

KILKENNY AND CARLOW EDUCATION AND TRAINING BOARD

An Evaluation of the Impact of the Covid-19 Modifications to Teaching, Learning and Assessment

June 2020



QI AWARD



etb

Bord Oideachais agus Oiliúna
Chill Chainnigh agus Cheatharlach
*Kilkenny and Carlow
Education and Training Board*

Contents

Introduction	4
Section One: Teaching Learning and Assessment.....	6
Teaching Learning and Assessment Process.....	6
Changes to learning environment	6
Learning outcomes.....	6
Alternative Assessment	7
Alternative Assessment Approval Process.....	7
Correcting of Assessments.....	8
Section Two: Governance and Management of quality	9
Changes to QA Processes and procedures	9
Internal Verification Process.....	9
External authentication process	9
RAP process.....	10
Review and Conclusion	11
Section Three: Self-evaluation, Monitoring and Review	12
Methodology.....	12
Teachers/ Tutor survey	12
Analysis of tutor data from tutor survey	12
Teachers/ Tutor context	12
Summary of main findings	12
Recommendations	13
Learner survey	14
Analysis of learner data from learner survey.....	14
Learner Context	14
Summary of main findings	15
Recommendations	15
Manager survey	16
Analysis of manager data from manager survey	16
Manager context.....	17
Summary of main findings	17
Recommendations	17
Section Four: Addressing key QQI questions.....	19
1. What were the main differences?	19

2.	What worked well?	19
	Alternative assessment process in terms of how the centres engagement.....	19
	Remote EA.....	20
	Engagement of centres with remote EA.....	20
	Survey to EA.....	20
	OneDrive as central sharing medium Uploading of files	20
	Sampling strategy.....	21
3.	What did not work as well as hoped but could have been improved?	21
	Remote EA.....	21
	Time to conduct EA.....	22
	Reduced sampling strategy.....	22
	Communication between centres, EA & QA team.....	22
	Alternative assessments being sent to learners before approval	22
4.	What in hindsight might have been done differently?	23
5.	What worked so well that it could be retained beyond the emergency?	23
	Elements of online learning and assessment.....	23
	Surveys	23
	Remote IV.....	23
	Remote EA.....	23
6.	How were the changes to TLA overseen, coordinated/quality assured?	24
7.	What international developments are noteworthy and how does Ireland compare?.....	24
	City and Guilds	24
	Summary and Conclusions.....	26

Introduction

This document describes the approach adopted by Kilkenny and Carlow Education and Training Board (KCETB) to the necessary amendments made as a result of the Covid-19 emergency. On the 12th March 2020, the Government announced that ‘Schools, colleges, and childcare facilities will close from tomorrow. Where possible, teaching will be done on-line or remotely’. As a result, all of the KCETB centres closed from 13th March and have remained closed to learners. This has had significant impacts on teaching and learning, assessments and quality assurance (QA) processes at a very important period in the academic year. Learners have been impacted considerably as a result of these changes and every effort has been made by centres to ensure that the impact has been minimised.

KCETB implemented a series of measures to assist remote learning for students and arrangements were also put in place for staff to maintain service delivery in so far as is possible. The staff focussed their efforts on ensuring that the care of the students remained at the core of all their endeavours. Teaching and learning developed into remote and online classes in place of the familiar ‘face-to-face’ contact in the classroom.

To support all of these transitions, and in response to the QQI guidance issued in relation to the Covid-19 emergency, the KCETB QA Team issued a number of documents to support staff and learners throughout the assessment and authentication processes. These are:

Document	Issued	Focus
Guidelines and Procedures for Covid-19 Contingency Planning for Assessments	6 th April 2020	Guidance on planning for alternative assessments
Proposal for modification to Work Experience or Work Practice	22 nd April 2020	Guidelines on alternatives to Work Experience or Work Practice in non Industry specific awards.
Guidelines and Procedures for Covid-19 Contingency Planning for Assessments Addendum 1 Alternative Assessments and Authentication Processes	23 rd April 2020	Guidance on Quality Assurance process
Guidelines and Procedures for Covid-19 Contingency Planning for Assessments Addendum 2 Authentication Processes	6 th May 2020	Guidance on Authentication processes

Table 1 KCETB documents issued for Covid-19 contingency planning

This report undertakes a holistic review of all of the steps involved in implementing the alternative arrangements for the teaching, learning and assessments and the quality assurance processes. It discusses and analyses:

- the methodologies used to gather information pertinent to the amendments via surveys
- the data and information from the completed KCETB surveys
- the process for alternative arrangements that were required for teaching, learning and assessments
- the governance and management of quality of the assessments

- highlights of what went well during the process
- areas where improvements could be made
- key learning points to inform future planning

The report is divided into sections as described in Figure 1

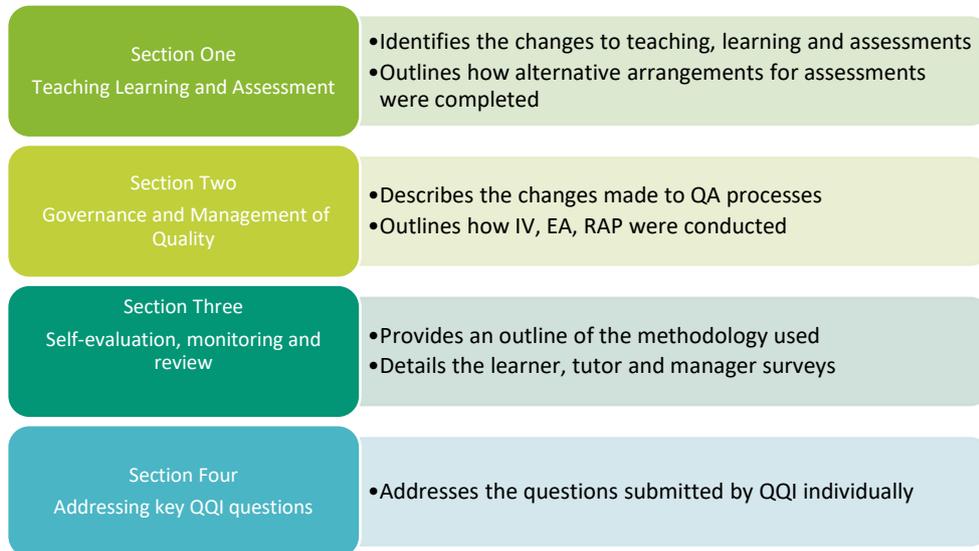


Figure 1 Layout of report

Section One: Teaching Learning and Assessment

Teaching Learning and Assessment Process

On 12th March, all KCETB learners left their respective centres as per government guidelines. However, the teaching and learning continued across the KCETB community. Teachers and support staff worked hard to ensure systems were established to allow continuity of education remotely. Examples of the innovative and flexible teaching and learning arrangements included:

- Use of 'Zoom' to conduct classes remotely
- Use of Microsoft Teams to provide a platform for communications, document sharing, group work, chats and video calls.
- Provision of IT support
- Use of websites and e-learning
- Continued use of Moodle where available
- Copying / scanning and posting of worksheets and resources

For courses that follow the academic year from September to May, there was a substantial volume of work completed by March, however the work planned for the second half of March through to May remained incomplete. Outstanding learning outcomes for modules were completed remotely, where possible.

Changes to the learning environment

Centres normally provide the necessary equipment and utilities to support the delivery of programmes including:

- IT equipment: PCs, laptops, printers, scanners,
- Broadband
- Specialist software e.g. SAGE, Micropay
- Practical equipment for specialist courses

The move to remote learning presented many challenges for both learners and tutors/teachers. It became much more difficult for learners to complete their work remotely. However, with approximately 75% of the academic year completed before the Covid-19 emergency, many of the practical skills necessary had been acquired. Certain assessments remained outstanding.

For learners requiring supports, centres endeavoured to continue addressing their individual needs remotely. Of those surveyed 46% faced challenges that hindered their ability to learn at home. The main challenges experienced were poor or no internet, caring for others and the lack of access to a suitable device.

Learning outcomes

With a portion of the learning outcomes not completed, remote classes were conducted to ensure course completion. Significantly, certain prescribed assessments could not be assessed remotely and alternatives were required to ensure the learning outcomes were met. These are discussed in detail in the next section.

In particular, there were a number of areas that provided significant challenges to overcome including:

- Work Experience modules across a number of programmes

- Practical modules including animal grooming, beauty therapy, professional cookery etc.
- Craft and New apprenticeship awards requiring access to workshops
- Technology dependant modules including sound engineering
- Art and craft modules including sculpture etc.

Alternative Assessment

Alternative Assessment Approval Process

Following QQI discussions and receipt of guidelines detailed instructions were issued by the QA Team in April 2020 (refer to table 1) on planning for assessments. These guidelines and procedures were intended to inform and support the development of alternative forms of assessment so that learners could achieve the qualification they had been working towards while maintaining the integrity of the award. Clear guidelines were provided on alternative forms of assessment to assist in their creation and implementation. In addition, contingency plans were provided for Work Experience modules where learners were unable to complete their work placement.

As a result of additional guidance published by QQI, an addendum to the original guidance document was issued on 23rd April (refer to table 1). This was intended for use when implementing and planning alternative assessments and authentication processes. The process involved is described in Figure 2 'Alternative Assessment Approval Process' and consisted of:

- The centre teachers reviewing the learning outcomes and devising alternative approaches to allow the original assessment to be amended or replaced by an 'alternative assessment' method. An alternative assessment was then created.
- The centre team then completed Alternative Assessment forms (templates were provided by QA) and submitted to the centre manager for approval. These were then submitted to the QA team for review.
- The QA team gathered all of the information into an Alternative Assessment tracker and organised a series of review meetings. Each proposal was reviewed and either:
 - Approved to proceed
 - Further information / clarification requested
 - Rejected with justification
- Feedback was delivered to each centre in a timely manner
- Those alternative assessments that were approved were conducted. Where clarifications or amendments were required, these were re-submitted for the next review.

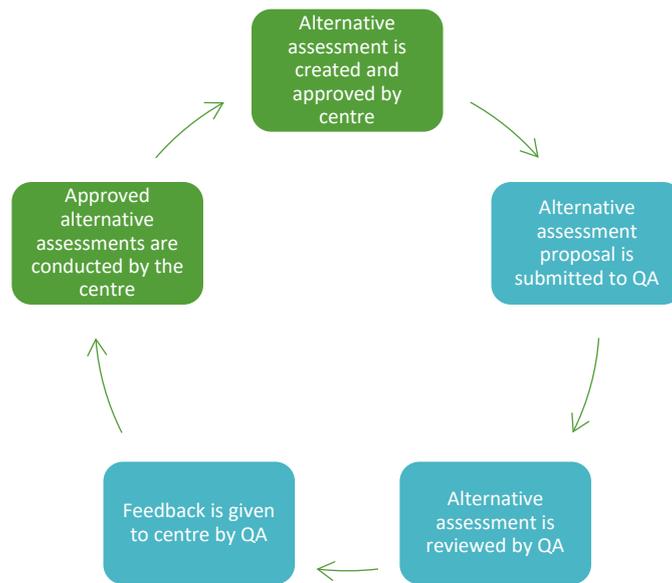


Figure 2 Alternative assessment approval process

The alternative assessment review process ensured robust Quality Assurance oversight of the changes as required during the Covid-19 emergency.

Correcting of Assessments

Due to Covid-19 restrictions, all KCETB centres were closed in March. All face-to-face and classroom-based teaching was conducted online thereafter. Assessments were also conducted online or remotely where possible and the KCETB teaching and support staff endeavoured to support each and every student to complete their coursework. KCETB created a notification 'Communication to learners'¹ to keep them informed of changes that were being implemented.

All completed assessments were corrected by the individual tutors/teachers and the work was submitted for Internal Verification.

¹ [KCETB Assessment Arrangements – Communications to Learners](#) (Link only valid within KCETB)

Section Two: Governance and Management of quality

Changes to QA Processes and procedures

Internal Verification Process

The internal verification process is conducted when the marking of assessments has been completed. Ordinarily, these are completed within the centre by staff. Internal verification is a key step in the overall authentication process.

Due to Covid-19 restrictions, the internal verification process required further guidance. As a result of additional guidance published by QQI, an addendum to the original guidance document was issued on 23rd April (refer to table 1).

Internal verification was conducted online where possible. This involved uploading learners work, marking sheets and associated documents. Throughout the internal verification process, all staff complied with the standard internal verification processes and reports on the internal verification process were issued by each centre.

External Authentication Process

The external authentication process of learners work is a key measure in the KCETB Quality assurance processes. It provides an independent oversight by appointing an External Authenticator who is a qualified professional engaged by KCETB to review the entire assessment process. This year, all of these external authentication processes had to be completed remotely.

In line with QQI guidelines all alternative assessment had to be externally authenticated. All material that was required to be externally authenticated was collated, scanned (where necessary) and uploaded online. The work then had to be categorised into files and folders which could be shared externally with the appointed external authenticator for the centre.

The QA team at KCETB oversee the external authentication process. To facilitate remote EA, the following steps were completed:

1. Confirmed the ability of each external authenticator to conduct EA remotely
2. Uploaded all of the EA paperwork online
3. Uploaded all of the marking sheets online
4. Uploaded the IV reports online
5. Uploaded sampled learners' assessments for review

Sampling strategies were critical. The sample had to be sufficient to enable the authenticator to make an informed judgement. The following was considered when agreeing a sampling strategy with an EA:

- placing a greater emphasis on reviewing evidence that had been assessed using alternative assessments
- analysing the number and distribution of results
- focus on borderline grades (e.g. Fail/Pass, Pass/Merit, Merit/Distinction)
- a reduced focus on long-established programmes that have been subject to extensive external authentication in the previous year to 18 months and in which very few issues have been identified.

As all of the above administration is an additional workload for each centre and also increased the length of the actual EA process, it was necessary to reduce the sample size. Therefore, it was proposed to amend the sampling strategies for all centres to the following:

1. Modules were collated into individual teacher/ tutor groups. Samples were to be spread across the range of tutors/teachers.
2. For each module, count the number of assessments and determine the sample size:

Number of assessments	Sample size	Suggested selection (EA to confirm)
≥ 25	6	Lowest Distinction grade Highest Merit grade Lowest Merit grade Highest Pass grade Lowest Pass grade Highest unsuccessful grade <i>If there is not a sufficient spread of grades, chose a mid-point also.</i>
< 25	3	Highest grade Mid-point grade Lowest grade

Note: 25 is chosen as $\sqrt{25+1} = 6$

Table 2: KCETB revised sampling strategy

The EA had access to the IV reports, the marking sheets, the selected learners work to review and was given an option to broaden the sample size if a satisfactory conclusion could not be determined based on the documents and evidence reviewed. On completion of the external authentication process, the EA submitted the EA reports to the QA office by e-mail.

KCETB is satisfied that this approach provided sufficiently robust Quality Assurance of the external authentication processes in the current circumstances.

RAP Process

The results approval process requires a convening of a Results Approval Panel (RAP). All results going forward for certification are presented for review and approval. In addition, items highlighted as part of the internal verification and external authentication processes are reviewed. Grade changes recommended by external authenticators are discussed and accepted (or not).

As a result of the Covid-19 emergency, the RAP process was conducted online as follows:

- All members were invited to participate by calendar invite via Microsoft teams
- Folders were created in Microsoft Teams to allow the uploading of IV reports, EA reports and summary marking sheets
- A separate folder was created for the KCETB RAP documentation
- The meeting was convened, with all members attending by video link, and chaired remotely by the KCETB Director of Further Education and Training
- All documents were reviewed and key items discussed
- The learners' results were recommended for issuing and processing via the QBS system to QQI by each centre.

Review and Conclusion

Throughout the Covid-19 emergency, KCETB was faced with many challenges. The significant changes to the education of the learners was sudden and dramatic. Likewise, the working lives of KCETB were altered. However, because of the significant efforts of a large cohort of staff and management, the vast majority of programmes were completed on time. In addition, changes made underwent robust QA scrutiny which provided solid oversight of all of the assessment and authentication processes.

Section Three: Self-evaluation, Monitoring and Review

Methodology

The Quality Assurance team prepared a MS Forms survey in line with the QQI guidance document and in consultation with the Public Information and Communication Group. It was decided in order to capture a full picture of the response at centre level additional questions would be asked to all stakeholders regarding Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL). Findings from this element of the survey will be used to develop a KCETB TEL Action Plan. In order to collect information from a wide range of sources, three separate surveys were completed:

- Tutor (teacher) survey
- Learner survey
- Manager survey

The Teacher/ tutor survey was circulated to all centres via the Principal or Coordinator and a two week time frame was given for completion. The Learner survey was prepared in a similar format and was circulated to all learners registered on a KCETB programme through our PLSS system. The survey was sent through text to all learners and again linking to the MS Forms format. The Manager survey was developed in a similar format but was circulated to all centre managers through the FET Director with a one week turn around time.

Teacher / Tutor Survey

Analysis of tutor data from tutor survey

On the 19th of May 2020 a survey was sent to all KCETB FET Teachers/ Tutors via email. The survey was left open until Friday 12th June. There were 167 responses to the survey. This represented a response rate of approximately 61% (total of 273 teachers/tutors working in KCETB excluding external party tutors). Responses were received from teachers/ tutors across a diverse range of KCETB FET provision. The survey was divided into three sections; Teaching & Learning, Alternative arrangements for assessment, Technology Enhanced Learning & Learner Engagement. Teachers/ Tutors/teachers answered a maximum of 44 questions across all sections. The survey used branching sections meaning some questions were only posed depending on a specific response to a previous question. The average time to complete the survey was 51 minutes.

Teachers/ Tutor context

This first part of the survey establishes which centre the respondent was from, the modifications to communication, structures and what worked well. Each centre was represented in the survey. Responses were received from teachers/ tutors/teachers across the majority of KCETB FET provision.

Summary of main findings

- Tutors/teachers/ teachers rated stress levels during this period at 3.53² with 5 being extremely stressful.
- The supports received after the closure from KCETB colleagues/management/QA department was rated at 3.54.

² Rating of 5 being extremely stressful rating of 1 not stressful at all.

- Of those surveyed 77.5% had not completed all learning outcomes prior to the centre closing. Teachers were then asked to confirm if all learning outcomes were completed after the centre closed 33% stated that all learning outcomes were covered after the centre closed.
- 44% stated that it was necessary to modify learning outcomes as a result of COVID-19.
- 60% found there were able to compensate for the lack of access to practical rooms. While 40% stated they could not.
- Of those surveyed only 17 tutors/teachers stated that their learners were able to complete work placement a further 17 stated that learners completed 65% or more of their placement, 37 stated that learners did not complete work placement and a further 38 stated that there was a mixture of the previous options. It must be noted that this figure may not represent true figures as some programmes such as Community Education and Adult Literacy do not have work experience requirements.
- Assessments most impacted by centre closures were Skills Demonstrations followed by exam and Assignment.
- In the case of alternatives to Skills demonstrations/ practical's 27% stated no alternative could be found to the practical element of the assessment when no access to the centre could be granted.
- A proportion of those surveyed stated that alternatives for practical assessments were completed online (26%) or turned into an assessment (19%)
- Alternative arrangements to sit down exams were carried either by open book or closed book exams. Of the respondents 15% stated there was no alternative could be found. A further 40% chose other, this was chosen largely in cases where there was no examination requirement.
- Confidence in the integrity of assessment was high at 3.74 with 5 being 100% confident.
- Of those surveyed 65% stated they were not concerned with plagiarism.
- 74% stated results seemed the same as previous years, 21% stated that results seemed worse than previous years and only 5% stated that results seemed to be better overall than previous years.
- A resounding 66% of those surveyed felt that learners had been disadvantaged as a result of alternative assessment arrangements.

Recommendations

The survey found that a varied approach was adopted overall for interacting with learners. While areas such as the use of MS Teams, Zoom and Moodle were used extensively during this period there was however a higher than expected reliance on email 89% and post at 54%. The use of post specifically is geared towards the learners in the lower levels NFQ levels but could be argued is more time consuming and costly than using MS Teams for example.

The fact that 72% of respondents felt that the content they deliver could easily be converted to online delivery would indicate there is a willingness to this method of delivery. However in order for this to become a reality extensive CPD for staff and investment in infrastructure to support learners and teachers to fully operate in an online learning environment is needed. These points are further explored in the managers' survey.

Rich responses were received in the area of modifications to learning outcomes as a result of alternative assessment methodologies. Teachers felt that changes needed to be made to learning outcomes in modules such as Health and Safety and Infection, Prevention and Control as a result of

the heightened requirements in these areas due to COVID 19. Other areas that need to be reconsidered are work experience requirements and practical subjects in light of current restrictions.

The development of alternative assessment was able to take place in the majority of situations. It was however an area where teachers identified some difficulty in terms of having to develop alternatives at short notice and under heightened pressures. Some suggestions that were made in this area were around the development of a common pool of alternative assignments that could be drawn from at times such as these. This is a suggestion that will be considered by the QA team going forward as it would heighten QA governance in this area but also provide valuable resources to teachers.

Areas such as Animal Care and Beauty Therapy were some of the areas that made up the 27% of Skills Demonstrations that could not be reconfigured. A key consideration here for the future to mitigate against such situations, were they to arise may be the use of a more integrated approach to assessment. This would mean that learners would not be repeating the same piece of assessment across different modules and that a more continuous assessment approach could be taken. This would reduce the stress on the learner at the latter part of the year and also strengthen their learning in key areas.

Finally, it must be noted however that on average stress levels are higher (3.53 / 5) for tutors/teachers than for learners (2.96 / 5). This was largely down to the volume of work online learning, alternative assessment and heightened requirements from learners brought to teachers. A more streamlined communication approach with TEL supports may help to reduce these stress levels into the future if what is now an exceptional situation became the norm.

Learner Survey

Analysis of learner data from learner survey

On Friday 5th June 2020 a survey was sent to all KCETB FET learners via text message through PLSS and a follow up email was sent to all centre managers/coordinators with a link to the survey to be forwarded to any learners that did not receive it initially.

The survey was left open until Monday morning 15th June 2020. There were 415 responses to the survey. This represents a response rate of approximately 13% (total of 3020 registered learners at end of May). Responses were received from learners across all KCETB FET provision.

The survey was divided into two sections; Learning during lockdown and Assessment during lockdown. Learners answered a maximum of 44 questions across both sections. The survey used branching meaning some questions were only posed depending on a specific response to a previous question. The average time to complete the survey was 9 minutes.

Learner Context

This first part of the survey establishes which centre the respondent is in, the level of the course they are enrolled in and other data indicating how they learned from home during the centre closure. Responses were received from Learners across a diverse range of KCETB FET provision. Of the 367 respondents (88%) were enrolled in a QQI accredited course. In some instances there is dual accreditation, e.g. QQI and ITEC.

Summary of main findings

- Overall communication with learners was excellent during Covid-19 (an average rating of 4.15 / 5)
- 21% of respondents are primarily using a mobile phone internet connection at home
- 83% of respondents have a laptop or desktop at home
 - A number of learners in BTEI and Training Services, in particular, do not have a desktop or laptop at home
- 46% of respondents faced challenges that hindered their ability to learn at home. The main challenges being:
 - Poor or no internet
 - Caring for others
 - No suitable device
- 43% of respondents were using Moodle as a platform. 46% were using Microsoft Teams with 21% using both
- 56% of respondents said teachers used Zoom for video classes
- 84% of respondents had fixed dates and times for online interactive video classes
- 35% of respondents have no KCETB email address
- 89% miss attending the centre for classes
- Stress levels were average overall (2.96 / 5) during centre closure
- 53% of respondents completed all their assessments, 14% did not with the remainder ongoing
- 50% of respondents said closure had no impact on difficulty level of assessments
- 47% of respondents assessments were changed due to centre closure, 31% didn't know if they were changed or not
- 78% of respondents did not think they were disadvantaged by the alternative assessment arrangements
- 26% did not complete work placement
- Awareness of plagiarism is low
- 55% did not know if checks were in place to check for cheating in assessments, 10% said there were none
- 58% did not know if a plagiarism checker is used
- 43% of respondents that did a closed book exam said they were not observed (numbers doing closed book exams are low – only 51)
- The timing of the closure meant that many respondents commented that they had completed most of their coursework and that if centres had closed earlier it would have been more difficult

Recommendations

The survey found that overall communication was excellent during centre closure. It must be noted however that on average stress levels are higher (3.53 / 5) for tutors/teachers than for learners (2.96 / 5). This raises the question about the longer term sustainability of the online environment if what is now an exceptional situation became the norm.

The survey indicated that there is a desire among learners to continue the more flexible approach that remote learning can provide. If it is clear at the outset what resources are required for online participation and if there is a structure with regular contact from teachers/ tutors then there is scope for more online provision within appropriate programmes. A blended learning policy is being explored and developed in KCETB to support flexible learning approaches.

That said there is also a strong desire for face to face interaction with the vast majority (89%) stating that they miss attending the centre for classes.

There is scope for the increased use of online learning platforms such as Moodle and Microsoft Teams. Less than half of those surveyed are using either one of these online platforms. There is also scope to increase the amount of KCETB email addresses for learners. Once a learner is set up with a KCETB email address there are a wealth of resources available to them within the Microsoft Office package. In particular having a KCETB email address makes it easier to participate in Microsoft Teams.

56% of respondents stated that their teacher/tutor used Zoom for online video classes. Concerns around privacy within Zoom were raised in the media in early April. Microsoft Teams is an integrated system and may be more appropriate for use in education and training. Microsoft have also committed to GDPR regulations. More research may be needed in the area of video calls and privacy.

There are significant challenges that remain for learners learning at home. These are well documented; childcare, caring for others and resources (internet access and access to devices). In addressing the care issues; if blended learning / online learning is to be successfully implemented then it needs to be made clear when advertising a course the time commitment that is involved and due consideration given towards assessment deadlines for those that are caring for others at home.

There are still significant numbers of learners that do not have access to a laptop or desktop at home. This makes online learning more difficult. Most jobs now require some level of proficiency in typing. Learners with no laptop or desktop are at a distinct disadvantage. Consideration is being given to the establishment of a borrow system for learners with no laptop.

The survey found that awareness of plagiarism and plagiarism checking software is low. It may be the case that for a lot of respondents these considerations are irrelevant. However for those submitting large amounts of written work awareness of the importance of referencing should be reinforced. The use of plagiarism checking can also be increased if more learners are setup on online learning platforms within appropriate programmes of learning.

Consideration should also be given to the use of closed book exams as an appropriate remote assessment method. Although the numbers of learners carrying out closed book exams were low (51), it may not be possible to ensure the integrity of the assessment process even if observed via video and is not at all possible if the learners are not being observed at all.

Manager Survey

Analysis of manager data from manager survey

On Monday 1st June 2020 a survey was sent to all KCETB FET Managers via email. The survey was left open until Friday 12th June 2020. There were 33 responses to the survey representing a full complement of those tasked with managing accredited programmes in KCETB. The survey was divided into three sections: Teaching & Learning, Alternative Arrangements for Assessment, Technology Enhanced Learning and Learner Engagement. Managers answered a maximum of 45 questions across all sections. The survey used branching sections meaning some questions were only posed depending on a specific response to a previous question. The average time to complete the survey was 197 minutes.

Manager context

This first part of the survey establishes which centre the respondent is in, the modifications to communication, structures and what worked well. Each centre was represented in the survey.

Summary of main findings

- 94% stated that they modified their communication arrangements as a result of Covid 19.
- The top method of communicating with learners was email (88%) followed closely by Telephone (76%), Zoom (64%), Post (61%) and Microsoft Teams (42%).
- 97% stated that modifications had to be made to processes and structures as a result of restrictions. The key area modified was assessment at 79%, followed by online classes (70%) one to one support (64%) and Online IV (45%) / EA (30%).
- 85% stated that they would continue to utilise elements of the modifications after restrictions are lifted. Key areas noted here were Teams, online exams, online tutorials and online IV/EA.
- 79% identified that internal consultation took place to establish modified Teaching, Learning and Assessment arrangements.
- Of those surveyed 83% stated that organisational supports were provided to their centre in establishing modified Teaching, Learning and Assessment arrangements while 6 stated support was not provided. Examples of the types of supports provided include supports from the QA Office, TEL Office and also personnel within their own service.
- 48% identified work experience requirements as a factor that complicated the establishment of alternative assessment arrangements.
- 79% stated that learning outcomes were not covered prior to closing the centre with a further 45% stating that some learning outcomes remained incomplete after the closing of the centre. When questioned further around this centres stated that this was due to IT issues, learners' personal circumstances, the type of award or that module would be finished later in the year.
- 82% stated that alternative assessment arrangements were put in place
- 81% stated that additional systems were put in place to preserve the academic integrity of the modified arrangements, Examples of systems put in place included online systems such as Urkund, time restraint on exams, open book assignments and confirmation of authenticity.
- 45% stated results achieved by learners were on a par with results received in previous years.
- 33% felt learners had been disadvantaged as a result of alternative arrangements
- 70% felt teachers were adequately equipped with the appropriate technology to communicate effectively with learners
- 45% felt teachers did not have sufficient training to be able to deliver online learning while a further with 85% stating that learners did not have sufficient training to be able to participate online.

Recommendations

The survey found overall that modification to the communication methodologies worked well. Areas such as the use of MS Teams, Zoom and Moodle were used extensively during this period. There is a willingness to continue conducting these methods of communicating and interacting with learners. As noted earlier, CPD for staff and investment in infrastructure to support learners and teachers to operate in this online learning environment is necessary.

There was however a considerable number of centres who used either email 87% or post 60% to communicate with learners during this period. The use of post specifically is aimed at learners in the lower NFQ levels but could be argued is more time consuming and costly than using MS Teams for example.

The roll out of MS Teams as a preferred platform would enhance collaboration within centres and also with learners. If an induction process for all learners was developed where learners would be given a KCETB email address to log on to MS Teams and signposted to use this as the preferred platform for interacting with their centre and teachers this would be a far more efficient method of communication going forward.

Other areas that could grow in line with continued modifications is the use of online exams. Managers felt that the implementation of these alternative assessments worked well in most cases. Plagiarism checks were put in place in most cases (81%) and if a more structured approach to such options was available the use of this method of assessment could grow considerably.

The use of remote Authentication processes also worked well. Internal verification was performed online in the majority of cases and centres have indicated that this is a process they will continue into the future with some modification to make the process smoother. Remote EA was also largely successful. This cut down on the amount of time EAs spent travelling and streamlined the process in terms of uploading material and interactions with the QA Team.

Managers were finally asked to identify key challenges for the future areas such as safety re-opening, inducting new learners, maintaining levels of engagement if blended learning is prolonged, covering course content adequately and finally supporting learners were key concerns for managers. TEL, CPD and PPE however were all proposed as possible solutions to mitigate these concerns. There is no doubt managers and centres are facing challenging times and support staff and learners through what lies ahead will be challenging for all involved. Great strides in the right direction have been made however and centres must not forget how far they have come in such a short period of time.

Section Four: Addressing Key QQI questions

1. What were the main differences?

There were a number of key differences between the Quality Assurance process implemented by KCETB in a standard year and the Quality Assurance Process implemented during Covid-19.

The implementation of Teaching and Learning remotely was a key change from the customary approach within KCETB. Teachers / Tutors and Learners had to adjust to remote teaching and learning over a short space of time and it was a learning curve for all involved.

As a number of assessments couldn't take place given the restrictions implemented, Alternative Assessments were required to ensure that courses could be completed and certification received. Centres were required to devise alternatives under the guidelines listed in the Alternative Assessment Approval Process detailed in Section One.

A strong desire remained to ensure the integrity of the authentication process was retained. Due to travel restriction imposed and the closure of centres Internal Verification and External Authentication processes the decision was made to conducted online. This was a new departure for KCETB as it was the first time that IV and EA was conducted online. Overall the process was successful, providing KCETB with key learning to be considered if we are to continue to facilitate IV and EA online into the foreseeable future.

These main differences are outlined further in the coming questions regarding what worked well, what could be improved and what could be continued into the future, while also begin outline in sections one to three above.

2. What worked well?

Alternative assessment process in terms of how the centres engagement.

Please refer to the Alternative Assessment Approval Process in Section One for more detailed information on how this process was conducted.

A template was created for centres to complete which captured key elements of the proposed changes to assessment. Using a prescribed excel sheet worked well as it contained the relevant information required to approve alternative assessments without being too onerous on the centres. Data inputted included the module in question, what the assessment was pre-Cvoid-19 and the learning objective covered by this assessment. The centre then inputted the proposed alternative assessment and outlined the learning objectives that this assessment would cover. Centres also submitted information on the duration of the alternative assessment, the justification and security arrangements regarding GDPR and plagiarism. The QA team, comprising of four members, reviewed the proposed alternative assessments and made a decision as listed in the Alternative Assessment Approval Process above. This process worked well with all centres engaging in this process. A total of 105 reviews of alternative assessments were conducted by the QA team. No issues resulting from the alternative assessments arose in the EA process or reports.

Remote EA

Remote External Authentication was implemented in all centres submitting learners to QQI for certification in the July window. This was the first time KCETB implemented remote EA. Remote EA was necessary to ensure the quality assurance of the assessment process, while taking into account the health and safety of those involved and the travel restrictions in place. A number of aspects of the remote EA process worked well, for example:

Engagement of centres with remote EA

Remote EA resulted in an increased workload for all centres, EAs and the QA team. This increased workload, in what would normally be a very busy time period, was an additional challenge. While centres and EAs spoke about the increased pressures caused by remote EA there were no issues raised about engaging in the process. All centres and EAs engaged fully to ensure that the learners would have their work Quality Assured and eligible to be submitted for certification. The learner was at the centre of the process.

Survey to EA

External Authenticators were booked at the beginning of the year for all centres being assessed in May. Due to the impact of Covid-19 KCETB needed to ascertain if the EAs were still willing to engage in EA work. A survey was sent to all EAs on the 23rd of April. EAs were asked if restrictions were lifted would they be willing to travel to EA, or if restrictions were not lifted would they facilitate the EA process online and what supports they would require to be able to do this.

100% of EAs were available and happy to conduct the EA process online. 10% of EAs were concerned about travel to the centre for the purpose of EA if restrictions were lifted with 5% of EAs stating that they would not be available to travel to EA. Feedback from EAs also showed that they had the required equipment to conduct the EA online, although some mentioned needing to brush up on their IT skills before starting the remote EA.

OneDrive as central sharing medium Uploading of files

Centres utilised OneDrive as a means of sharing learners' files with the EA. One central location on OneDrive was created by the QA Team for use by all centres. Within this location a folder was created for each centre and in each centre's folders were folders specific to the EAs booked for that centre. Each EA then had folders with the modules they would authenticate. The sharing of folders with EAs was managed centrally from the QA office. This arrangement ensured that EA could only access the files relating to the subject matters they were authenticating and could not access materials shared with other EAs. Once the EA process was concluded these folders were unshared with the EAs.

Tutors/teachers uploaded their learners' files to the relevant subject folders for the EA to authenticate. As a number of portfolios would have only been available in paper based format within the centres this resulted in work having to be photocopied and tagged for each learner. For example the communications module at level three had over 100 pages per learner to be digitised. Other centres ensured that medium which could not be photocopied, such as sculptures and large pieces of art work, were accessible to EAs by recording 360° videos of each piece. This resulted in large files being created that were time consuming to record and upload. This all took place within a period of a week and is a credit to all the centres involved and their drive to ensure the quality of the QA process.

“The effort put in by all concerned, Tutors/teachers and Administrators alike, to complete the Assessment process, the IV work and the Authentication as well as it has been is seriously commendable. This is by far the best work output I have seen from any centre so far this assessment period. The completeness, the folder structure, the entire content of each module folder so well arranged, and the layout of the work by the Tutors/teachers and administrators is simply outstanding. Nothing was missing. Everything had its place. And basically each module followed a well planned structure of work for the EA. Really very helpful. To achieve this in normal times would be quite a success. To do so under the circumstances of Covid disruption is simply outstanding.” **Christian Steele – EA for KCETB**

Sampling strategy

To ensure there was adequate time to digitise learners’ portfolios and taking into consideration the extra time demands on EAs when conducting EA online the following amendments were made to KCETB’s sampling strategy.

For each module group, the number of assessments were counted to determine the sample size. Where there were multiple tutors/teachers delivering a module it was a requirement that each tutor was included in the EA’s schedules at least once for that module.

Number of assessments	Sample size	Sample
≥ 25	6	Selection to be decided by EA
< 25	3	Selection to be decided by EA

Note: 25 is chosen as $\sqrt{25+1} = 6$

To provide more time for centres to ensure that all QA processes were completed to a high standard an agreement was made with EAs regarding the selection for learners for EA. This agreement meant that centres would submit marking sheets to the QA office and a sample would be selected along pre agreed lines with EAs, (please see table 2 above). This reduced the need to upload all learners to the OneDrive with centres uploading the selected learners. It also reduced the turn - around time for centres to know which learner files to upload. EAs were able to cross reference that the learners selected by the QA office met the agreed sampling strategy by checking marking sheets when conducting EA.

3. What did not work as well as hoped but could have been improved?

Remote EA

Feedback from EAs and centres maintained that remote EA, while successful, lacked aspects that centre based EA contained. EAs and centres felt that in conducting remote EA Authenticators did not get a comprehensive feel for the centre and their work. The reduced sampling size didn’t allow EAs to get a full appreciation of the quality of the work produced in the centre. Also the overall process took longer to complete than centre based EA. Were the process to continue to be conducted in this manner some modifications would be made to counteract these points.

Time to conduct EA

Online EA was a positive process in allowing the EA of learner's portfolios under current conditions however there were increased time demands to ensure that this was sufficiently robust. Most centres had to push out their original dates booked for EA due to the time required to process alternative assessments and ensure the IV process was conducted to the usual high standard. This change of date coupled with the feedback from EAs that online EA was taking between 2 and 3 times longer to complete meant that EAs who had changed dates to suit us were now restricted on time as they were also booked to EA in other centres. Many EAs worked long days and over weekends to ensure that the process was fully completed. In future if Online EA is to be conducted again the extra time demands will need to be factored into any booking.

Reduced sampling strategy

The reduced sampling strategy allowed enough time to conduct the EA within the time allocation and ensured that centres had adequate time to upload the required documentation for EAs. An unintended consequence was that due to the lower sampling size, specifically the modules that had a sample of 3 learners, centres felt that the EAs were not getting a full picture of the quality of the work produced by the learners. If all modules were sampled at the original sampling strategy this would not have been an issue as there would have been a wider spread of learners across each module.

Communication between centres, EA & QA team

In a normal context the EA would arrive at a centre, meet the centre manager and be in contact throughout the day as required allowing for consistent communication. In the remote EA context this did work well for the most part but there were areas for improvement.

As part of KCETB's Quality Improvement Plan this year the QA office took more of a role in the external authentication process. There was some confusion regarding communication between centres, EAs and the QA team. Some centres were very proactive and made contact directly with EAs once the process started whereas other centres waited for EAs to contact them. Some EAs were in constant contact with the centres others contacted the QA team and others waited for either the centre or QA team to contact them. This, in some instances, resulted in lost time with regards to clarification of issues that could have been rectified sooner had communication been improved.

This was minor in the overall EA, but should remote EA be engaged with in the future there needs to be detailed guidelines on how communication should take place between EA and centres and how this is instigated. This coupled with other areas identified will provide a basis for revised EA guidelines going forward were remote EA to continue to be a feature of the authentication process in KCETB.

Alternative assessments being sent to learners before approval

The process of approving alternative assessments worked well as can be seen from the alternative assessment approval process above. Issues that arose that could be improved on in the future mainly related to timing. When direction was given to the centres with regards to alternative assessments some centres had already begun the process of providing alternative assessments to learners. This was understandable given the nature of the situation and centres were acting in the interest of their learners to provide supports to enable them to finish their studies. Where this was the case the QA team still required the excel sheets completed and retrospective approval was sought.

A small number of centres had sent alternative assessment to learners after direction was sent to centres but before approval was granted from the QA office. This did result in amendments having to be made to alternative assessments to ensure that they met the requirements for approval from the QA team. Although this process would need to be more robust in the future KCETB assured that all alternative assessments were robust enough to meet the modules learning objectives.

4. What in hindsight might have been done differently?

Given the nature of the circumstances it was a stressful time for Tutors/teachers and Learners. The issuing of guidance in a more timely fashion to avoid initial confusion could have provided enhanced supports. It is worth acknowledging that when guidance was issued to centres regarding alternative assessments, online EA, etc. we were coming to the end of the academic year and time was limited. This created increased demands during an already busy time.

The development of a heightened awareness of the need to consult with the QA office with reference to issues pertaining to Quality assurance would be developed from the onset. In the initial stages some centres devised alternative assessments internally without oversight from the QA Office and these required retrospective approval.

While CPD training was provided to some Teacher/ Tutors in recent years. A wider reaching approach could have been adopted to include mandatory training for all teaching staff and Learners would of further supported remote learning. However, had we been aware of how the circumstances would unfold further CPD training for remote Teaching and Learning could have been provided earlier to support learners.

A policy on communication between EAs, centres and the QA Office could have been devised to outline the communication process. This would have improved communication between centres, QA Office and EA while outlining responsibilities for ensuring strong exchanges.

5. What worked so well that it could be retained beyond the emergency?

Elements of online learning and assessment

As indicated by the learner surveys above there is an appetite among learners for the flexibility that remote learning can provide. However, any incorporation of online learning into existing programmes will have to take into consideration the significant challenges facing remote learning such as childcare, caring for others and resources (internet access and access to devices).

Surveys

The use of Microsoft forms to conduct surveys was very useful. It was an easy to set up and access from a range of platforms including mobile phones. This was particular useful for learners.

Remote IV

Although remote IV took longer to facilitate than centre based IV it worked well and it remains an option for the future should it be required. Centres have indicated that this is a process they will continue into the future with some modification to make the process smoother.

Remote EA

Notwithstanding the issues raised in Question 3 above there is scope to look at remote EA in the future.

Some modules have a small number of subject matter experts available to EA. Depending on location and travel some EAs may not be in a position to take on work in a particular centre. Remote EA removes the requirement to travel which can add an extra day to the EAs work calendar opening up their availability further.

Centre appeals where there are small number of scripts to be rechecked could be facilitated in an online process reducing the travel need for EAs and would not be too onerous on the centres to digitise.

A move towards the submission of work digitally and the correction of work online at centre level would lend itself more to online EA as there would be a reduction in the level of work required to digitise and tag paper based assessments.

6. How were the changes to TLA overseen, coordinated/quality assured?

Once the lockdown was announced KCETB convened its executive management team for emergency planning. This became the Business Continuity Team which meets regularly. While the initial focus was on remote learning, a large feature of this meeting has become discussions and updates on alternative assessments, external assessments and those learners needing results for CAO applications. While changes to TLA were implemented locally they were initially monitored by the Directors of FET and Schools. The changes were fully overseen, coordinated and quality assured by relevant centre staff and the QA department as listed in sections one and two above. The KCETB QA Oversight approved all processes.

The earlier Section one covers the Teaching Learning and Assessment process, changes to the learning environment, learning outcomes, alternative assessment and the correction of assessments, while section two covers the IV, EA and RAP processes.

7. What international developments are noteworthy and how does Ireland compare?

City and Guilds

There are 3 centres in KCETB that run City and Guilds accredited programmes. The qualifications that run in KCETB are classed as international qualifications. At present KCETB is running programmes in the following professional areas:

- Hair / Beauty / Make-up
- Hospitality (Specifically Confectionery / Patisserie)
- Information Technology

On the 9th June 2020 City and Guilds issued assessment mitigation guidance documents that were specific to various vocational areas. Alternative arrangements could be implemented according to specific criteria outlined on the City and Guilds website: <https://www.cityandguilds.com/covid-19/mitigation-approaches-for-vrqs-nvqs>. Issuing this on the 9th June did not leave the centres with much time to complete assessments before the usual summer break. This was a source of stress for some students enrolled in City and Guilds courses. The guidance from QQI came far earlier in April 2020. This does expose a disadvantage with using international qualifications as the legislative requirements differ from state to state. A crisis such as Covid-19 required rapid response and this was difficult for City and Guilds qualifications because they are being delivered all over the world.

Following close monitoring of government guidelines with reference to centre closures all alternative assessments were communicated to the EQA (External Quality Assurance) person with responsibility for overseeing QA within KCETB.

For the qualifications in the Hair/Beauty/Make up sector there are assessments that cannot be completed and remain outstanding due to the requirement to access clients and facilities in centres. Other assessments were completed by conducting question and answer sessions via video calls.

For the Confectionery / Patisserie course theory exams were altered allowing the learner to complete the assessment from home via a recorded question and answer session with the tutor. For the practical assessments learners were given a brief two days before in order to have time to get all the necessary ingredients. For the exam they will be required to provide:

- Written recipe with cooking times and temperature
- Written Time plan/ Scheme of work
- Photographic evidence or a video demonstration (depending on which task)
- A Written evaluation and photo of the finished product

There is an outstanding synoptic assessment for Confectionery / Patisserie and there are plans to complete that assessment in July when the Covid-19 restrictions are loosened and in time for the reopening of the hospitality industry.

Covid-19 did not have an impact on the City and Guilds Information Technology courses that are running in KCETB. The video recorded question and answer session could potentially be used in other courses as an alternative to assessing learners via written sit-down short answer exam sessions.

According to [Unesco](#), as of 17th June, over 1 billion learners have been affected internationally. Ireland remains in the category 'country wide closure'. As can be seen from Figure 3, a large number (123) of countries monitored remain in this category.

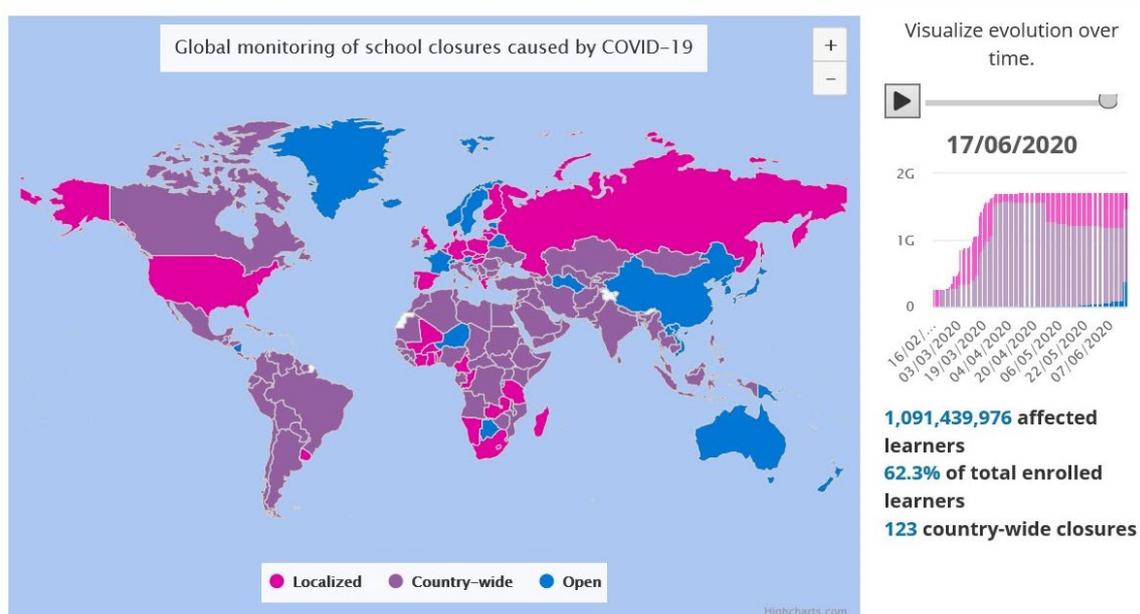


Figure 3 Data from UNESCO

Within the EU, the approach of different countries is outlined in the [school education gateway](#).

'Now that Vocational Education and Training (VET) schools have also been closed for a number of weeks in Europe, VET teachers and trainers are continuing to adapt their material from classroom to online learning.'

In the UK, guidance was issued for [apprenticeships](#)

'We are encouraging and supporting employers, and training and assessment providers, to make use of distance-learning tools wherever possible and practicable to do so allowing the modification of end-point assessment arrangements, including remote assessments wherever practicable and possible - ... apprentices ready for assessment, but who cannot be assessed due to coronavirus (COVID-19) issues, can have their end-point assessment rescheduled, apprentices whose gateway is delayed can have an extension to the assessment time frame

Almost all countries are having to adapt their traditional methods of teaching learning and assessment and Ireland is no different. There are strong similarities between the approaches adopted in the UK for example and the measures put in place in Ireland. As Covid-19 continues to be an evolving situation, it is difficult to make definitive comparisons and conclusions at this time. However, it is likely that education will be different for the foreseeable future for us all and we will have to adapt as stated in this quote 'Let us not go back to past habits but find a better new normal. With the energy we have shown as educators over the past months, we will surely succeed'³.

Summary and Conclusions

All of the alterations made to teaching learning assessments and QA processes have been outlined and discussed in this report. Detailed surveys have been completed and the key findings shared.

Overall it has been a huge learning experience. It cannot be overstated the massive impact the Covid-19 emergency has had on the education of the KCETB learners and also on the working lives of staff. The remote learning, alternative assessments, revised authentication procedures all meant a massive increase in work for a large number of staff. It also added to the stress of learners and staff during a very busy period. Although this would not be sustainable long term, the systems have been put in place and we are in a very strong position now to have the flexibility to adapt prior to and during the coming academic year. Valuable lessons have been learned by all.

With regard to learners, the challenge will be to re-engage them when centres re-open and to provide assurances that courses can be delivered by whatever method that is deemed necessary. Consideration will be required to increase the use of online learning platforms such as Moodle and Microsoft Teams and to increase the amount of KCETB email addresses for learners. This would allow easier and faster transition to remote learning should it be required.

³ Drs. René van Schalkwijk MscBA, MME is the former president of Euprovvet (European providers of Vocational Education and Training).