the many issues that

arise for providers particularly during the June and December assessments. Over 2,000 calls per month are handled by the service desk during these assessment periods.

Information and Communications Technology

The information and communications technology (ICT) environment is critical to FETAC's success, both in implementing its policies and providing the necessary services to the further education and training sector.

FETAC's certification processes are fully dependent on ICT. Initially, ICT systems were developed in-house on an ad hoc basis from the inherited systems to meet immediate needs. These systems require a variety of different methods of collecting data, including online, file transfer and paper which are particularly labour intensive. Considerable work has been undertaken since the establishment of FETAC in developing and enhancing these systems to ensure the certification demands of the sector can be met. However, these systems are at risk, as identified in the Risk Assessment Audit carried out in 2003, and they require high levels of maintenance to avoid issues that could impact on the integrity of the certification process.

In addition to the certification processes, new business functions such as quality assurance, programme validation, standards development and related business requirements, including the provision of comprehensive statistical data, demand effective ICT systems. The ICT systems currently in use were not designed for or intended to cater for these requirements and they are not capable of being upgraded to meet the new demands.

FETAC agreed an ICT Strategy and aligned it with its Strategic Plan in September 2004. The strategy set out a vision and actions for ICT over the three year period of 2004 to 2007. The development of a new Integrated ICT system is the main priority of the ICT Strategy.

An integrated ICT system will support the integrity of the certification processes, facilitate the provision of constructive feedback and management information to FETAC itself and, critically, support the demands of a diverse and changing sector by catering for the requirements of over 700 providers representing 1,200 centres.

To date, a feasibility study and detailed business requirements gathering has been completed. FETAC is currently awaiting approval to commence the development of the integrated system.

The ICT Strategy also identified Information Technology Infrastructure Library (ITIL) as a best practice framework for managing FETAC's IT infrastructure including hardware, software, networks and associated services. ITIL will support both the existing and future application systems. FETAC commenced implementation of the ITIL process during 2005 and providers, and FETAC itself, have already experienced the benefits of this best practice model through the successful operation of the FETAC helpdesk.

Statistical Reporting

Since 2001 FETAC has provided a range of statistical information in relation to certification. These statistics are published on the FETAC website. FETAC provides a range of statistics to NQAI and to the Department of Education and Science to meet reporting requirements in relation to the National Development Plan and to meet UNESCO, OECD and EUROSTAT reporting requirements. FETAC provides detailed statistical data to Forfás for the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs. In addition, statistics are provided on an ad hoc basis to support decision-making processes in the Department of Education and to a range of other bodies on request.

Between 2001 and 2005, it was not possible to provide detailed analyses of awards statistics as a result of differences in approach under the processes of the former awarding bodies. With the completion of the placement process in 2005 and the classification of awards in 2006 analyses of FETAC awards data can now be carried out across a range of variables. These analyses have been carried out on the data for awards made in 2006 and are published on FETAC's website.

Customer Service

A Customer Service Charter was published in September 2004. This was supported by a comprehensive action plan which involved a variety of steps to ensure that the service delivered meets the needs of stakeholders. These steps include staff training in customer service, surveys on the service requirements of stakeholders and the establishment of focus groups to provide detailed feedback on services.

Stakeholder research has been initiated to evaluate service provision and to ensure that FETAC's commitment to delivering a quality customer service is met. Phase 1 of this research, which involved qualitative telephone interviews with 21 providers was completed by an independent market research company in March 2007.

The results were very positive with indications that satisfaction with FETAC amongst providers is high across all areas, from communication of information to certification and online systems.

Phase 2 was completed in July 2007. It comprised a quantitative online survey e-mailed to all registered providers. 400 providers responded and took part in the survey which explored their level of satisfaction with the service FETAC provides. The results from the second phase are also very positive. There is a high level of satisfaction with FETAC's overall service and improvements in the service level were recognised and commended. The survey results also point to areas that could be improved.

From its establishment in 2001 FETAC continued, for a period, to oversee the operation of the NCVA support service. Traditionally this service had been staffed through a small number of VECs. Over the years responsibility for management and co-ordination of this service has moved to the City of Dublin VEC.

Stakeholder Feedback – Business Processes

82% of online respondents and 77% of providers agree that FETAC has quality processes. Most respondents agree that the processes are flexible and easy to use. Some providers indicate that the assessment opportunity timing and turnaround times need to improve to meet the needs of commercial and community sectors. Some providers mentioned difficulties in relation to the work involved in entering results data onto FETAC systems.

Customer satisfaction surveys indicate that providers are generally happy with FETAC ICT systems. One respondent suggested that FETAC should "…expand the website and online entry system - both of which are very good tools." A key stakeholder suggested that investment in ICT is badly needed and that this may provide more frequent assessment opportunities. A new ICT system could provide a more user-friendly face for centres providing data to FETAC.

Providers state that interactions with the helpdesk and personal contacts in FETAC are very satisfactory. Problem resolution is very good. The FETAC website is seen as a valuable source of information and almost all deadlines are well communicated.

The issuing of certificates is working very well and turnaround times are good.

A key stakeholder pointed to the need to provide information on awards that would enable comparisons to be made between bodies. Another stakeholder commented that the shortage of particular statistical data is a stumbling block in determining future skill needs.

Support for providers is a key theme throughout the stakeholder feedback. In commenting on FETAC's role and priorities going forward providers emphasise the need for support and capacity building.

Conclusions

Having evaluated the information gathered and issues raised during the review, FETAC draws the following conclusions in relation to its business processes.

The business processes established and developed since 2001 have worked well. Customer satisfaction levels are, in general, high. FETAC acknowledges the need to continuously review these processes and to develop them to ensure continuity of quality service.

FETAC is awaiting confirmation of funding to implement the ICT strategy and is committed to moving ahead with this work as soon as possible.

FETAC will work proactively with all stakeholders to provide statistics in relation to awards in order to meet the needs of stakeholders. FETAC statistics have become more comprehensive and inclusive since 2006 and will improve significantly when the new ICT system is introduced.

Satisfaction levels of stakeholders, in particular providers, will continue to be monitored and improvement plans will be developed, implemented and monitored through the planning process.

FETAC recognises the need for a support service which spans the sector. The FE Support Service provides information and support to providers within the FE sector. Many providers do not come under this umbrella. FETAC must work proactively to ensure that support for these providers is made available to ensure the successful implementation of its policies and of the framework itself.

Section 4
Evaluation by Objectives

FETAC published its Strategic Plan 2003 – 2006 in June of 2003. The plan set out FETAC's mission, vision and values and identified five key strategic objectives for the organisation.

Reviewing Progress

Progress against the plan was first reviewed in 2004. This review led to the identification of new milestones for 2007. A second review was undertaken in 2006, extending milestones to 2008 in the form of an outline plan.

Milestones Achieved

The Strategic Plan 2003 – 2006 identified 30 milestones to June 2006. All of these milestones were achieved.

Following the reassessment of the milestones arising from the second review of the Strategic Plan and having reviewed the programme of projects, a range of milestones were identified for FETAC for the next three years to the end of 2008. The current status of these milestones is outlined at the end of this section.

Implementation of the Strategic Plan

- FETAC ensured that all 15 strategic objectives were met and the milestones achieved through detailed operational planning and through the implementation of the project management approach it adopted in 2004.

- Detailed annual operational plans were developed for each section of the organisation. These plans contained internal and external organisational goals and targets.

- Projects directly related to the strategic objectives and published milestones of the Strategic Plan were identified and coordinated through the project management process. This process ensured the integration and alignment of the various projects. It provided efficient management of dependencies and cross-project issues and it created a structure through which projects could be monitored, reviewed and controlled. In summary the process provided a central point for the provision of project control and support to individual projects.

- Since its inception, 48 projects have been managed through the Programme Office. 33 have been successfully closed as at 28 May 2007.

(i) FETAC met the **needs of learners** in further education and training through the provision of awards by:

- increasing the number of awards made to learners;
- introducing new awards and standards at levels 3 – 6 through the processes of the former awarding bodies;
- establishing tools and methodologies for the efficient development of new standards;
- introducing new awards and standards at levels 1 and 2;
- establishing a fully transparent national awards system through the classification of all awards and the publication of the updated Directory of FETAC Awards;
- ensuring increased opportunities for learners to transfer and progress using FETAC awards;
- registering all new providers accessing FETAC awards through the quality assurance process;
- enabling learners to accumulate minor awards over time;

- registering programmes leading to FETAC awards, and establishing a register of these programmes;
- ensuring providers offering programmes on a commercial and profit making basis have arrangements in place for the protection of learners;
- completing a pilot project with a small number of providers which enabled learners' prior experience and learning to be recognised and making recommendations for the future;
- recognising other, non-FETAC, awards.

Feedback

- 91% of online respondents and 70% of providers agree that FETAC has catered for learners' needs by providing awards that are accessible, relevant and of high quality.
- Adult learners' representative believes that FETAC has definitely catered for the needs of learners and that FETAC has made a very good start.
- A national provider indicated that FETAC is in the first stages of implementation of a huge national project with relatively limited resources. While much work has been done in terms of setting the ground work, much remains to be done.
- A trade union representative indicated that FETAC's major strength in this regards is its continuous listening, as a result learners and employers value FETAC awards.
- An industry representative believes that while FETAC has done a good job here, there are some concerns about the organisation's capacity to meet the high level of demand.

(ii) FETAC has **built partnerships and engaged** with further education and training providers in developing and implementing policies and systems to fulfil FETAC's functions by:

- working proactively with providers and other stakeholders through consultation groups, technical working groups, expert working groups etc.;
- publishing all policies to enable FETAC to fulfil its functions under the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act, 1999;
- encouraging and enabling industry and educators to contribute to the work of the Council;
- ensuring the principle of partnership is embedded in the implementation of policies;
- reviewing the Council's policies regarding quality assurance and recognition of other awards;
- preparing the foundations for a robust and integrated ICT system to support the implementation of a wide range of policies;
- promoting co-operation between providers by encouraging networking.

Feedback

- 76% of online respondents agree that FETAC has worked proactively with providers of further education and training to develop, agree and implement policies and systems to fulfil FETAC's functions.
- FETAC's consultation process with providers is seen as a core strength.
- The development and publication of policies in areas like quality assurance, determining standards, assessment, validation, recognition of prior learning and monitoring is helping to progress the building of an infrastructure for FET in Ireland. The main issue around this is support – some providers state that they do not have the necessary human and financial capacity.
- The ongoing implementation of policies will require FETAC to work proactively with providers to fulfil its functions.

(iii) FETAC has **built the quality of awards and promoted widespread awareness** of this quality by:

- publishing and implementing policies which ensure the quality of awards including policies for: determining standards; a common awards system; recognition of prior learning; monitoring; recognition of other awards; quality assuring assessment and the validation of programmes;
- encouraging a culture of continuous improvement in the sector;
- registering all providers through the quality assurance process;
- completing a rigorous awards classification process;
- publishing a Directory of FETAC Awards and updating it as required;
- increasing the level of awareness of FETAC amongst the general public by running targeted media campaigns;
- providing information through a range of publications and the FETAC website;
- building a quality management system.

Feedback

- 72 % of online respondents and 77% of providers agree that FETAC has improved the quality of awards.
- The public perception of FETAC is good. However, this perception is stronger amongst the public than it is with industry.
- FETAC systems are critical to quality.
- FETAC awards are seen as something to have.
- The credibility of FETAC awards is based on their high quality.
- I am impressed with the standards that I have witnessed as an extern.
- FETAC has delivered a quality service to its stakeholder.
- The new design of certificates was well received.

(iv) FETAC has **enhanced the status, recognition and currency** of FETAC awards nationally and internationally by:

- implementing the registration of all providers by agreeing their quality assurance procedures;
- participating in key policy development activities nationally and in Europe;
- interacting with a broad range of organisations nationally and internationally;
- providing formal responses to discussion papers received from a range of national and international bodies;
- developing certificate supplements, in English and other languages, to ensure greater transparency for learners working or living abroad;
- recognising awards from other countries, in a range of discipline areas;
- publishing a register of non-FETAC awards;
- contributing positively to the debate on a European Qualifications Framework;
- organising a European conference on quality assurance;
- launching, with the support of the European Commission, the European Network on Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training (ENQA-VET);
- promoting the European Common Quality Assurance Framework (CQAF);
- promoting FETAC awards through the national media and by attending award ceremonies nationwide.

Feedback

- 84% of providers and 85% of online respondents agree that FETAC has enhanced the status, recognition and currency of FETAC awards nationally.
- 53% of providers and 45% of online respondents agree that FETAC has done so internationally. The low level of agreement in these figures is a reflection of a high level of "Don't Knows".
- People from accession states are made aware when graduating of the value of a FETAC award. They are "chuffed" to know that they have something which has currency! Prior to FETAC the differences between the various levels were not obvious. This has been a huge achievement, the sector would be very fragmented without FETAC.
- An industry representative indicated that on the international front, it is a strength of FETAC that they have interlinked with and often lead Europe.
- Some learners felt that FETAC could promote their courses/themselves better and increase awareness amongst the general public, other potential Learners and relevant employers. They felt awareness of FETAC in their centre was low.
- An industry representative believes that more work needs to be done on the status and value of FETAC awards. However, when learners say "I did my FETAC" there is an enormous ownership behind it. It is seen as up-to-date, high status and valuable to those who do it.

(v) FETAC has **built its capacity as an organisation** to achieve its mission and deliver a comprehensive and effective service by:

- achieving the internationally recognised Quality Standard ISO9001 2000;
- investing in staff education, training and development through PMDS;
- meeting all legislative requirements;
- devising and implementing an ICT strategy to support the implementation of FETAC functions;
- enhancing certification processes to meet increased demand including introduction of a web-based entry system;
- establishing service related processes including a service desk, formal complaints procedure etc.;
- implementing an internal communications strategy.

Feedback

- 74% of providers and 72% of online respondents agree that FETAC has delivered a quality service to its stakeholders.
- 82% of online respondents and 74% of providers agree that FETAC has quality processes.
- Interactions with the helpdesk and personal contacts in FETAC is very satisfactory from the providers perspective - problem resolution is very good.
- The FETAC website is seen as a valuable source of information for providers.
- The issuing of certificates is working very well and turnaround times are good.
- Almost all deadlines are well communicated to providers.

Conclusion

FETAC considers it has successfully achieved the objectives it set itself in its first Strategic Plan. This is evidenced through the outcomes outlined in this section and through the achievement of all of the milestones identified in the Plan.

Milestones Achieved from Strategic Plan 2003 – 2006

	Milestones	Current Status
Summer 2003	• FETAC Strategic Plan 2003 – 2006 published	Achieved
	• Consultation under way on policy development for making and promoting FETAC awards, quality assurance, validation of programmes, determining standards and recognition of other awards	Achieved
Winter 2003	• Directory of all existing FETAC awards published	Achieved
	• First FETAC Report published	Achieved
	• Testing of quality assurance procedures under way	Achieved
	• Recognition of Other Awards – policy published	Achieved
Summer 2004	• Existing FETAC awards placed on the new National Framework of Qualifications	Achieved
	• Quality Assurance – policy published	Achieved
	• Determination of Standards – policy development underway	Achieved
	• Validation of Programmes – policy development underway	Achieved
	• Recognition of Other Awards under new policy commences	Achieved
Winter 2004	• Providers' quality assurance procedures being submitted to FETAC for agreement	Achieved
	• Determination of Standards – policy published	Achieved
	• Validation of Programmes – policy published	Achieved
	• Guidelines on Recognition of Prior Learning published	Achieved
	• Review of FETAC Strategic Plan completed	Achieved
Summer 2005	• Quality of programmes being monitored and evaluated by FETAC	Initiated
	• Standards for new awards being determined by FETAC	Achieved
	• Programmes being validated in accordance with new FETAC policy	Achieved
	• Recognition of prior learning being facilitated formally	Achieved
Winter 2005	• All new FETAC awards established as part of the National Framework of Qualifications	Achieved
	• Review of FETAC Strategic Plan completed	Achieved
Summer 2006	• FETAC fulfilling its functions as set out in the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act, 1999	Achieved
	• Comprehensive guide to all FETAC awards available	Achieved
	• System of credits for FETAC awards being operated	Achieved

New and Revised Milestones for July 2006 – December 2008

	Milestones	Current Status
July 2006 – December 2006	• Awards Plan published	Initiated
	• Learner's Charter published	Initiated
	• First new certificates issued	Achieved
	• First certificate supplements available	Achieved
	• Monitoring of quality assured centres commences	Initiated
	• Assessment Guidelines for providers published	Achieved
	• Standards Advisory Board established	Achieved
	• First Standards Development Groups operational	Achieved
	• Validation of programmes at levels 1 and 2 commences	Achieved
	• Recognition process for holders of other awards active	Achieved
	• Quality Management System (QMS): quality standard achieved	Achieved
	• Service desk established	Achieved
January 2007 – June 2007	• First level 1 and 2 awards made to learners	Initiated
	• All existing providers' quality assurance agreed	*
	• First programme approval agreements in place with national bodies	Pending
	• Detailed requirements and criteria for recognition of prior learning published	Initiated
	• First national conference on further education and training	Postponed
	• Strategic Plan 2007 - 2010 published	Initiated
July 2007 – December 2007	• First new awards developed under Common Awards System at levels 3 to 6 published	
	• Transition arrangements for returning results cease	
	• All providers required to have authentication procedures in place	
	• Transition arrangements for development of awards and standards cease	
	• Validation of programmes at levels 1 to 6 operational	
	• First national monitoring report published	
	• Internal audit 2004 - 2007 programme complete	
	• Best practice IT framework (ITIL) in place	
	• New information and communications technology (ICT) system developed	
	• Review of FETAC policies and procedures by NQAI	
	• FETAC Guide to Access, Transfer and Progression opportunities published	
January 2008 – June 2008	• Large scale introduction of new awards developed under Common Awards System	
	• All providers implementing authentication procedures	
	• New ICT system operational	
	• Internal audit plan 2008 - 2010 agreed	
July 2008 – December 2008	• Third Directory of FETAC Awards published	
	• Review of FETAC policy on providers' quality assurance	
	• First Review of Strategic Plan 2007 - 2010 published	
	• Initial review of effectiveness of ICT system carried out	

* To be achieved by autumn 2007

Section 5
Evaluation by the Common Quality Assurance Framework

Background

Shared Ambitions for 2010

In February 2002 the ministers responsible for education and training in all EU countries along with the European Commission set themselves the following goals, to be achieved by 2010, "for the benefit of citizens and the European Union as a whole":

- the highest quality will be achieved in education and training and Europe will be recognised as a worldwide reference for the quality and relevance of its education and training systems and institutions;
- education and training systems in Europe will be compatible enough to allow citizens to move between them and take advantage of their diversity;
- holders of qualifications, knowledge and skills acquired anywhere in the EU will be able to get them effectively validated throughout the Union for the purpose of career and further learning;
- Europeans, at all ages, will have access to lifelong learning;
- Europe will be open to co-operation for mutual benefits with all other regions and should be the most-favoured destination of students, scholars and researchers from other world regions.

These are ambitious goals given the range and diversity of national vocational education and training systems. These shared goals continue to guide and inspire reforms and foster progress within each country including Ireland. FETAC is contributing to achieving the shared goals at both a national and European level.

Copenhagen Process

The Copenhagen Declaration (November 2002), involving member states, the EEA-EFTA countries, candidate countries and the Social Partners, and the Council Resolution (December 2002), on 'Enhanced Cooperation in Vocational Education and Training' gives priority to:

'Promoting cooperation in quality assurance with particular focus on exchange of models and methods, as well as common criteria and principles for quality in vocational education and training.'

The Resolution invited the member states and the Commission to take the appropriate steps necessary to implement this priority, building on and adapting relevant structures and instruments.

Technical Working Group on QA in VET

In 2002, the European Commission, as part of the Copenhagen Process, established a technical working group (TWG) on quality assurance in VET.

The group consisted of representatives from member states, associate/candidate countries and social partners. FETAC represented Ireland.

The mandate of the group included the following:

- to examine existing national and international quality standards and norms, their application, strengths and weaknesses;
- to identify a common core of criteria for quality development at European level;
- to outline a proposal for a co-operation framework in order to develop common activities between countries on specific issues, to promote the exchange of good practice and the use of voluntary peer review.

Self-Evaluation Report of the Further Education and Training Awards Council

Common Quality Assurance Framework (CQAF)

In 2003, the group conducted an inventory of QA systems in the EU. Based on the findings, and with the intention of helping and assisting member states/countries in improving quality assurance at systems and provider level, the technical working group developed a Common Quality Assurance Framework (CQAF).

In May 2004, under the Irish Presidency, the Education Council (of EU ministers) endorsed the principles and approach of the Common Quality Assurance Framework.

The CQAF constitutes a common and systematic approach to quality assurance. It can help policy makers and practitioners to share best practice and to improve quality systems.

The Education Council invited member states and the Commission, within their respective competencies to:

* promote the CQAF on a voluntary basis and together with relevant stakeholders introduce practical initiatives;
* encourage coordination of activities at a national and regional level to ensure overall coherence;
* promote cooperative and voluntary networks on an experimental basis, to enable the trans-national exchange of best practice.

European Network on Quality Assurance in VET

In order to further promote European cooperation in the area of quality assurance the *European Network on QA in VET* was launched by the European Commission in Dublin in October 2005 at a conference hosted by FETAC entitled "Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training: Building Sustainable European Co-operation".

The Network has three main objectives:

* to create a structured, sustainable and cooperative platform for member states to exchange ideas and experiences, debate, mutual learning and consensus building;
* to promote quality in vocational education and training in each Member State and, consequently, improve the status of the sector's awards;
* to foster transparency and consistency of approach across member states dealing in vocational education and training.

Context for FETAC

As noted, FETAC was a member of the Commission's Technical Work Group on QA from 2002–2005 and before that the European Forum on QA from 2001–2002.

During the Irish Presidency in 2004 FETAC assisted the European Commission in drafting the Council Conclusions on the Common Quality Assurance Framework, which was agreed by the Education Committee in May 2004. At the same time, during 2003 and 2004, FETAC was involved in national consultation regarding its own providers' QA policy.

As a result there is a very a close relationship between FETAC's existing QA policy and the Common Quality Assurance Framework.

This relationship is evident from section 1.4 of *Quality Assurance in Further Education and Training, Policy and Guidelines for Providers v1.2*. The background to the policy identifies the Copenhagen Process as providing a:

"political framework for cooperation at a European level………..As part of the process, structures have been proposed to facilitate voluntary practical cooperation among member states. Such cooperation is seen as a method to increase confidence within and between national systems, thereby improving mobility for award holders. FETAC has been an active participant in these structures, gaining valuable insight into existing and developing practice" (page 7).

FETAC was a founding member of the ENQA-VET and a member of FETAC staff was elected chairperson in November 2005 and continues to hold that position. FETAC personnel are involved in all three Thematic Groups and have taken part in a number of Peer Learning visits to other member states.

Compliance

The CQAF has four key elements:

- an appropriate model, to facilitate planning, evaluation and review of systems at the appropriate levels in member states;
- an appropriate methodology for review of systems, for example self-assessment, to enable member states at the appropriate level to be self-critical and strive for continued improvements;
- monitoring as appropriate at national or regional level, possibly combined with voluntary peer review;
- measurement tools developed at national or regional level to facilitate member states to monitor and evaluate their own systems.

Evidence of Compliance

The following is an evaluation of the extent to which FETAC complies with the CQAF.

Evidence of compliance is identified for each of the four key elements of the CQAF.

Element 1   An appropriate model, to facilitate planning, evaluation and review of systems.

An appropriate model refers to having in place proportionate and fit for purpose arrangements to ensure good quality operations and systems relating to all aspects of the delivery of services that is a quality circle approach. The quality circle includes the following stages: planning; implementation; evaluation/assessment; review; and feedback.

FETAC's Own Internal Operations:

FETAC has in place formal quality assured process to facilitate planning, implementation, evaluation and review (including feedback) of its own systems. This includes the following organisational structures: a Senior Management Team; a Strategic Planning Steering Group; a Cross Functional Planning Team; Cross Functional Groups; an IT Steering Committee; and project management through which strategic projects are managed and coordinated.

The strategic planning process involving internal and external stakeholders identifies and sets key objectives, actions, milestones and performance indicators for the duration of the plan.

The implementation process since Autumn 2003 has been through a formal project management system whereby strategic projects are identified, scoped, justified, planned in detail, resourced, financed and managed. To date, 34 projects have been managed and are now closed. Currently, a further 14 projects are in progress.

In April 2007 FETAC was awarded the ISO9001 2000. As part of FETAC's QMS processes 110 procedures have been identified. The procedures are monitored on an annual basis to ensure that the procedure is compliant with the actual activity.

In relation to policy development FETAC has a very detailed procedure in place which includes a number of stages: preplanning; planning; consultation with stakeholders; drafting; approval; and review.

Relationship with Providers

As part of its Providers QA policy, FETAC requires providers to develop a quality assurance system which includes the following:

- a mission;
- principles and values underpinning the providers education and training programmes and related services;
- policies in relation to nine key areas;
- procedures designed to implement the policies;
- an internal monitoring system which will regularly measure the effectiveness of the procedures;
- a self-evaluation system which will examine and report on the quality of programmes and services. This evaluation will include the views of learners and of an external evaluator who can make comparisons with other similar provision;
- a system of responding to the findings of monitoring and evaluation which will address areas for improvement and build on areas of strength.

Element 2   An appropriate methodology for review of systems, for example self-assessment, to enable member states at the appropriate level to be self-critical and strive for continued improvements.

Self-assessment or self-evaluation is an important mechanism and tool to ensure and develop quality at a systems and provider level. It helps organisations to assess their performance and will provide appropriate feedback specifically regarding areas that need improvement.

FETAC's Own Internal Operations

Well organised and critical self-assessment helps to improve good governance and identify areas for improvement. FETAC has in place a number of self-assessment or self-evaluation processes and procedures in order to continually strive for improvements. This includes: formal and published reviews of the implementation of the Strategic Plan identifying milestones achieved; partial achieved or not achieved; an internal quality management system; preventative/corrective action procedures; and internal audits.

FETAC is required by the Qualifications Act to formally self-evaluate its effectiveness and publish a Self-Evaluation Report and Recommendations for improvement.

Relationship with Providers

As outlined in FETAC's Provider's Quality Assurance Policy, providers are required to self-evaluate and monitor their effectiveness on an ongoing basis, in a consistent and systematic manner. FETAC's role is to monitor the effectiveness of the provider's quality assurance policies including in relation to programme development, evaluation and review.

This activity commenced in 2006 and FETAC is currently processing and evaluating Self-Evaluation Reports from providers.

Element 3   Monitoring as appropriate at national or regional level possibly combined with voluntary peer review.

Self-assessment is an important method to assess quality and quality improvement and development. It is, however, introspective and, thus, open to bias. Therefore, it should be combined with periodic external monitoring by an independent and appropriate third party body.

FETAC's Internal Operations

FETAC is required by the Qualifications Act to be formally reviewed by the National Qualifications Authority. As part of this, FETAC is required to formally self-evaluate its effectiveness.

FETAC is subject to external monitoring by SGS Ireland and the Comptroller and Auditor General.

Relationship with Providers

The FETAC monitoring policy was agreed by Council in March 2006. FETAC is currently at the stage of testing monitoring tools with a range of providers to ensure their appropriateness and effectiveness.

Monitoring as defined in the above policy, is the collection and dissemination of qualitative and quantitative information about providers and programmes on an ongoing basis for the purpose of assuring quality.

FETAC's monitoring of a provider's quality assurance addresses the extent to which:

• the provider is implementing its procedures as agreed;
• the procedures as implemented are effective in maintaining and improving the quality of programme design and delivery;
• there is consistency of implementation of procedures in the centres of a multi-centre provider.

FETAC monitors will evaluate information gathered through the various monitoring activities and produce a monitoring report for each provider.

FETAC's monitoring process includes the following six stages:

1. Production of Annual Monitoring Plan

An annual monitoring plan will be drawn up to determine priorities for monitoring activities for the year ahead in terms of providers, awards and programmes.

2. Desk Monitoring

This is monitoring carried out through analysis of reports for the purpose of identifying trends and issues arising relevant to the priorities in the Monitoring Plan.

3. On-Site Monitoring

A panel of monitors will carry out site visits in centres in accordance with the Monitoring Plan.

4. Production of Monitoring Reports

Monitors will evaluate the findings of site visits and other information sources. A report will be drafted for each provider and published identifying good practice and recommendations for improvements. FETAC will require providers to implement any or all of the recommendations identified in a monitoring report *(Ref. Section 18 (3) Qualifications Act, 1999)*. The provider's implementation will become one of the foci of subsequent monitoring.

5. Acting on Findings

FETAC will disseminate providers' best practice and will monitor implementation of recommendations for improvement.

6. Review of Quality Assurance Agreements

FETAC may, at any time but within a maximum period of five years, review the agreement of the provider's quality assurance. Monitoring over the period of an agreement will form the basis on which a decision on the renewal of the agreement will be made by the Council.

The monitoring policy and the above activity will become fully operational from autumn 2007.

Element 4   Measurement tools developed at national or regional level to facilitate member states to monitor and evaluate their own systems.

Measurement tools help at a system and provider level to ensure adequate identification, evaluation and follow-up of issues arising.

FETAC's Internal Operations

FETAC identified a range of performance indicators in 2003 to measure and assess its own effectiveness.

These indicators were published as part of the Strategic Plan 2003–2006. They include:

Learners
learner satisfaction with the service FETAC provides
number and range of learners completing FETAC awards
range of opportunities for access, transfer and progression.

Providers
providers' satisfaction with FETAC's service
number and range of providers offering FETAC awards
extent and effectiveness of working partnerships with providers.

Providers Quality Assurance
number of further education and training programmes validated
awareness among stakeholders of the quality of FETAC awards
effectiveness of FETAC validation and quality assurance procedures.

Recognition
extent of recognition of FETAC awards in Ireland by learners, social partners and the wider community
extent of international recognition of FETAC awards
number and range of other awards recognised by FETAC.

Quality Service
customer satisfaction with the quality of FETAC's overall service
extent of staff motivation, satisfaction and effectiveness
capacity of the organisation to fulfil its functions.

Other internal measurement tools:

FETAC as part of its Quality Management System uses a range of internal metrics to monitor its own system effectiveness. This includes: IT internal customer response rates, providers QA processing rates; and recognition processing rates etc. Any deviations are formally tracked and corrective action taken.

In 2005 FETAC set a target of 31 December 2006 for the receipt of QA applications from existing providers. FETAC has approximately 700 providers representing 1,200 centres. Through a process of setting, managing and monitoring process metrics this target was reached within the timeframe scheduled.

FETAC engages external expertise to assess, analyse and evaluate data with regard to customer feedback. Responses are fed back into the review of policies and current projects.

FETAC maintains a database of all learners achievements and awards issued. This includes the number of awards made by level, award type and fields of learning. Data is available per annum and trends are identified.

Relationship with Providers

FETAC has responsibility to validate and approve providers' programmes. In this context providers are required to submit programme details to FETAC for approval. FETAC will review and evaluate the provider's effectiveness by analysing and evaluating data returned from the providers. This will include data regarding:

number of providers registered
number and range of programmes
programme duration
participation rates i.e. number of learners
completion rates
awards (volume, award type, and fields of learning) achieved (by learners) and grades
self-evaluation reports and action plans
monitoring reports including internal verification and external authentication reports.

Feedback – Compliance with CQAF

European partners agree that FETAC interacts effectively with European bodies, playing a proactive role in a wide range of initiatives including active involvement in conferences and in peer learning visits, ENQAVET and Thematic Groups.

One partner indicated that FETAC has "significantly contributed to ongoing development in VET, including the development of the new European Quality Assurance Reference Framework and the launch and activity of the European Network on Quality Assurance in VET".

Another partner responded that FETAC used the quality assurance principles underlying CQAF before the creation of CQAF and FETAC is seen as strongly supporting the European Network.

A partner said "I hope that FETAC will continue to give high priority to the work on an EU level because FETAC and Ireland seem to have much to give and seem so effective in inspiring other participants (in the Network) and member states".

An Irish key stakeholder indicated that '…on the international front, it is the strength of FETAC that they have interlinked with and often lead Europe'.

Feedback from our European partners confirms that FETAC played a strong role in the development of the CQAF and continues to play a key role in the European Network.

Conclusion

The Council considers that is applies all four elements of the CQAF with regard to (a) its own internal quality assurance operations and (b) it relationship with its providers.

Section 6
Planning for the Future

When FETAC began its self-evaluation for the Quality Review by NQAI, it commenced planning for its second Strategic Plan.

In summary the first phase of strategic planning commenced with internal consultation which included questionnaires and workshops with Council, senior management team, senior staff and all staff. It looked at "where we are now" i.e. what has been achieved to date. It also began to explore a future vision for FETAC and to identify key strategic directions. The second phase focused on refining strategic directions, identifying objectives and actions and included the external stakeholder research.

Phase three of the planning process will take place following the recommendations of the Authority later in the year.

Towards a vision for the future

Early in the process the Council and the senior executive set about identifying a vision for FETAC for the next five years. The vision needed to be challenging, it needed to provide an overarching position from which the strategic goals and objectives could emerge. In order to identify this vision questionnaires were completed and a series or workshops were conducted. An examination of FETAC's key strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats was conducted and a range of internal and external environmental factors were identified. The external factors included:

- national and international developments: the European Qualifications Framework and the Common Quality Assurance Framework for VET in Europe, *Towards a National Skills Strategy*, decentralisation and possible rationalisation of functions between the three bodies, OECD review of state agencies;
- the changing profile of learners: learners in the workplace; learners at all levels of the framework; increased number of foreign nationals as learners; and changes in rationale for participation;
- the changing profile of providers: formal regional and national networks of providers emerging; growth in number of private providers; changing role of former awarding bodies to training providers; influence of funding agencies; and some more mature/self-sufficient providers.

Values

In reviewing the values of the organisation the executive examined the principles which underpin its approach to work and the values it places at the centre of all of its activities. The review (Section 3) endorses the principles and values previously adopted and supports their continuance and further development over the next five years.

Identifying strategic goals and objectives

The review of functions (Section 2), of processes (Section 3) and of objectives (Section 4) strongly influences the identification of key strategic goals and objectives for FETAC. The review activity included the Council and internal consultation. It took into account the reflections and plans of the executive. In addition external stakeholder feedback identified a range of issues which need to be considered in future plans.

External Consultation

This section outlines the recurrent themes and issues that emerged during the external stakeholder consultation and identifies the challenges that these present for FETAC.

Key Themes

Throughout the external consultation phase of the review two key themes emerged time and again:

- meeting the requirements of the economy and in particular those highlighted by the recently published document *Towards a National Skills Strategy*;
- the changing profile of the learner.

Key Issues

In summary the issues that emerged from the review were:

- the need for a comprehensive suite of awards to meet the needs of the learner, providers and social and economic needs;
- FETAC's capacity to meet the demand for new awards;
- the recognition of FETAC awards as awards with status and value, in particular with employers and industry groups;
- the full implementation of all FETAC functions and the challenge of achieving this through partnership with others;
- the need for a system of assessment and certification which supports diverse modes of learning.

Each of these issues presents a particular challenge to FETAC which it will endeavour to meet through the implementation of its second Strategic Plan.

The need for a comprehensive suite of awards which are accessible and which meet the needs of the learner, providers and broader social and economic needs

Issues

The current range of awards offered by FETAC, although acknowledged as large in number and broad in range, are not thought to be sufficient to meet the future demands of learners, providers, legislation, the national skills strategy etc.

The current suite includes a multiplicity of approaches to the expression of standards and a certain degree of duplication. In addition not all awards within the current FETAC directory enable the same degree of access, transfer and progression. In particular there are problems with access to, and progression from, awards which originated with FÁS, in particular Craft awards at level 6. Access can also be impeded by issues outside FETAC's remit including geography, level of engagement by providers to provide flexible provision options, lack of paid education/training leave, employer's support for education and training in the work place etc.

There is strong demand for certification/recognition of awards which are currently outside the framework, industry specific awards, vendor awards, global awards etc.

Challenges

FETAC needs to move ahead with the development of a comprehensive, quality assured suite of awards which are coherent and consistent and which meet the learner, provider, social and economic needs.
FETAC will need to review existing awards, harmonising them under the Common Awards System. FETAC must create transparent and systematic pathways for learners and continue to work with the key players to enhance progression opportunities to higher education and training and to work. To achieve this FETAC must build on its key partnerships with NQAI, HETAC and other key agencies and institutions.

FETAC must work to influence national policy and build stronger relationships with appropriate government departments and agencies and employer-focused bodies to aid in removing barriers to access that are outside of FETAC's remit.

FETAC needs to explore ways of ensuring that learners' currently achieving awards outside the framework either receive recognition for this achievement or that equivalent FETAC awards are developed. Either way FETAC must endeavour to ensure that the resulting awards are recognised by industry and carry equal rights of progression for the award holder. FETAC must develop an approach to the alignment and inclusion of awards from other bodies, in keeping with the determinations of the Authority.

FETAC's capacity to meet the demand for new awards

Issues

There is an urgent need for FETAC to progress work on the development of standards for new awards. Some stakeholders questioned the capacity of FETAC, as it is currently organised, to develop the number and range of awards required, to ensure their acceptance by industry and the higher education institutes and to meet the needs of learners in diverse settings particularly in the work place.

FETAC has identified as a risk the inability of its current ICT system to meet the demands of the various new processes including standards development.

Decentralisation is identified as an issue which could potentially impact on performance. FETAC is committed to implementing Government policy on decentralisation and will endeavour to ensure continued quality of service through careful planning.

Challenges

The challenge for FETAC is to ensure that the proposed standards development process (standards development groups) can meet the demand for new and revised awards. It must meet the award needs of learners, society and the economy and it must result in awards that have relevance, status and currency. The process must be responsive in terms of timing, range, number and type of awards.

The process must be managed and scheduled carefully by FETAC. As with the implementation of its other functions FETAC can not implement this policy alone it must do so by recognising and using the experience and expertise of others. FETAC must work continuously to form and maintain efficient and effective partnerships. FETAC must move ahead to full implementation of its ICT Strategy as quickly as possible.

The recognition of FETAC awards as awards with status and value, in particular with employers and industry groups

Issue

Although the FETAC brand has been firmly established there remains a lack of awareness of the status and value of FETAC awards, in particular amongst employers and industry groups. This lack of awareness or acceptance of FETAC awards can, if not addressed, have a detrimental impact on the ability of the award holder to progress.

Challenges

FETAC's promotional activity should focus on increasing recognition of FETAC awards amongst employers and industry groups. The status and value of awards can be enhanced through involvement of key stakeholders in the determination of standards and other FETAC processes. In addition FETAC must work proactively with the Authority to increase recognition of the framework.

The full implementation of all FETAC functions and the challenge of achieving this through partnership with others

Issues

To date FETAC has offered awards through the processes of the former awarding bodies. Policies have been developed for implementation by FETAC and/or the sector's providers. These new policies must now be fully implemented. Providers raise a question about their own capacity (resources) to implement FETAC policies and to meet the demands of the national skills strategy (demands for flexible provision). This is particularly true for smaller providers and those in the community and voluntary sectors.

In addition some stakeholders raise an issue around FETAC's capacity to validate the enormous volume and range of programmes which will be developed in the sector.

Challenges

The full implementation of all new policies is only possible with the co-operation and buy-in of the providers. FETAC must continue to listen to providers and to work proactively with them to build their capacity and to meet the challenges of the future. In addition FETAC should assist providers to identify resource implications and facilitate dialogue with various funding and support agencies to influence positive outcomes.

FETAC needs to explore ways of working through others, quality assuring others to carry out some functions, or part thereof, on behalf of FETAC. Stakeholder feedback indicates a broad welcome for this approach with the caveat that initial support and guidance is required. The principle of subsidiarity should continue to underpin the implementation of FETAC's policies.

The need for a system of assessment and certification that supports diverse modes of learning

Issues

The National Skills Strategy will demand a greater degree of recognition of informal learning including work place learning and prior learning. It will also require flexible provision including part time courses, short programmes, and programmes for people with mixed ability. Providers will need time and resources to develop these processes.

Challenge

FETAC must ensure that the system of assessment and certification supports both the provider and the learner. For instance certification opportunities are currently restricted to twice a year for those operating under one of the current systems. This must be changed in order to enable these providers to offer assessment and certification more frequently.

Other Issues

In addition to the recurring themes and issues outlined above, stakeholders also raised a range of other issues including the level of international recognition, the need to make explicit the link between the framework and the awards of FETAC, the need for overarching national agreements in relation to quality assurance, the effectiveness of consultation and how best to reach further into various organisations, the barriers that overly technical language can cause, the promotion of the process for the Recognition of Other Awards and the need for international liaisons. There was also a reaction to the current implementation plan for the assessment policy which related to timing, provider resources and capacity, in addition providers raised issues about the possible negative impact on current standards of this policy change.

Advice

FETAC in the development of its strategic goals and objectives also took into consideration the following advice gathered during the review stage:

*   provide continuity for learners while new processes are being introduced;
*   lead European development especially re levels 1 to 3 of the framework;
*   legislation will drive awards development over the coming years;
*   FETAC must continue to work pro-actively with providers;
*   improve communication with and support for providers including teachers, trainers and instructors.

Draft Strategic Plan 2007 – 2012

Presented here is the first draft of FETAC's Strategic Plan 2007 – 2012.

This plan has been developed through the detailed process outlined in Section 1. It puts forward the Council's vision for FETAC for 2012 and the strategic goals and objectives which support this vision.

Included in it are the FETAC's plans to address the issues raised during the review. Further work on this plan will continue throughout the rest of the year to allow further consideration of the self-evaluation, refinement of the actions, identification of milestones and the formulation of progress indicators.

This plan will be amended and updated following the Council's consideration of the report of the expert panel later in the year. FETAC's second Strategic Plan 2007 – 2010 will be published in December 2007 and will include plans for the implementation of the recommendations of the Authority's report.

Mission

The mission of FETAC is to make **quality** assured awards to learners that:

- are in accordance with national **standards** within the national framework;
- create opportunities for learners in further education and training to have their achievements **recognised**;
- provide systematic **progression** pathways.

Vision

Building on the significant progress made to date, by 2012.

- FETAC will have played its part in enhancing Ireland's reputation as a knowledge-based, inclusive learning society.
- FETAC will have contributed to the significantly enhanced status of the FET sector.
- FETAC's awards will be meeting the needs of learners, employers and providers.
- FETAC will be a first class awarding body, working in partnership with all its stakeholders.

Values

A number of values underpin FETAC's approach to its work and its internal and external relationships. In summary these are:

- different modes of learning are valued equally;
- partnership with its stakeholders;
- enabling people, internally and externally;
- quality;
- openness.

Strategic Goals and Objectives

Goal 1: A comprehensive suite of awards will be in place.

Strategic Objective 1.1: To establish an appropriate range of quality assured awards at levels 1 to 6 of the framework.

Actions

- Establish standards development groups to develop awards at each level of the framework.
- Put in place internal management processes to co-ordinate, facilitate and monitor the quality and effectiveness of the work of the standards development groups.
- Monitor the quality of awards developed by the standards development groups.
- Schedule the development of all awards through the awards plan and with due regard for demand driven by legislative, economic or social change.
- Develop an approach to the alignment and inclusion of awards from other bodies in keeping with the determinations of the Authority.
- Review the Common Awards System and the Standards Policy.

Strategic Objective 1.2: To ensure that awards meet the needs of learners and the economy and that they have relevance, status and currency.

Actions

- Underpin the development of standards with appropriate research.
- Ensure that standards development groups have representation or input from appropriate statutory, profession and/or lead bodies.
- Review and revise all existing awards through the Common Award System.

Strategic Objective 1.3: To design awards that can be achieved in a variety of settings, including the work place, to support and enable the achievement of the national skills strategy.

Actions

- Express standards for awards as learning outcomes independent of learning or delivery contexts.
- Integrate generic and transferable skills into awards.
- Enable learners to accumulate minor awards over time and at different levels.

Goal 2: FETAC awards will be recognised nationally and internationally.

Strategic Objective 2.1: To ensure national recognition for FETAC awards by employers, by higher education institutions and by the public.

Actions

- Devise a promotional strategy which builds on the established FETAC brand and develops understanding nationally of framework levels and the standards required for awards.

- Carry out a range of promotional activities aimed primarily at employers and recruitment agencies.
- Host a conference linked to the Government agenda of up-skilling the workforce.
- Initiate and highlight high visibility partnerships between industry, employers and providers of further education and training.

Strategic Objective 2.2: To create awareness of FETAC awards in Europe.

Actions

- Develop and implement a strategy to increase awareness of FETAC awards in Europe.
- Issue certificate supplements for all major awards.
- Instigate strategic alliances with education and training organisations and awarding bodies across Europe.
- Publish a range of material and publications in different languages.

Strategic Objective 2.3: To make a significant contribution to European policy development for vocational education and training.

Actions

- Participate actively in developments relating to the emerging European Qualifications Framework and include reference to the EQF on all certificates.
- Continue to play a key role in policy development at European level and to share best practice through participation in networks, projects and conferences.
- Continue to encourage the use of the Common Quality Assurance Framework for Europe including the application of the agreed indicators.

Goal 3: Learners will be navigating the framework of qualifications and progressing to higher levels of education and training and to employment.

Strategic Objective 3.1: To create further transparent and systematic pathways for learners to access, transfer and progress through the framework.

Actions

- Implement a common credit system to underpin all awards.
- Publish certificate supplements for all awards.
- Develop further a transparent and automated process for the Recognition of Other Awards which is easy to operate and simple to use.
- Actively promote the process for Recognition of Other Awards and publish a comprehensive directory of other awards recognised by FETAC.
- Provide access to information on awards, detailed standards, provider types and locations, validated programmes, other awards recognised by FETAC, arrangements for the recognition of prior learning etc. through a variety of modes including the website.

Strategic Objective 3.2: To enhance progression opportunities to programmes of higher education and training and to work.

Actions

- Liaise closely with the higher education institutions (HEIs), HETAC, and the NQAI.
- Initiate and highlight high visibility partnerships between industry, employers and providers of further education and training.
- Build robust awards which are attractive to higher education and training providers to facilitate access, transfer and progression.
- Ensure the relevance, quality and currently of all awards.

Strategic Objective 3.3: To promote and enable the recognition of informal learning, in particular the recognition of prior learning and of learning in the workplace.

Actions

- Quality assure providers to offer the recognition of prior learning for access, for exemptions and for awards.
- Develop a strategy for the recognition of work place learning.
- Promote the development of mixed provision models e.g. between further and higher education and training and the workplace to enhance opportunities for lifelong learning.

Goal 4: All FETAC registered providers will be improving their programmes and services on a continuous basis.

Strategic Objective 4.1: To further promote a culture of continuous improvement through the implementation of all FETAC functions and policies.

Actions

- Improve the process for agreement of provider's quality assurance policies and procedures.
- Review provider's quality assurance agreements.
- Monitor the impact and effect of new policies, instigate policy reviews and implement improvement plans.

Strategic Objective 4.2: To further encourage the improvement of programmes and of assessment.

Actions

- Implement FETAC policies on assessment of learners.
- Monitor and evaluate the quality of programmes.
- Validate programmes leading to FETAC awards.
- Identify and explore a range of models to enable effective implementation of validation across a large range of awards and a large number of programmes.
- Provide feedback to providers to facilitate continuous improvement.

Strategic Objective 4.3: To provide direction, challenge and leadership within the further education and training sector.

Actions

- Develop, implement and monitor agreements for programme approval, e-assessment and assessment overseas with providers.
- Carry out a review of current research activity in FETAC and develop and publish a research policy.
- Publish statistics and reports pertinent to the further education and training sector.
- Encourage networking and other self-support mechanisms.
- Publish a range of guidelines and codes of practice.

Strategic Objective 4.4: to enable providers build their capacity to meet the challenges of the future.

Actions

- Co-ordinate, facilitate and explore support mechanisms to enable the changeover for providers from existing to new processes.
- Implement a communications strategy to ensure transparency and to disseminate information relating to policy implementation.
- Provide schedules for the change over to new processes through the publication of an awards plan, a validation plan and a monitoring plan.
- Develop or recognise appropriate qualifications in assessment, internal verification, external authentication, programme evaluation, assessment for RPL, evaluation of quality systems, monitoring etc. to underpin new processes.
- Publish a range of reports including provider's self-evaluations, monitoring report, reports on policy reviews etc.
- Assist providers to identify resource implications and facilitate dialogue with funding agencies as appropriate.
- Review the current position in relation to the delegation of authority.

Goal 5: FETAC will be recognised as an organisation which delivers a quality service.

Strategic Objective 5.1: To build and enhance the FETAC team to achieve our strategic goals.

Actions

- Review the current organisational structure to ensure appropriate structures and resources are in place to implement the new Strategic Plan.
- Further develop FETAC's human resource strategies to realise staff potential to the full and to ensure the full implementation of the Strategic Plan.
- Review and improve the internal communications strategy.
- Improve processes for the recruitment, training and monitoring of individuals and organisations who work on behalf of FETAC.

Strategic Objective 5.2: To enhance FETAC's technology capabilities, strategies systems and processes to support the implementation of the Strategic Plan.

Actions

- Implement fully the proposed integrated ICT system which will enable and support the implementation of all FETAC functions and processes.
- Enhance financial planning, management and information systems and deploy financial resources in an effective way.
- Further refine current organisational processes including project management, quality management system and performance management development system to ensure coherence and to ensure positive return on investment.
- Develop and establish better systems for reporting progress against objectives and actions for use throughout the organisation.

Strategic Objective 5.3: To offer a quality service to all our stakeholders.

Actions

- Establish processes to improve responsiveness in particular to review the frequency of certification.
- Develop and implement an internet/online strategy.
- Research the possibility of establishing secure individual learner accounts which could facilitate access for learners to their FETAC certification history online.
- Publish a range of registers: register of providers; of validated programmes; of providers approved to carry out recognition of prior learning, e-assessment, delivery of assessment overseas; and of other awards recognised by FETAC etc.
- Provide relevant information through appropriate channels.
- Implement Government policy on decentralisation and ensure, through careful planning, that quality of service to stakeholders is not adversely affected.

Goal 6: Learner needs will be central to all policy development and implementation in FETAC.

Strategic Objective 6.1: To place learners' needs at the centre of FETAC policies and processes.

Actions

- Continue to gather information about learners through various means including learner surveys.
- Ensure that all policy development is underpinned by national and international research into learners' needs.
- Monitor learner input in the self- evaluation of programmes by providers.
- Monitor providers to ensure the implementation of the determinations of the Authority in relation to access, transfer and progression in particular those relating to information provision.

Strategic Objective 6.2: To ensure that appropriate information is available to learners and that arrangements are in place for the protection of learners.

Actions

- Implement an eServices strategy to provide self-service options for key stakeholders such as providers, learners and employers.
- Review and improve the information available to learners, the content and mode of communication.
- Publish a range of material and publications in different languages to meet the needs of immigrant learners/workers.
- Continue to monitor the arrangements in place relating to protection for learners enrolled with providers offering programmes on a commercial and profit making basis.

Strategic Objective 6.3: To ensure the quality of programmes.

Actions

- Improve the quality of programmes for learner by validating all programmes leading to new awards.
- Prioritise planning for the implementation of validation.
- Publish and maintain a register of validated programmes.
- Provide feedback to providers to facilitate continuous improvement in their programmes.

Goal 7: Efficient and effective partnerships will underpin FETAC's relationships with all key stakeholders.

Strategic Objective 7.1: To build on the partnerships which have been established with key stakeholders.

Actions

- Strengthen the working relationship with NQAI and HETAC to ensure the full implementation of the framework.
- Build stronger relationships with the Department of Enterprise Trade and Employment, other government departments involved with FET and other employment focused bodies such as ICTU, IBEC, Forfás, etc.
- Build partnerships with various support agencies to aid in planning effective and timely interventions for providers as they implement FETAC policies.
- Instigate strategic alliances with education and training organisations and awarding bodies across Europe.

Strategic Objective 7.2: To continue influencing national policy development and implementation.

Actions

- Continue to advise the Minister and to work closely with department staff in relation to national policy and international developments in further education and training.
- Engage in dialogue with funding agencies on the resource implications for providers relating to the implementation of policies and the various funding options available.
- Liaise closely with higher education institutions (HEIs).

Appendix 1 – Members of Council

Mr Donal O'Rourke   Cathaoirleach

Mr Stan McHugh   Chief Executive, FETAC

Mr Séamus Puirséil   Chief Executive, HETAC

Ms Margaret O'Connell   Ministerial Nominee (Education and Science)

Ms Deirdre Keyes   Ministerial Nominee (Education and Science)

Mr Rory O'Sullivan   Ministerial Nominee (Education and Science)

Mr Joseph O'Leary   Ministerial Nominee (Enterprise, Trade and Employment)

Mr Niall Egan   Ministerial Nominee (Enterprise, Trade and Employment)

Mr Seán Ó Longáin   Ministerial Nominee (Education and Science) Representative of VEC

Ms Margaret Mernagh   Ministerial Nominee (Education and Science) Representative of employees of providers

Mr Kevin Moriarty   Nominee of Fáilte Ireland

Mr Paddy Browne   Nominee of Teagasc

Ms Anna Kelly   Nominee of FÁS

Ms Eimear D'Arcy   Nominee of Irish Business and Employers Confederation (IBEC)

Mr Ron Kelly   Nominee of Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU)

Appendix 2 – Permanent Staff

Chief Executive	Stan McHugh	
Director of Awards and Standards	Barbara Kelly	
Director of Services	Ultan Tuite	
Head of Administration	Colette Harrison	
Development	Walter Balfe	Liam Carroll
	Grainne Cullen	Rhona Dempsey
	Marie Gould	Angela Lambkin
	Orla Lynch	Luana MacAnaney
	Denis O'Mahony	Roisin Sweeney
	Andrina Wafer	
Certification	Chris Breslin	Paula Doyle
	Paula Gaffney	Marita Kiernan
	Maria McLoughlin	Tina Medjber
	Grainne Morris	Andrea Sadlier
	Christine Shannon	
Provider Registration	Theresa Atkinson	James Byrne
	Yvonne Cullen	
Corporate Services	Antoinette Beatty	Janet Cawley
	Alga Mulhall	
Finance	Paul Brady	Deirdre Conlan
	Aoife Marley	
Human Resources	Caoimhe Mac Rory	Dearbhail McKee
Communications	Susan MacNeill	Deirdre Miller
	Anne Maher	Alison Quinn
Information Technology	Mark Coney	Ian Larkin
	Gay Luskin	Peter McGonigle
	Ray O'Neill	Archana Ramachandran
	Paddy Tallon	

Appendix 3 - Organisation Structure

Chief Executive			
Director of Awards and Standards		**Director of Services**	
Development –		Head of Administration	
Awards and Standards	Quality Assurance Provider Registration	Certification	Finance
Recognition		Human Resources	ICT
Monitoring		Corporate Services	
Registration and Validation of Programmes		Communications	

Appendix 4 – Sources

Annual Reports

FETAC First Report 2001 – 2003, http://www.fetac.ie/PDF/FETAC%20FIRST%20REPORT.pdf
FETAC Annual Report 2004, http://www.fetac.ie/PDF/FETAC_Annual_Report_2004.pdf
FETAC Annual Report 2005, http://www.fetac.ie/PDF/FETAC_Annual_Report_2005.pdf

Directories

Directory of FETAC Awards 2003, http://www.fetac.ie/PDF/directory_final.pdf
Directory of FETAC Awards 2006, http://www.fetac.ie/directory_of_awards_and_updates/default.htm

Policies

A Common Awards System, http://www.fetac.ie/cas/Common_Awards_System_Dec_05.pdf
Determining Standards, http://www.fetac.ie/PDF/det_stands_policy_doc_280905.pdf
Monitoring, http://www.fetac.ie/monitoring/Monitoring_Policy_March_06.pdf
Protection for Learners, http://www.fetac.ie/private_providers/PFLPolicy.pdf
Provider Quality Assurance, http://www.fetac.ie/qa/Provider_Quality_Assurance_Policy.PDF
Quality Assuring Assessment, http://www.fetac.ie/assessment/QA_Assessmentforwebmar06.pdf
Recognition of Other Awards, http://www.fetac.ie/recognition_otherawards/Policy_Sept_04.pdf
RPL: Policy and Guidelines (Draft), http://www.fetac.ie/rpl/RPL_Policy_and__draft__guidelines.pdf
Validation of Programmes, http://www.fetac.ie/validation/Validation_Policy_March_06.pdf

Strategic Planning

FETAC Strategic Plan 2003 - 2006, http://www.fetac.ie/PDF/Plan_090603.pdf
First Review of the FETAC Strategic Plan 2003 - 2006 and outline plan for 2005 - 2007 ,
http://www.fetac.ie/PDF/First_Review_of_Strategic_Plan.pdf
New and Revised Milestones July 2006 - December 2008
http://www.fetac.ie/PDF/New_and_Revised_Milestones_Jul_2006_to_Dec_2008.pdf
Second Review of the FETAC Strategic Plan 2003 - 2006 and outline plan for 2006 – 2008
http://www.fetac.ie/PDF/Second_Review_of_Strategic_Plan.pdf

Quality Assurance Framework

Fundamentals of a 'common quality assurance framework' (CQAF) for VET in Europe
http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/2010/doc/qualitynet/cqaf.pdf

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