

Report from the Director of ACCS/JMB Further Education Support Unit 2020/2021

ACCS/JMB Further Education Support Unit (FESU)

The Further Education Support Unit was established in September 2019. The work previously undertaken by JFERG is now performed by the ACCS/JMB Further Education Support Unit. Catherine O’Sullivan is the Director of the Support Unit.

The ACCS/JMB Further Education Support Unit is involved in the following activities:

- Supporting schools in consultation with Education & Training Board of Ireland (ETBI) and SOLAS regarding the Programme Learner Support Services (PLSS) and Funding Allocations Request Reporting (FARR) systems.
- Establishing arrangements with ACCS and JMB schools both nationally and regionally to work effectively with SOLAS and Education & Training Board (ETB) structures.
- Co-ordinating and supporting schools in relation to planning and re-focusing provision in consultation with SOLAS in response to the recommendations from the Post Leaving Certificate evaluation.
- Co-ordinating the provision of relevant Continuous Professional Development to schools.
- Collaborating with relevant stakeholders locally to ensure best provision standards are provided.
- Supporting schools with the process of QQI Quality Assurance, QQI reengagement and QQI Programme validation.
- Providing a communication channel facilitating the exchange of information between ACCS/JMB, ETB, ETBI, SOLAS, QQI and other relevant stakeholders.
- Contributing to the establishment of formal arrangements through Education & Training Board (ETB) and Further Education Training (FET) Services to facilitate collaboration between ETB FET services and ACCS/JMB schools. Collaborate to develop and share Further Education Training mechanisms to support and encourage cohesive, integrated local planning and delivery.
- Supporting collaboration between Education & Training Boards and ACCS/JMB colleagues to improve practice, share policies, procedures, information and resources in areas of supporting Further Education Training learners, programme planning and delivery through the Regional ETBI, ACCS/JMB Further Education Training Liaison Group.
- Representing ACCS and JMB schools on relevant Further Education national working groups, steering groups and advisory groups.
- Advising and updating the Association of Community & Comprehensive Schools’ (ACCS) Executive and Joint Managerial Body (JMB) Council on Further Education and Training matters as requested.

National Representation

ACCS is actively represented on the following committees/groups at National Level:

1. PLSS Advisory Group
2. ETBI Voluntary Secondary Community Comprehensive Sector (VSCCS) FET Regional Liaison Group
3. Further Education and Training Colleges Ireland. The voice of FET college Leaders. A committee of NAPD. Formerly know as the NAPD – FET Committee
4. ETBI DEIS Transitions to FET Network

FETCI – A Committee of NAPD (formerly NAPD FE Committee)

The National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals (NAPD) is the professional association for all Principals and Deputy Principals in Post Primary Schools, Further Education and Training (FET) Schools and Colleges in Ireland.

Further Education and Training Colleges Ireland (formerly the NAPD FET Committee) is a Committee of NAPD, representing Principals and Deputy

Principals from over 100 FET Schools and Colleges in Ireland under the auspices of the three managerial bodies, ETBI, JMB, and ACCS.

Established in 2000, this committee has represented NAPD on many State Boards, national working groups, and committees involved in FET. In addition, a nominee of this committee is a member of the NAPD National Executive and works with the NAPD Executive in addressing FET issues as they affect Principals and Deputy Principals in their role in leading and managing their Schools and Colleges.

Voluntary Secondary and Community Comprehensive are represented on the NAPD Committee - FETCI (Further Education and Training Colleges Ireland) by Catherine O'Sullivan, JMB and Tom Lowry, Principal, Moate Business College, Co Westmeath.

To date a delegation of FETCI has engaged in two meetings with the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science officials and Niall Collins, Minister of State Department of Higher Education, Innovation and Science with responsibility for Skills and Further Education. Both meetings were very positive and FETCI looks forward to engaging further with this Department.

Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science

The Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science is responsible for policy, funding and governance of the Higher and Further Education and research sectors and for the oversight of the work of the State agencies and public institutions operating in those areas.

The Department's role is to ensure that these sectors underpin and stimulate Ireland's social and economic development and that the opportunities provided by public investment and policy in the sectors are made more widely available to everyone including the most vulnerable in society.

Further Education activity (PLC and BTEI provision) in ACCS/JMB schools is now under the remit of this new Department.

ACCS/JMB Further Education Support Unit COVID-19 Response Meetings/Clinics

Since March 2020 regular meeting have been scheduled via Zoom to support Voluntary Secondary and Community/Comprehensive Colleges/Schools delivering FE courses. The meetings/clinics focus on:

- Online Provision
- Delivery
- Assessment
- Resources
- Policies and Procedures
- Government Restriction guidelines
- IT Supports
- Future Provision
- Operational and strategic activities in FE

"Thank you very much for being such a support to us during the first lockdown in March when all seemed so bleak and scary. You got us up and running with Zoom support meetings and very sane advice re assessments and delivery etc. This advice has continued into our first term back and we feel your support has been crucial to us staying the course for this term. Mile buíochas duit".

"Thank you for all your ongoing support throughout these uncertain times. The frequent Covid response meetings have been a great support to me where you give all the colleges a forum to meet and discuss the issues that arise. You are a fountain of knowledge that is only willing to share it with us".

"Thank you for the great work you are doing for us in the schools, we are really in the loop and feel confident in this uncertain COVID-19 landscape".

Comments from attendees



CPD/In-service Training

Due to COVID-19 all face to face scheduled In-service training was cancelled. CPD events moved online since March 2020. The following CPD events were hosted via Zoom:

- Feedback to Learners on Summative Assessment Tasks
- An Introduction to Local Assessment for New Assessors
- Reimagining your Course - the Move to Blended Learning

Programme Learner Support Services PLSS Training

The Programme Learner Support System (PLSS) is a joint project between SOLAS (the National Further Education and Training Authority) and Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI). PLSS is a suite of software applications that are designed to provide an integrated approach to the collection and processing of personal data of users of PLSS and FET programmes (PLC & BTEI) funded through SOLAS.

Since March 2020 In-service training on the use of PLSS is being delivered online via Zoom and TeamViewer on a centre by centre basis by the ACCS/JMB Further Education Support Unit.

“Thank you very much for todays training. I found it really helpful given that I am new to the system. The 3 hours flew by. It was brilliant!”



QQI

Since March 2020 QQI have extended the scope of provision for all providers to include online learning. Several publications have issued to support providers during COVID-19. The ACCS/JMB Further Education Support Unit (FESU) has assisted their FE schools and colleges to develop Contingency Plans for submission to QQI. The unit also issued guidelines pertaining to Alternative Assessments, Internal Verification and External Authentication.

Programme validation for alternative modules to the Work Experience module were developed by providers with the support of the FESU.

In November 2019, Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) published a Professional Award Type Descriptor (PATD), detailing standards for new Early Learning and Care (ELC) awards at levels 5, 6, 7, and 8. The awards at levels 5 & 6 must now be developed into programmes that will replace the existing QQI Early Childhood Care and Education awards, which will shortly be deactivated. Dublin and Dun Laoghaire Education and Training Board (DDLETB), on behalf of the 16 Education and Training Boards, are leading out on a pilot project on shared curriculum and programme development for ELC programmes for ETBs and partner providers at levels 5 & 6.

A Programme Board comprising representatives of key stakeholders in the ELC sector to ensure that the programmes developed meet relevant industry, legislative and regulatory requirements and standards has been established.

The Programme Board will act in an advisory capacity throughout the development of these new programmes, for which the expected completion date is summer 2021. The Programme Board will provide feedback on curriculum structure and the programme learning outcomes to the programme development group and advise to ensure that the programmes meet the needs of all stakeholder. The Voluntary Secondary/Community Comprehensive sector is represented on the Programme Board by Aisling Kirby, BA ECCE, MEd.

FE Support

ACCS is greatly appreciative of the support of Andrew Brownlee, Ciarán Conlon, Greg Bissett, Clare Wynne, Joan Hennessy, Gerry O'Connor, Audrey McCormack, Denise Hogan, Therese O'Connor, Síle Mullin, Marie Duffy, SOLAS, Walter Balfe and Colette Harrison, QQI, Fiona Maloney, Siobhan McEntee, Tanya Jones ETBI for their ongoing vital support.

SOLAS

COVID-19 FET Response Group

A COVID-19 FET Response group was established by SOLAS to review, advance and support arrangements for business continuity and contingency planning in respect of teaching and learning and other activities for FET learners.

The ACCS/JMB Further Education Support Unit was represented on this group by Anne Ganly, Moate Business College, Co Westmeath and Catherine O'Sullivan, Director of the ACCS/JMB Further Education Support Unit.

The primary focus of the group was to:

- monitor the current levels of provision and the full range of circumstances
- identify and deal with immediate issues arising
- document best practice and develop guidelines
- engage directly with third parties in developing solutions

The ACCS/JMB Further Education Support Unit continues to work closely with SOLAS at both an operational and strategic level on behalf of the Voluntary Secondary/Community Comprehensive schools it supports.

COVID Funding

FESU secured a total of €561,000 in additional COVID-19 funding from SOLAS for services related to FET provision in the Voluntary Secondary/Community Comprehensive school sector. €58,000 of which was allocated to purchase student devices with the balance being used for Minor Works, enhanced supervision/substitution, PPE, and enhanced cleaning.

Funds for Students with Disabilities

SOLAS allocates funding to support students with disabilities. The funding allocation to Voluntary Secondary and Community and Comprehensive Colleges/Schools delivering PLC was co-ordinated through the Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools (ACCS) and Joint Managerial Body (JMB) Further Education Support Unit (FESU) this year for services and accommodations required for students with disabilities. Funding to the value of €388,000 was allocated to a total of 43 learners across Voluntary Secondary and Community/Comprehensive Colleges/Schools delivering PLC course for the academic year 2020/2021.

ETBI

ETBI – ETB VSCCS National and Regional Liaison Groups established in 2018 continue to operate. Kilkenny Carlow ETB, Cork ETB and Limerick Clare ETB have been working closely with the Director of the ACCS/JMB Further Education Support Unit to meet the objectives set out in the Terms of Reference of the Groups.

The ACCS sector is represented on the ETBI DEIS Learners Transitions to FET Steering Group by Catherine O'Sullivan and Antoinette Nic Gearailt. The ETB Supporting DEIS Learners Transition to FET group was established to support collaboration amongst ETB and non-ETB colleagues, to continually improve good practice and to develop proposals, policies and procedures, information and resources in the area. The group is responsible for identifying existing good practice that support Learners from DEIS Schools Transition to FET and providing recommendations to enhance good practice.

NACED

NACED is the National Association of Adult and Community Education Directors, who organise and run lifelong learning classes in their schools. As well as lobbying for adult education at a national level, NACED provides networking and professional development opportunities for directors of adult education in Community and Comprehensive schools.

ACCS commends NACED member schools on their efforts to deliver Adult Education evening classes remotely/online since September 2020.

**Catherine O'Sullivan,
Director of ACCS/JMB Further Education Support Unit.**