

Further Education & Training to Higher Education Regional Network



Scoping Exercise

Access, transfer and progression from Further Education and Training (FET) to Higher Education (HE)

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The FET2HE Regional Network receives support from the HEA



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Executive Summary

This work identifies institutional, infrastructural and cultural barriers with regard to progression from Further Education and Training providers (FET) and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)¹. It reveals a lack of data thus far for the Leinster region regarding progression, and for student success or otherwise once in the HEI environment. It names issues such as trust in curriculum and assessment outcomes and processes, and the fundamental challenge of competitiveness on a local scale. It draws attention to the need in particular for baseline information and transparency for learners and for us as a region, determined as we are to enable more seamless progression, providing relevant opportunities for future skills and other needs for learners regardless of pathway.

Background

This document emerges from the discursive work of a Network of Further Education and Training providers (FET) and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Some of the work of the Network is part funded by a second Strategic Innovation Fund (SIDF) phase through the HEIs. In 2015, the group formally adopted a new title of the FET2HE Network.

The Network is made up of representatives from:

- Athlone Institute of Technology (AIT)
- Dublin City University (DCU)
- Dundalk Institute of Technology (DKIT)
- Maynooth that University (MU)
- Cavan / Monaghan Education and Training Board (CMETB)
- City of Dublin Education and Training Board (CDETb)
- Dublin / Dun Laoghaire Education and Training Board (DDETb)
- Galway / Roscommon Education and Training Board (GRETB)
- Kildare / Wicklow Education and Training Board (KWETB)
- Laois / Offaly Education and Training Board (LOETB)
- Longford / Westmeath Education and Training Board (LWETB)
- Louth / Meath Education and Training Board (LMETB)
- SOLAS

¹ The Network originated from a HEA initiative funded via the SIDF funding stream and is led by DCU, MU, DkIT & AIT. From this project in 2013-2014, an MOU was signed by 8 of the newly established ETBs and the 4 HEIs that represented the Region (in the Dublin-Leinster Pillar 2 Cluster). The Network operates on an equal basis between the ETB representatives and the HEIs. QQI and SOLAS were invited to join the Network in the latter half of 2015.

- Qualifications and Quality Ireland (QQI)

Aims and Objectives of the FET2HE Regional Network

The overall aim of FET2HE is to create and develop a formal network of ETBs and HEIs for the purposes of collaboration on enhancing access, transfer and progression opportunities from FET to HE in the Leinster region. The Network is particularly focused on the *National Strategy for Higher Education 2030* and Section 8 of the *Further Education and Training Strategy*, which refers to the HEA target of 10% in 2016 for students progressing from FET to HE.

The Networks objectives are to:

- Identify barriers to access, transfer and progression and propose appropriate and feasible solutions.
- Create greater awareness of opportunities for students who are in the Further Education and Training Sector to progress to Higher Education.
- Collaborate on enhancing transparent visible Access, Transfer and Progression (ATP) pathways and progression opportunities across the region.
- Identify where resources and good practice could be shared and to explore thematic collaborations.
- Foster and support research on access, transfer and progression across the FET & HE sectors to inform policy.
- Provide opportunities to share and disseminate information relevant to staff and students.
- Collaborate with wider stakeholder groups to further the above objectives.

Work of the Network 2015-2016

FET2HE set up three working groups made up of members of the Network to address its objectives:

- The Research Working group
- The Pathways Working group
- The Communications Working group

The Research Working Group was tasked with conducting a scoping exercise towards a report highlighting the range of issues related to pathways from FET to HE already in place, and the complex issues of access, transfer and progress from FET to HE. The subsequent report

recommends areas for further research and highlights good practice in the sectors, at local and regional Levels. The report is developed into 'themes' for the working conference where policy makers, and senior decision makers involved in FET and HE can come together to share innovations and look towards models of best practice that are fair and transparent.

The conference has been part funded by the Network, QQI and SOLAS.

Approach to the Scoping Exercise

A qualitative approach was used for this exercise and used a number of research instruments to gather the data. The Research Working Group commenced with reconnaissance process to help establish the terms of reference and the focus of the scoping exercise. This reconnaissance process was drawn from a broad range of literature and due to the nature of the work of the Network focused on policy and strategy documents including those from government².

Electronic surveys were issued to the Network members inviting as much information as possible. The surveys were augmented further by data drawn from two focus groups consisting of members of the Network and other relevant FET and HE stakeholders. The feedback from these focus groups was recorded and transcribed. This data was then analysed and further refined to develop a semi-structured interview schedule.

Scoping Exercise Outcomes/Challenges

This scoping exercise asked all the Network members to provide information on issues related to transitions from FET to HE. From the FET perspective this could mean relationships with specific programmes within HE, links agreed through Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) or through participation in the Higher Education Links Scheme (HELS) on the basis of named awards conferring eligibility to compete for places. Individual HEIs were asked to provide information on entry from FET. Each participating organisation was asked to outline issues related to good practice, relationships and barriers etc.

² Consultation Paper: Towards the development of a new National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education (NAO 2014), Quality and Qualifications Ireland Strategy Statement 2014 – 2016 (QQI, 2013), Further Education And Training Strategy 2014 – 2019 (SOLAS, 2014), Evaluation of the HEAR and DARE Supplementary Admission Routes to Higher Education (NUIM, 2013), SOLAS Corporate Plan 2014 – 2016 (SOLAS, 2014), The 2014 Further Education and Training Services Plan (SOLAS, 2014), Leaving School in Ireland: A Longitudinal Study of Post-School Transitions (ERSI, 2014), Policy and Criteria for Access transfer and progression in relation to providers of further and higher education and training (NQAI 2003, Restated by QQI 2015)

The scoping exercise suggested that there are a variety of relationships between FET and HE. However, inequities within the current FET to HE access routes were observed and this suggests that the relationships are not based fully on equality. Rather it seems to be based on a wide and diverse range of other factors including, for example:

- Requirements for a highly skilled and educated workforce consistent with a high performing open economy.
- Broad social acknowledgement of the benefits of higher education qualifications to the individual in comparison to other routes
- Increasing demand from students, teachers and trainers in FET to find progression pathways for further education and training graduates.
- Pressures on places and recruitment to HE programmes, the developmental trajectory of many learners, and the realities of lifelong learning. FET teacher training within HE.
- The historically segregated responsibilities of the State in relation to FET provision, for example, the Department of Enterprise and Employment, and the Department of Education and Skills.
- Perceptions of variable quality of learning and outcomes obtained through some FET programmes, including of lack of consistency nationally between identical awards obtained through/from different providers.
- Pressure on ETB management to offer clear progression routes from FET provision to the world or work and HE.

To meet these needs, a wealth of individualised relationships evolved over time between FET organisations, stakeholders, providers and HEIs to improve access, transfer and progression for learners seeking pathways to higher education. There are individual arrangements between teachers and management within ETBs and HEIs who have co-constructed facilitative pathways for FET graduates of particular standards and experiences to progress into HE.

Provision in the Region

Within the FET2HE region there is a wide range of programmes leading to awards at all Levels of the Framework. Earlier work by the MEND Partnership confirmed for HEIs that the distribution and range of programmes in HE was appropriate for the demographic and skills demands of the region. With regard to FET provision, the individual ETB demographic and

skills demand, locally, regionally and nationally, is reflected in the annual FET Services Plan published by SOLAS. It may be useful to analyse the matching and distribution of different programmes and populations across both sectors with a view to informing required pathways, and effectively targeting the 10% of FET participants addressed in both FET and HE strategies.

Within FET provision, programmes leading to awards at Levels 5 and 6 are delivered across a range of full-time and part-time programmes including, for example, the Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) provision, specific skills training, traineeships and apprenticeships. Other programmes are delivered through the Back to Education Initiative (BTEI) and the Vocational Training Opportunity Scheme (VTOS).-PLC provision is the largest single programme type, leading in most instances to major awards at Level 5, some with progression opportunities to a second year leading to Level 6 awards or to awards of UK based awarding bodies. PLC programmes specifically include preparation for progression to HE among the programme aims. An evaluation of the PLC programme is currently being conducted by the ESRI on behalf of SOLAS.

Participants in FET include the full range of socio-economic and age groups including those who are disadvantaged. Many individuals undertake FET as a second chance education opportunity. This diversity also means that applicants from FET to HE may qualify under several pathways: mature access, access/outreach pathways for disadvantaged cohorts, on the basis of previously attained Leaving Certificate, including with the Disability Access Route to Education (DARE) or the Higher Education Access Route (HEAR) schemes, through local FET college to HE programme local links, scholarships for voluntary/ community/ arts or sporting achievements or through the Higher Education Links Scheme (HELS). Some pathways are more distinctive than others and candidates and indeed FET providers may never be aware of the basis for entry once granted.

The Higher Education Links Scheme (HELS) and systematic progression to HE

The Higher Education Links Scheme (HELS) developed in the 1990s through the work of the National Council for Vocational Awards (NCVA) with HEIs, primarily the Institutes of Technology (ITs). It was recognised that for awards of the Council to have status and be valued appropriately nationally, access to HE would have to be negotiated on the basis of the quality of learning involved in the attainment of the award. The scheme did not apply to awards made by other awarding bodies e.g. FÁS, Teagasc, Fáilte Ireland etc.

A link was established for individual awards (Level 5 certificates or 'full awards') granting eligibility to apply for access to first year in programmes in HEIs, sometimes with additional special requirements, e.g. named minor awards or specific grades in specific minor awards. Providers developed programmes based on the standards of the awards, typically taking account of progression requirements. The HELS is owned and managed by the HEIs through the Central Applications Office (CAO). A key advantage of the scheme is the efficiency gained for HEIs in processing diverse applications. Gradually the Universities adopted the scheme. Quotas remained small and were not transparent to the public at large.

Following the establishment of the Framework (NFQ), the IoT sector agreed a broad view that achievement of a Level 5 award was in principle adequate to confer eligibility to progress to programmes at Level 6, 7 or 8 depending on core knowledge, skill and competence requirements. Pathways widened, including an arrangement where any Level 5 major award (i.e. 120 credits) gave eligibility to apply for a place in many programmes within the IoT sector. The IoTs began to rank FET applicants among those from Leaving Certificate in a common pool, based on a score obtained through a combination of grades, credits, level and associated points. The University sector remained with the reserved quota system. Some Universities now publish the number of places available for FET candidates.

Following the introduction of CAS, the HELS was reviewed by HEI representatives. A new scoring system was devised to evaluate candidate's achievement. A 'cap' of 400 points (390 from 2017) was established largely to address inappropriate use of the flexibility of the CAS system wherein some FET providers offered largely irrelevant double credit minor awards, including at Level 6, to facilitate achievement of a higher score, typically to enhance the chances of success of candidates applying to high demand programmes. Scoring of Level 6 achievement was adjusted to become identical to that of Level 5. Candidates could apply to the first year of programmes in HE on the basis of a Level 5 or 6 award. (Some Level 6 awards or programmes confer eligibility to apply for advanced entry or for exemptions within HE programmes but these are on a case by case basis and are not part of the HELS. FET providers contest the decisions surrounding valuing of achievement of awards at Level 6.) Individual HEI requirements must be satisfied by successful applicants e.g. specific minor awards required, specific number of specific grades obtained, satisfied single sitting requirements. The latest adjustment to the HELS is the introduction of the revised scoring system, to be implemented from 2017.

Universities continue to offer places within a quota system and typically require five Distinctions as a minimum. One University requires four Distinctions for admissions and noted no subsequent drop in attainment of candidates progressing. IoTs continue to offer places ranked within a common pool including Leaving Certificate and other candidates. Places are offered by the CAO in line with the HEI requirements on the basis of merit and without regard to centre of origin. CAO rigorously audit the application of their process annually. Accurate information regarding links and requirements are published by CAO annually. CAO and the individual HEIs remain the key source of data.

The number of applicants to HE through HELS increases annually. However, there is a fairly constant drop-off between those applying in the first instance, eligible for and offered places and those accepting and taking up places. There appears to be no qualitative data regarding the factors affecting such decisions, although anecdotally it is thought that the time lapse between being offered a place and knowing that the funding is in place to enable accepting the place is an issue.

HELS does not enable qualification under the Disability Access Route to Education (DARE) or the Higher Education Access Route (HEAR). The view in devising CAS is that both the awards structure and associated validated programmes provide sufficient flexibility to enable appropriate decisions at local level regarding equity of opportunity to succeed in assessment. Little is known about the experiences of people with disabilities within FET programmes at Level 5 and 6; this may be an area for further exploration within the region. The number of applicants to HE through HELS increases annually. However, there is a fairly constant drop-off between those applying in the first instance, eligible for and offered places and those accepting and taking up places. There appears to be no qualitative data regarding the factors affecting such decisions, although anecdotally it is thought that the time lapse between being offered a place and knowing that the funding is in place to enable accepting the place is an issue.

This could be considered in the future by the Regional Network, perhaps in collaboration with relevant other stakeholders e.g. the HEA National Access Office and the CAO.

The advantage of the HELS is its systematic, transparent, stable and efficient application. Accurate information regarding links and requirements are published by CAO annually. CAO and the individual HEIs are the key source of data in this regard.

It is important to note that there is sometimes significant variance between the stated requirements for one HEI and programme from another, and indeed from one year to another. FET providers note the challenge of keeping abreast of such requirements and have observed within the Network that it can actually preclude progression as a programme can only absorb so many adjustments in delivery meeting the requirements perhaps of a particular HEI rather than a range.

It may be useful in the work of the Network and the region to examine such variations with a view to understanding the rationale behind them.

The quota system within HELS is often discussed; it appears logical that the range of those progressing from one stream should be proportionate to those from others. FET programme purposes and individual motivations and realistic opportunities can vary. HELS accommodates achievement through the accumulation of credits which may match certain modes of participation; however, individual HEIs set the requirement regarding a single sitting. It should be noted, however, that where a single sitting is deemed a basic requirement, this effectively excludes flexibility at a critical point of entry. This needs to be borne in mind when considering HELS as a progression route and in devising public information around it.

An evaluation of FET learner performance within HE has not been carried out nationally for many reasons. Some HEIs provide routine feedback to FET colleges regarding the progression experience and attainment of FET graduates within programmes. This may be an area for consideration within the Network. The National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning has published *Transition for Second Level and Further Education to Higher Education* indicating that FET graduates perform well in HE, are motivated and informed regarding choice and that this impacts positively on performance and persistence and retention. A further study is ongoing specifically with regard to the experiences of FET graduates within HE.

The Network may wish to consider such research and monitoring/data planning of different cohort's experiences as part of its on-going suite of work. In some regions, outside of HELS, additional arrangements are developed granting advantage/extra points to applicants presenting from particular programmes offered in particular FET centres. These tend to be difficult to identify in public material and therefore may be an impediment to good planning on an applicant's behalf. Where this exists in the region it may be useful to examine such arrangements in order to identify the basis and its extensibility in terms of confidence/trust.

Pathways from FET to HE

Many of the links and relationships between different institutions are programme-to-programme links. Some of these links highlighted through the Network are working very well. Some have been developed over many years by individuals from both sectors working together to enhance the quality of experience and progression options of their learners. However, these special relationships can be viewed negatively by those outside the relationship. This relates to a lack of transparency in these arrangements. Though not stated publicly, some respondents to the scoping exercise suggested that the central reason for the lack of transparency of relationships is that many FET institutions and ETBs guard the arrangements as they are in direct competition with others for student recruitment; the same was suggested by the HEI respondents in relation to their institutions.

Transitions from Training to Higher Education

Post Leaving Certificate Courses

The scoping exercise showed that for many in the HEIs and the ETBs, the focus is primarily on progression from PLC courses rather than the broader FET sector, largely for historical reasons, some of which date to the White Paper, *Charting our Education Future* (1995), which clearly flagged PLC programmes as an alternative route to Higher Education for some. The purposes of programmes such as traineeships and apprenticeships did not give such primacy to progression to Higher Education and is now clearly, arising from the formation of ETBs as comprehensive regional services and broader contextual and social changes reflected above, an area for consideration for more effective, explicit inclusion of graduates of such programmes in progression arrangements.

Progression to higher education frequently fails to address validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL). This is an issue the regional Network could research further.

Apprenticeships

With regard to Apprenticeships, the Advanced Craft Certificate³ provides progression to a variety of Level 6, 7 and 8 courses in HEIs. In addition to the Advanced Certificate, individual

³ The volume of learning associated with the Advanced Craft Level 6 award is 240 FET credits; programme duration is typically four years.

institutions may have had some further entry requirements such as interview and/or preparatory programmes.

A full mapping exercise was completed and published by FETAC entitled *Progression from FETAC Advanced Certificate - Craft to HE Courses* (July 2010). In general, applications to full-time and part-time courses were by direct application to individual institutions. However, some required applicants to apply through the CAO. Applicants were advised to confirm mode of entry and any additional requirements with the Admissions Office of the individual institutions. However, clear information and consistent progression requirements do not appear to be in place for holders of Advanced Craft awards.

With the introduction of the Common Awards System (CAS), former FÁS awards (except the Advanced Certificate Craft awards), along with Teagasc, Failte Ireland and NCVA awards transitioned to the CAS. Programmes differed but the same learning outcomes were achieved leading to major awards. Therefore, it is logical to expect that learners achieving the standards of the awards, regardless of provider, should experience comparable progression routes, where awards are the basis for progression as in HELS.

In certain cases, there may be specific entry requirements in addition to the award which may or may not be part of the programmes offered, notwithstanding that the same major award is obtained. Places within the HELS are offered via the CAO and are subject to the number of places available for non-standard entry, quotas, and reserved places etc. where such apply, i.e. in the university sector.

Concern has been aired regarding a perceived lack of progression from training provision to HE, which merits careful examination. Higher Education institutions seeking talent need to be aware of the full range of programmes offering linked awards, and to examine such programmes and explore articulation in ways similar to that associated with some PLC programmes.

Inconsistencies in the entry mechanisms to HE

Many HEIs appear to have ring-fenced a dedicated number of places within particular HE courses for FET graduates with whom they have developed a relationship. Many of the HEIs call these 'reserved places' and they are accessed in the main through the CAO. However, a reoccurring theme in the scoping exercise in relation to this - highlighted by many of the ETBs - was the 'lottery' aspect of these reserved places. Achievement of the entry requirements does not always guarantee entry.

Many HEIs do not have a formalised FET to HE progression strategy or common stated policy. Within this vacuum, individual FET Centres negotiate local pathways, in some instances based on carefully developed articulation arrangements with individual programmes within HEIs. However, competitiveness in a local context is a key feature of such arrangements. In addition, many FET providers express a view that places in HE programmes are freely offered where there are issues with recruitment or retention, where programmes cannot otherwise be filled. High demand programmes do not typically attract such places or arrangements, although there are anecdotal exceptions.

There are political, legacy and historical reasons why FET provision is very unequal across the country. The scoping exercise demonstrated that it is difficult to obtain transparent information regarding progression pathways; local arrangements are another as most are underpinned by MOUs. However, such MOUs are not typically published, and can be vague as to detail yet are widely promoted as providing enhanced progression opportunities.

Laois Offaly Education and Training Board (LOETB) kindly contributed information in relation to their local pathways arrangements. It may be helpful for others to describe these mechanisms and relationships.

CAO Points

The scoping exercise uncovered varying viewpoints and interpretations regarding the issues of CAO points. Some respondents suggested that there was clearly a differential of 235 between the maximum achievable using FET results and the Leaving Certificate. It was suggested that a maximum of 400 points can be achieved via FET through scoring of awards at level 5 or 6 as against 635 points for the Leaving Certificate. The Leaving Certificate is placed over Levels 4 and 5 of the NFQ.

Also, the different requirements from some HEIs in relation to the number of Distinctions that learners must achieve, appears to be inconsistent. However, in stating these issues, we cannot ignore the NFQ and the Levels and workload associated with these awards.

It should be stated here that IoTs use the HELS differently, and rank candidates competitively against the Leaving Certificate applicants. That means that the discrepancy in scoring could be perceived to be an issue except that most programmes in IoTs do not carry more than a 400-point (*390 from 2017*) requirement, and secondly, IoTs argue that if they didn't do this, they could not admit as many candidates as they do currently from FET.

Respondents suggested that the issue of the relative valuing and 'points' differential between QQI (FETAC) awards and the Leaving Certificate should be discussed and addressed.

Full-Time and Part-Time Provision

The research highlighted that real issues exist in both full-time and part-time provision. Full-time provision may have some blockages, and part-time (and flexible) provision offers few local pathways. Respondents described problems learners encountered when trying to gain access to HE from FET in relation to grants, student fees and social welfare. Inconsistencies in the eligibility criteria for non-traditional students (mature students, lone-parents, and people with disabilities, socio-economically disadvantaged learners etc.) were cited as a significant barrier to progression. The Back to Education Allowance was named as an example of such inconsistency. In relation to part-time study and flexible modes of delivery this again seems to be an issue. The scoping exercise highlighted issues related to this:

- The lack of flexible study opportunities at HE.
- The State's Free Fees Schemes for HE is only applicable for full-time courses. The evidence would suggest that a large group of learners wishing to progress from FET to HE are slightly older (or fit into the mature student range 23+) than the traditional Leaving Certificate students. They tend to have a greater tie to home, family, work and other community commitments, which do not allow them to attend full-time study and deems them ineligible for the State Free Fees scheme.

Connected to this issue is the issue of 'forward and backward steps'. Respondents suggested that some learners wishing to progress from FET to HE were encountering barriers in relation to progression into universities from NFQ Level 6 and subsequently discovered that there were no progression routes from their course. Some who subsequently wished to return to a more pathway-specific Level 5 course found that this 'backward step' disqualified them from certain future funding opportunities.

Again, it is difficult to get all the data from the HEIs regarding admissions as sometimes learners may apply and qualify through a range of pathways.

It can be difficult to understand each route and what is the most efficient application system for the learner concerned.

Learners identified confusion regarding progression routes, sometimes compounding a personal lack of confidence.

One suggestion may be to conduct further research with the Admissions Departments at HEI Level as well as the CAO if the appropriate permissions could be facilitated.

Placement

Graduates of FET provision do not know whether they will get a place in the HEI when applying. Universities and some high demand programmes in IoTs use quotas to ensure places for non-standard entrants including those from FET and mature students. Some Universities and IoTs routinely publish the number of places set aside for FET entrants but there is no national picture available on the number of places that might be available for such candidates in any given year. (CAO publishes the small number of places available in nursing degree programmes.)

Thus, there is generally a lack of clarity regarding the scope of opportunity available for learners. This is not consistently highlighted or communicated within guidance circles, and there is a general lack of profile in media etc., which in turn might diminish the standing of FET. Additionally, numbers are small and therefore it is hard to draw robust conclusions with regard to performance, attainment, capacity and future employment success.

Further research should be focused in this area in conjunction with the SOLAS role of 'increasing the standing of FET' (2015).

The Higher Education Authority (HEA) gathers data on progression into HE, including from FET. It would be helpful to analyse such data particularly with reference to this region and to discuss it more publicly.

Some institutions (e.g. Cork Institute of Technology) routinely give detailed feedback to FET providers regarding the progression success or otherwise of candidates once accepted into HE programmes. Through collaboration, programmatic adjustments are facilitated to support transition and integration into programmes. This practice is viewed as helpful and supportive.

It is also noted by many HE providers that FET graduates present well prepared for HE, and typically experience success. Persistence, maturity and an informed decision underpinning participation are features of successful FET progression within HE.

Curriculum and assessment collaboration

While some of the staff within the HEIs commented that the assessment methods used in FET helped to prepare students well for HE, others indicated they would like to recruit more learners from FET but there can often be concerns with standards obtained by FET applicants. There appears to be very little evidence base for these concerns, and it would be very helpful for the Network to conduct further research with the HEIs to explore this. (QQI and others such as the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning are actively researching and addressing issues of consistency across the sector including within FET and HE, through increasingly rigorous programme validation and other policy led measures.) Some ETB respondents highlighted that certain 'domains' in HE were harder to create connections with, such as Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM). Some ETBs outlined how they are addressing this by co-designing programmes in FET which are externally examined by the HEI. This is a positive step. QQI has taken a range of actions in relation to some of these concerns, such as the joint development of the Maths for STEM Special Purpose award at NFQ Level 5. This award, which may be embedded within major award programmes, carries a double credit and has been deemed by the validation panel to be comparable at Merit Grade to HC3 grade in higher Level Mathematics for Leaving Certificate. The programme also provides specific measures to provide for consistency in assessment through on-line question banks developed collaboratively by practitioners in both further and higher education and training.

Information and guidance and navigation

The scoping exercise identified concerns in the information and guidance services for learners within FET and within the Post-Primary schooling system. It was acknowledged that while there are excellent guidance services being provided in various FET settings, the national guidance infrastructure appears to be inconsistent, leading to gaps in provision and access to effective services. Some ETBs suggested that their learners had informed them they felt 'confused' when it came to making choices for future learning opportunities particularly at Post-Primary Level and sometimes in the FET setting itself.

It would be important for the Network to explore these issues further and engage with NCGE and adult guidance initiatives and other bodies related to guidance services.

Themes and Next Steps

Progress is being made at ETB and HEI Level in certain areas, but the scoping exercise reveals that there is much left to do. The process highlighted many examples of local initiatives being

developed and piloted. This exercise was designed for the Network members to build progress through engagement with the relevant FET and HE stakeholders. These issues have been clustered into themes as outlined below:

- **ATP opportunities and pathways from FET to HE - Why do arrangements and requirements differ between FET Centres/Colleges and HEIs? What can be done to make pathways more equitable and transparent in this region?**
- **What barriers do students, mature students, non-traditional students, face in terms of funding, grants and progression from training programmes and to Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL). What are the solutions for this region?**
- **Quality assurance at the counterpoints and shared concerns related to assessment, curriculum and content. Should FET and HE collaborate at a curricular Level? If yes, what approach/models should be considered? If no, why not?**
- **Clarity of information and guidance – why do few students and their families know about all of the options available to them? What will bring around change in that regard in this region?**

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