



etbi
Education & Training
Boards Ireland
*Boird Oideachais &
Oiliúna Éireann*

Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI)

Submission to

Seanad Special Select Committee

on the UK's Withdrawal

from the European Union:

ETBI Report on Possible/Likely Issues for ETBs and the Education Sector Arising Pre and Post Brexit

Education and Training Boards Ireland

Piper's Hill
Kilcullen Road
Naas, Co Kildare W91 K729
Telephone: +353 (0)45 901 070
Web: www.etbi.ie

General Secretary: Michael Moriarty

1. The most significant challenge(s) that you have identified
2. The solution or solutions that you believe might best address the challenge
3. Relevant precedents, if any
4. The manner in which your solutions might be implemented

Background to ETBs

Education and Training Boards (ETBs) are statutory education authorities, established under the Education and Training Boards Act, 2013 to replace the 33 VECs. A transformation which included the incorporation of the former FÁS Training Centres under the umbrella of the ETBs.

ETBs deliver a wider range of services across many educational levels throughout Ireland.

They operate over 270 second-level schools inclusive of Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) Colleges, a network of Training Centres, and over 500 education centres.

ETBs act as joint trustees of 92 Community Schools. They also manage a growing number of multi-denominational primary-level Community National Schools.

ETBs have responsibility for Youth Work, Youthreach programmes, Apprenticeships, Traineeships, Prison Education, Back to Education Initiatives, Vocational Training Opportunities (VTOS) Schemes, Basic Education programmes, Workplace Learning programmes, Outdoor Education and Training, Adult and Community Education, Music Education and other educational programmes.

Brexit is likely to have a more significant impact and pose more challenges for ETBs operating adjacent to the Border, i.e. Donegal ETB**, Mayo Sligo and Leitrim ETB, Cavan and Monaghan ETB and Louth and Meath ETB. This notwithstanding current links in relation to FET with non-Border ETBs e.g. City of Dublin ETB.

*(**Appendix I provides further information)*

Student/Learner/Trainee Flows

- The biggest uncertainty concerns the large cohort of Irish students (just over 10,000) who study in the UK and Northern Ireland and could face costly non-EU fees as a result of the vote. At present, Irish students in Britain and Northern Ireland, as well as British and Northern Irish students in the Republic of Ireland, have been able to study in both jurisdictions under EU rules.
- As an example, over 2,000 students in Co Donegal are sitting their Leaving Certificate now. A substantial percentage have opted in the past to continue their studies in NI/UK. Many students from the Republic of Ireland may opt to study at home in the Republic of Ireland in the future given uncertainty over fees for Irish students in the UK. In principle, Irish students would be treated as international students – who face much higher fees – in UK universities unless a deal was struck with authorities there.

- If these students were to opt to remain at home it may put additional pressures on the CAO points system into the future. This will have implications for the third level institutions along the Border regions.
- Considerable numbers of residents of Border counties, in particular from the Inishowen area of Co Donegal, transfer to NI/UK Colleges to continue their studies following second level education.
- Research carried out by the DES shows that there has been an increase in the numbers of ROI students attending Further Education courses in NI: From 2007/2008 to 2011/2012 an increase of 39% (from 3,302 to 4,592). North West Regional College (NWRC) which has extremely close proximity to Co Donegal had the largest number of ROI students: In 2011/12 NWRC had two-thirds of the total ROI intake.
- Following Brexit, it is highly likely that Border ETBs will experience increased numbers of students wishing to further their education within the Republic. This will require the funding of additional places on PLC programmes, apprenticeships and other courses such as BTEI and VTOS.
- ETBs currently accept learners from NI onto training courses. These trainees undertake work experience in NI. Brexit may pose barriers, financial or otherwise to the continuation of this practice. Job placement, following a training course with Donegal ETB, often occurs in NI/UK. Placing trainees with NI/UK employers may prove to be more difficult following Brexit.

Solution:

The solution is free movement of Learners across the border and the least preventable obstacles and barriers in place for Learners to undertake work placements. The idea of an 'educational permit' for learners and educators could be examined. The permit should be low cost and quick and easy to obtain.

Data collection continues to be a recurring difficulty for education providers in the South. Our Management Information Systems need urgent updates and improvements if we are to fully and accurately track learners as they progress through our system.

A robust FET data collection architecture, Programme Learner Support System (PLSS) has been developed in a joint initiative between SOLAS and ETBI (Education and Training Boards Ireland). This suite of software applications provides an integrated approach to the collection of key data on FET programme outputs, outcomes and performance. The PLSS will also expose a comprehensive overview of FET programmes at national level, key data on further education and training programme outputs, outcomes and performance and provide a mechanism for the secure sharing, collecting and utilising of FET data. PLSS is the integrated and coordinated mechanism for the achievement of Strategic Goal 4 of the Further Education and Training Strategy 2014-2019, which is to implement a new planning and funding model for further education and training.

It is likely that ETBs will require extra places on a range of FET courses to cater for the increase in student numbers opting to remain in the South to further their studies post Brexit. This will involve an increased bid to SOLAS through the FARR system.

There is the possibility that the ROI will become more attractive financially for NI Students wishing to study to HE and FE Courses. We need to be mindful of this in our planning.

Course Provision

- There will be implications in terms of ETBs having to develop new courses, which may currently be only available in FE Colleges in Northern Ireland. These courses are relevant in terms of progression and placement, are popular and attract students from the Republic due to enhanced financial assistance available to ROI residents along with progression to HE Colleges in NI.
- Student access to UK colleges and training facilities: should the current arrangement not continue (as a consequence of visas, administration, etc.), it may put future pressure on the Irish Third Level and FET sectors as the only English-speaking country within the EU – this could be considered as both an opportunity and threat.
- Should there be an increase in financial and shared services relocating from the UK to Ireland, an increase in educational and training provision targeting this sector may be required. Where the Dublin infrastructure is a limiting factor in expansion of current or new ventures, alternative locations outside of Dublin, for instance Cork, may see increased demands in this sector.
- Where programmes utilise UK assessors, verifiers or trainers for education or training (for example, City and Guilds, Oil/Gas Certifying bodies), restricted movement may have an impact on the ability to deliver programmes.
- Where dual certification at Institutional level is utilised for a programme in conjunction with a UK partner, Brexit may have an as yet unidentified impact.
- Tendering for training programmes may not be possible for non-EU contractors (Northern Ireland contractors).

Solution:

The solutions will largely be resource based in terms of being able to secure funding for course development and QA systems.

The Brexit result provides us with an opportunity to begin the process of revitalising the QA system, and indeed the FET sector as a whole, in Ireland.

An obvious part of the solution is to consult with the learners themselves. So far in this process, there has been, to our knowledge, very little engagement with young people and learners. This could take the form of ‘town hall’ meetings and/or focus groups. There is also potential for academic research to happen with regard to Brexit and many dissertation topics remain to be proposed.

Donegal ETB in particular, has considered the option of operating a PLC College on the campus of the Letterkenny Institute of Technology, as PLC provision in Co Donegal is currently located in the ETB’s second level schools, while many school leavers would prefer to move to another setting for Further Education. The hope would be that students who study locally rather than elsewhere (e.g. in Belfast, Liverpool or Dublin) would be more likely to progress their education in Donegal and remain in Donegal post qualification.

Academic Qualifications

- Issues in relation to teacher mobility – mutual recognition of qualifications: qualification systems differing in the two jurisdictions. Education is one of the areas of cooperation in The North South Ministerial Council. Much good work has been achieved in the areas of Special Educational Needs, Educational Underachievement, Teacher Qualifications, and School, Youth and Teaching Exchanges.
- Will Irish qualifications continue to have the same recognition in the UK – Leaving Certificate and QQI? Clarity will be needed regarding the recognition of EU v UK qualifications in our colleges.

Solution:

There is a need to ensure mutual recognition of UK qualifications for Irish students. It is imperative that the work of the North-South Ministerial Council is maintained, in particular in relation to teacher qualifications.

Employees

- A significant minority of ETB employees reside in NI. Brexit may have implications in relation to their financial situation and travelling arrangements.

Solution:

Free movement across the border. Equality and ease of processing and compliance in terms of tax and allowances.

Languages

- Schools should perhaps give consideration to offering more European languages.
- Ireland's position as a majority English-speaking EU country may become more significant.

Solution:

This will require resources. Development of international education hub for attracting English language Students and Learners.

Second level schools could consider offering the International Baccalaureate in light of Ireland being the only majority English-speaking country in the EU.

Goods and Services

- ETBs purchase a range of goods and services from NI/UK. Brexit may contribute to these purchases being more difficult to achieve.
- Purchases from NI/UK are currently better value for the Euro since the vote to leave, but fluctuations in currency exchange rate may affect this.
- In procurement processes where e-tenders are utilised and open to all EU business, UK businesses may be restricted from responding to e-tenders, which may have a negative impact in terms of competitive bids.
- Tendering for training programmes may not be possible for non-EU contractors (Northern Ireland contractors).
- Services from the UK may be more expensive if customs duties are applied.
- The storage of data on servers in the UK may present problems. The EU applies significant safeguards on personal data transferred out of the EU which can be complex.

Solution:

Open competition arrangements are required to avail of competitive rates with NI. There is a need to establish a new framework for cross-border data transfer.

VAT

The Revenue Commissioners may make VAT changes which will affect the cost of the purchasing of goods and services.

- VAT may be an issue as it may not be possible to reclaim VAT paid for UK goods and services, if the UK is not part of the EU.
- The fact that UK purchases will no longer be subject to the reverse charge VAT mechanism will have an effect.
- UK VAT rates will apply to purchases from both NI and mainland UK, which may have the effect of making imports more or less expensive depending upon exchange rate fluctuations as well as differing VAT rates.

Solution:

New VAT rules regarding transactions with UK suppliers will need to be implemented.

Sterling Devaluation

It is possible that in the short term, there will be some savings on purchases of equipment, materials, etc., from the UK, potentially 10% or thereabouts.

EU Funding & Other Partnerships

- Future EU funding in partnership with UK organisations, particularly those in NI, may be affected.
- There will be implications for the operation of the Erasmus+ programme, not least the financial, resourcing and accommodation implications arising from possible increased inflow of Erasmus+ students into Ireland. Also EU PEACE and INTERREG funding, while guaranteed for now, may be in jeopardy. There are also implications in relation to finding partners to access Horizon 2020 funding.

Solution:

Resources are required for the operation of increased Erasmus+ programmes. We also need to ensure eligibility for Erasmus+ funding for Irish students in UK (especially NI).

There must be agreed solutions to Partnerships between the EU and UK. These multilateral programmes must be maintained as they have become an integral component of the follow-

through from the Peace Process where they have contributed to peace building, community improvements and citizenship.

Conclusion

Education is an excellent framework for the development and improvement of community relations and working in partnership with our UK and European neighbours.

Any barriers to the provision of education, whether they be availability of choice, travel, border controls, form filling (whether e-forms or not), or time delays in crossing the border, will impose additional costs and obstacles to the Learner/Educator in accessing that provision. We cannot allow these costs and obstacles to hinder the hugely positive and cooperative partnership work that has been ongoing, most especially since the Good Friday Agreement.

Appendix I

Cross Border North West, Higher and Further Education Cluster

Discussions have been taking place with a view to setting up the above cluster. Such a cluster is referenced via statements in relation to increased cross border cooperation in the Strategic Statements of the Northern Ireland HE Strategy (April 2012), the Irish HE Strategy (January 2011), Letterkenny IT, NWRC and Donegal ETB.

In order for the Donegal region to thrive, all efforts must be made to keep its young people in the region - the Derry, Strabane, Letterkenny City Region: the North West City Region. We must work to provide educational opportunities that will allow them to remain in the area if they so wish and to continue to remain by providing the necessary framework for sustainable employment.

A mapping of pathways is planned with a view to clearly articulating progression opportunities for learners given the complex cross border linkages which exist between Co Donegal and Northern Ireland. This mapping work has now become even more important as we urgently need to get an accurate picture of the current situation in relation to student flows so that strategic plans can be put in place to deal with the fallout following Brexit.

Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) exist between all the education providers in the North West City Region and Derry City and Strabane District Council and Donegal County Council. All are committed to meeting the challenges of Brexit and to working together to minimise the impact of Brexit on the communities of this region.