
ETB COVID-19 Contingency Plans Survey Report



3RD APRIL 2020

EDUCATION AND TRAINING BOARDS IRELAND



etbi

Education and Training
Boards Ireland
*Boird Oideachais agus
Oiliúna Éireann*

ETB COVID-19 Contingency Plans

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI) surveyed the sixteen Education and Training Boards (ETBs) on their COVID-19 Contingency Plans. All ETBs have implemented the HSE guidelines concerning the closure of schools and FET centres.

The survey questions focused on the following areas:

- Continuity of learning in Further Education and Training (FET)
- Supports for the health and wellbeing of FET learners
- Continuity of learning in Schools
- Supports for the health and wellbeing of students
- Actions and online initiatives of Youth Organisations in ETB areas
- Continuity of essential financial services such as payroll and payments
- Supports that ETBI could provide to the sector

The high-level themes emerging from the survey show that ETBs have quickly adopted online platforms, tools and technologies and are supporting staff and tutors with equipment, upskilling, and professional development to meet the COVID-19 challenge. Time did not allow for a planned remote learning process and therefore expectations of need to be managed in all communication.

Teachers, tutors, instructors, and guidance staff are engaging with students and parents supporting wellbeing. Remote working with access solutions is providing continuity for all essential services at ETB head office level. The responses identify the need to acknowledge the excellent work by all and acknowledge the short timeframe and the high standard of response by the ETB sector.

ETBI will continue to lead and streamline communications to the sector.

Executive Summary

The ETB sector have implemented contingency plans in response to the exceptional circumstances COVID19 has presented. ETBs continue to work collaboratively and in partnership with agencies and bodies to support the continuity of learning across provision whilst maintaining the supporting infrastructure and financial services.

ETBI

ETBI has responded to the national crisis that is COVID19 by:

- establishing working groups as required
- representing the sector at Department led strategic groups
- providing guidance documents on contingency planning and redeployment
- establishing effective communication channels to ensure ETBs are kept informed and updated
- issued press statements as required
- maintaining business continuity in our offices, all staff are successfully working remotely and continuing business as usual

Community National and Post Primary Schools

The ETBI schools and CNS Patronage Directorates have maintained links with schools through Principals networks and Directors of Schools through regular updates, email correspondence, Microsoft Teams meetings and phone support. ETB schools have been represented by ETBI engaging with the Department of Education and Skills School Communication Group at twice weekly meetings and has provided meeting notes from all such meetings. Section 29 appeals, clarity on contingency for State Exams and the requirements of the admissions bill form some of the issues raised by ETBI on behalf of the ETB sector.

Further Education and Training

The ETBI FET Directorate has engaged consistently and effectively with the various strategic groups established under the DFET Forum in particular those involved in contingency planning. ETBI has represented the FET sector at various national groups where all stakeholders are present. A tertiary education system steering group has been established where ETBI represent the sectoral view on matters discussed in the sub-groups such as disadvantaged and equality, contingency planning, financial implications, apprenticeships and matters of quality assurance, integrity, and reputation. ETBI has also produced guidance on the approach to planning of alternative assessment to be taken at local level which builds on the work of the DFET Forum Quality Strategy Group. Updates are provided regularly on this engagement.

Youth Organisations

ETBI continues to liaise directly with DCYA to ensure continuity of service in so far as possible in youth provision throughout Ireland. ETBI Youth Support Service has provided support to ETBs and youth officers in getting clarification as required and disseminating to the sector.

Organisation Support and Development

ETBI OSD Directorate has provided ETBs with continued support for business continuity planning, response to queries and seeking clarification from the DES on matters that have arisen as a result of COVID19. Many of these issues relate to specific programmes that may be self-financing in nature or attract contractual issues that require clarification. ETBI has also produced some guidance in supporting ETBs in reviewing business continuity planning against the requirement to nominate staff to the national redeployment panel. Legal advice, HR/IR and Procurement support has also been ongoing over the course of the last number of weeks.

Methodology

The ETB survey was opened on March 20th and closed on the 1st April with responses from all ETBs received.

The survey included closed and open questions with the option to add additional information for closed questions. Open-ended questions and comments are summarised following content analysis into recurring themes, and the relative frequency of the items are reported.



Continuity of Learning in FET

In response to the question “Please indicate all the platforms/supports currently being used to provide for the continuity of teaching and learning in FET” the ETB’s reported using the following platforms and supports.

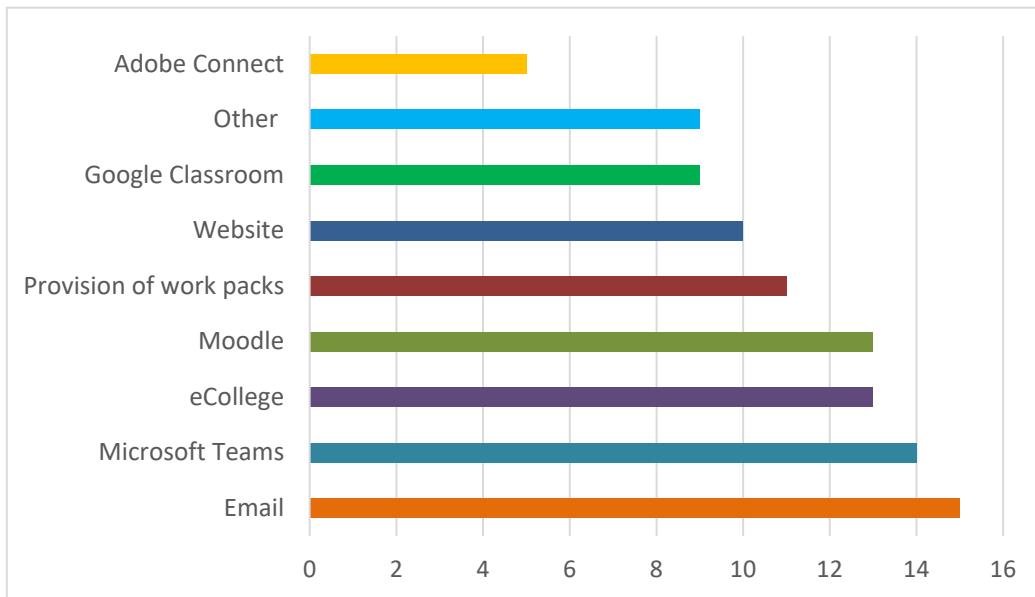


Figure 1 Platforms and supports providing continuity of teaching and learning in FET

Email, Microsoft Teams, Moodle, and eCollege were the most widely used platforms across ETBs as illustrated in Figure 1. The provision of physical work packs delivered by post featured highly where learners may not have access to technology platforms. ETBs also reported using websites and Google Classrooms to deliver continuity of teaching and learning. Adobe Connect is a streaming classroom application available within Moodle and was reported to be in use in five ETBs.

A range of platforms were also identified in the *Other* category in Figure 1 and are reported in the next section.

Continuity of Learning in FET (cont'd)

Other platforms and supports used by several ETBs included [Zoom](#), [Edmondo](#), Phone, [WhatsApp](#) and [Webex](#) as illustrated in Figure 2 while other supports were used less often such as [Apple Classroom](#), [Schoology](#), [Seesaw](#), [Duolingo](#), Text, Private Facebook Groups and Messenger, OneDrive Sharing, Microsoft Notes, [Google Hangouts](#), [Instagram](#) and [YouTube](#).

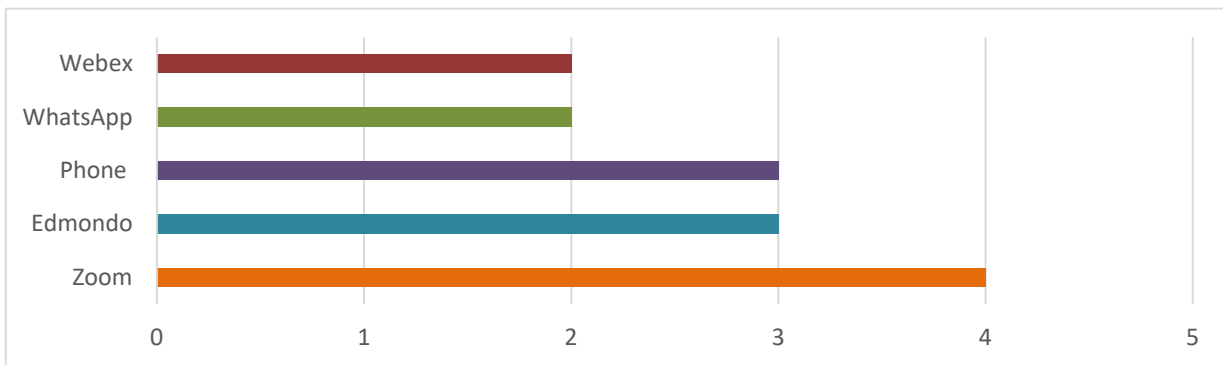


Figure 2 Other platforms and supports providing continuity of teaching and learning in FET

Continuity of Learning in FET (Cont'd)

In response to the open question *“Please outline your approach as to how the FET specific content including work-based learning or apprenticeship or practical context will be provided”*, ETB’s reported the following.

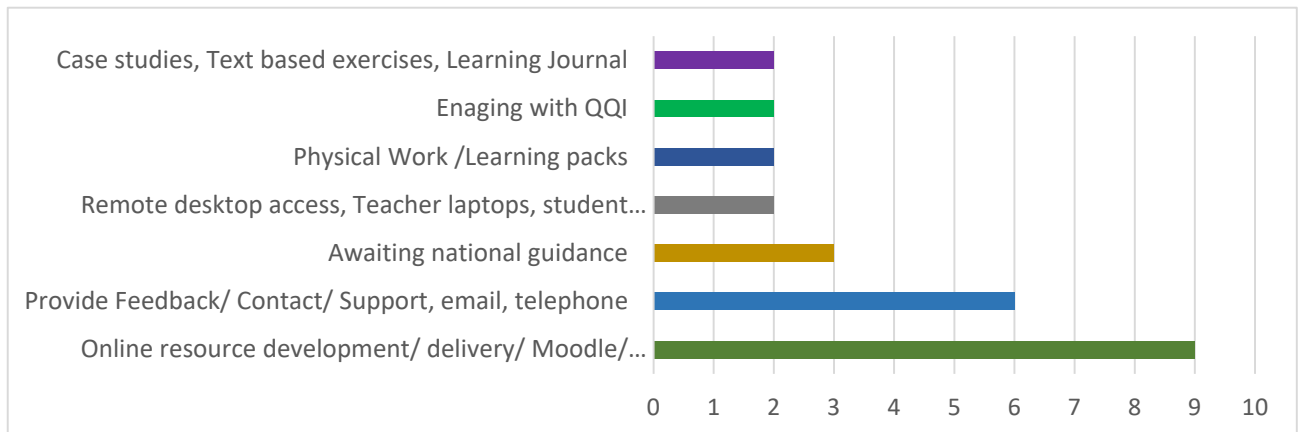


Figure 3 Approach on the provision of FET specific content

Online resource development and delivery through Moodle or Microsoft Teams, Class Notebooks and OneNote was the main approach reported by ETBs to this question. Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs) are being used to provide theoretical work linked to the practical. For example, in Heavy Vehicle Mechanics, apprentices are using CDX (online motor platform) and are being guided by instructors. Apprentices are also being encouraged to complete online content such as Common Modules on the Moodle platform.

ETBs are engaging with learners, maintaining contact, providing feedback and support by email and telephone. Three ETBs indicated they were awaiting national guidance regarding apprenticeship, particularly for craft apprenticeships at Phase 2. ETBs reported providing teachers and instructors with remote desktop access, laptops, and software to support learners remotely as well as developing and providing physical work packs to complete. ETBs are also engaging with QQI regarding alternative assessments and using case studies, text-based exercises and encouraging learners to complete learning journals.

Continuity of Learning in FET (Cont'd)

In response to the open question “What are your plans to further develop support to ensure the continuity of teaching and learning across FET programmes?”, ETB’s reported the following.

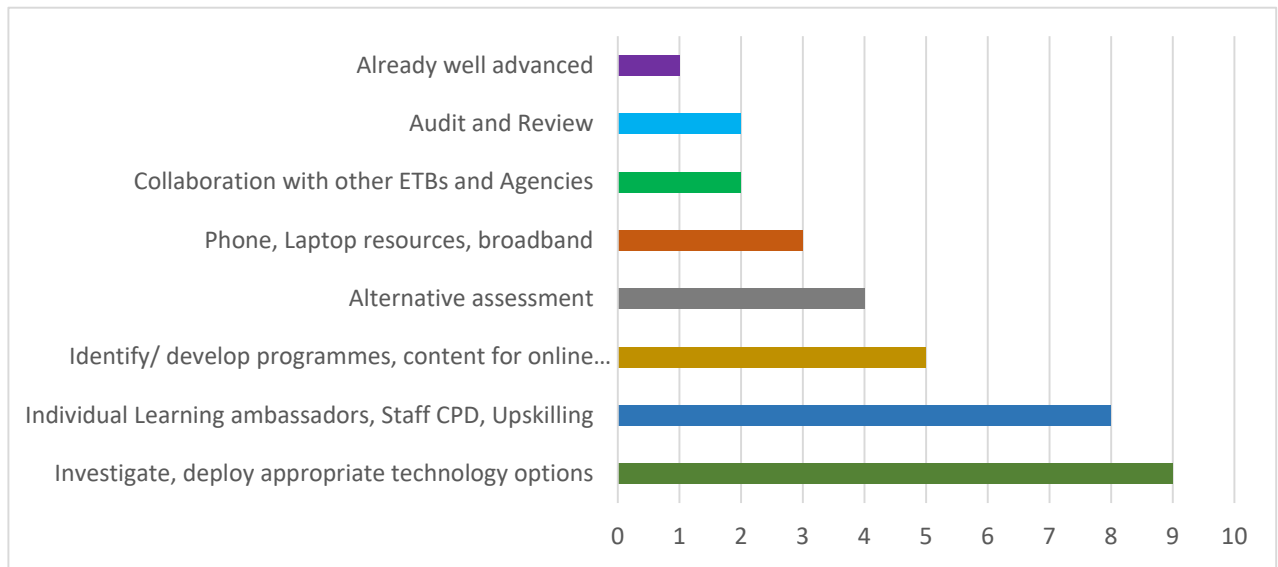


Figure 4 Plans to further develop support to ensure continuity of teaching and learning for FET

75% of ETBs reported that they were investigating appropriate technology solutions and are planning to deploy these to ensure continuity of teaching and learning. A significant focus on supporting and upskilling staff to fully exploit the technology capabilities with mentoring and online training.

ETBs are also identifying programmes and planning the development of programmes for online delivery. Opportunities to develop alternative assessments in collaboration with other ETBs and engaging with agencies, and statutory bodies are also evident.

Identification and deployment of additional resources such as mobile devices, laptops and broadband access were also reported.

Supports for the health and wellbeing of FET learners

In response to the open question “*What supports other than the technology mentioned above have been put in place to reach out to learners who may not have access to technology or may not be in a position to engage with services that may be beneficial to their health and wellbeing?*”, ETB’s reported the following.

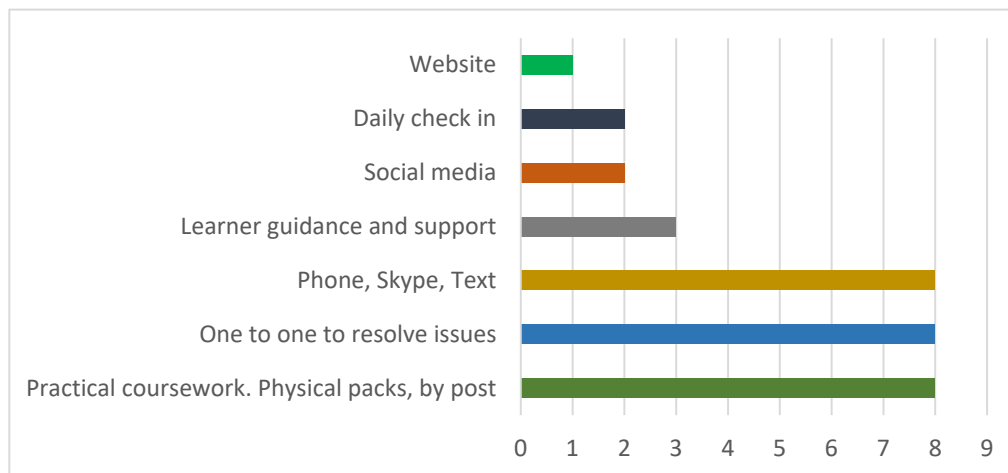


Figure 5 Other supports for learners not already mentioned

To support learners who are not technology enabled services are posting work packs and following up with telephone calls for support. Learner engagement is being monitored and reviewed to try to resolve issues by phone, text, and Skype. Engagement through social media is also evident with some ETBs doing daily check ins with more vulnerable learners. Some services have been able to provide laptops and iPads to learners who have limited access to technology.

Where learners have identified challenges e.g. continuing their learning at home while caring for children/parents; those learners have been given reassurances regarding support and/or extension of submission dates as appropriate. Timetables have been adapted to suit home circumstances on some of the full-time courses, with books posted out to learners to assist with their studies.

The idea of a national wellbeing programme that could be developed and used by ETBs was also mentioned.

Continuity of learning in Schools

In response to the request “Please indicate all the platforms/supports currently being used to provide for the continuity of teaching and learning in schools” the ETB’s reported using the following platforms and supports.

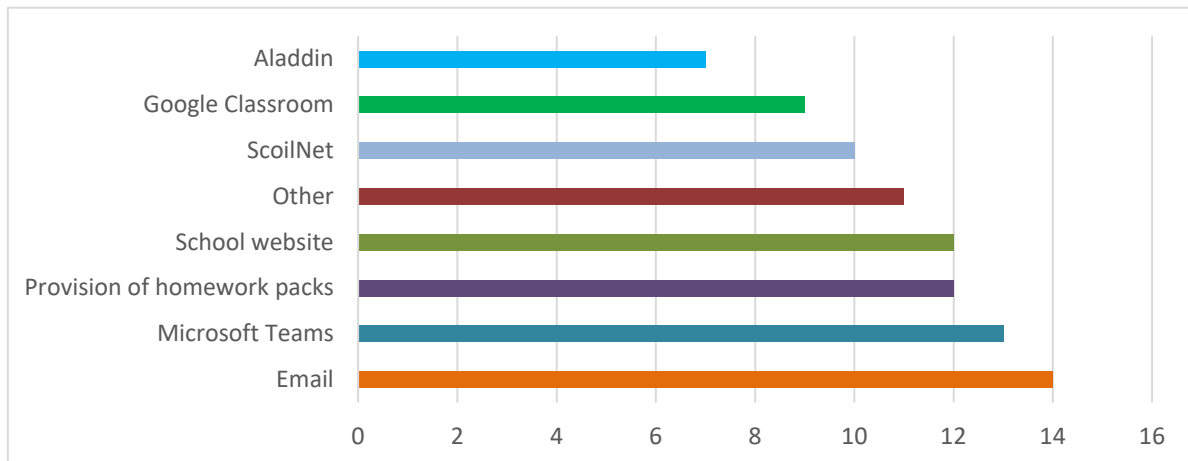


Figure 6 Platforms and supports providing continuity of teaching and learning in Schools

The use of email, Microsoft Teams, school websites and the provision of homework packs were reported as the most common platforms/supports in use by schools. [Scoilnet](#), [Google classroom](#) and [Aladdin](#) were also reported with other supports illustrated in Figure 7.

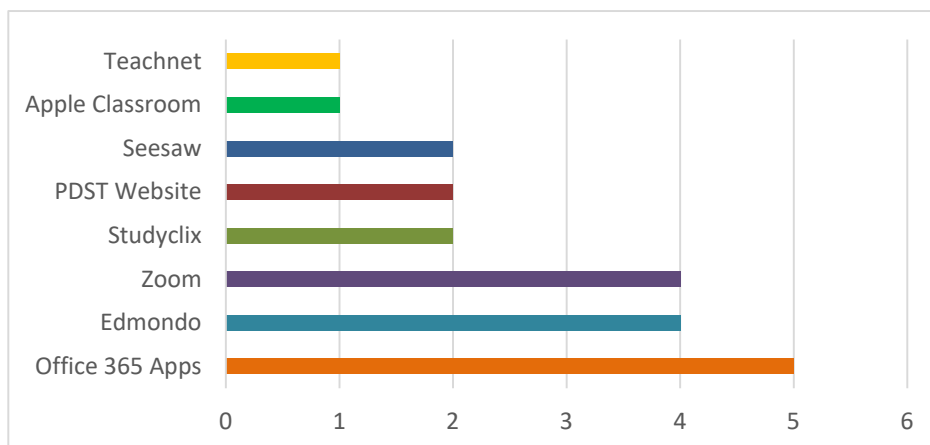


Figure 7 Other platforms and supports providing continuity of teaching and learning in Schools

Continuity of learning in Schools (cont'd)

In response to the open question “What are your plans to further develop support to ensure the continuity of teaching and learning across all schools?” the ETB’s reported the following.

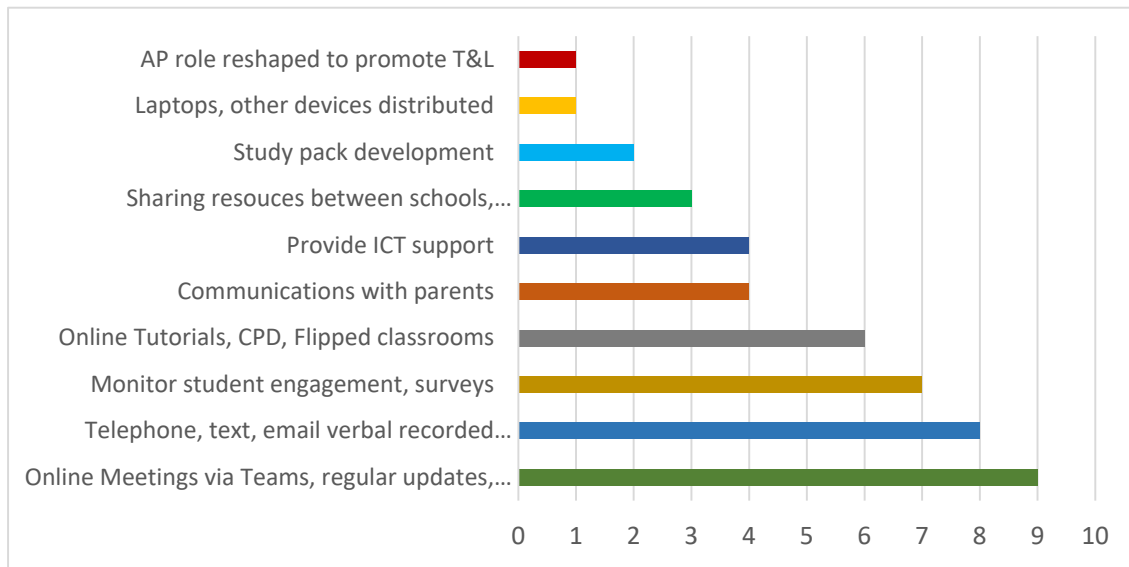


Figure 8 Plans to further develop support to ensure continuity of teaching and learning for Schools

ETBs are adopting a structured approach with regular team meetings via Microsoft Teams to ensure continuity of teaching and learning and providing support to those teams. Business continuity plans have been activated with feedback and support to include recorded voice and video messages to learners. Monitoring student engagement and conducting surveys with additional supports for teachers by way of online tutorials, CPD and adopting flipped classroom pedagogy were also reported.

Increasing communications with parents to support students and provision of study packs was also evident. The provision of ICT support, and devices to teachers with AP responsibilities reshaped to support remote working in the delivery of teaching and learning also reported.

Supports for the health and wellbeing of students

In response to the open question “*What supports other than those mentioned above have been put in place to reach out to students to support their health and wellbeing?*” the ETB’s reported the following.

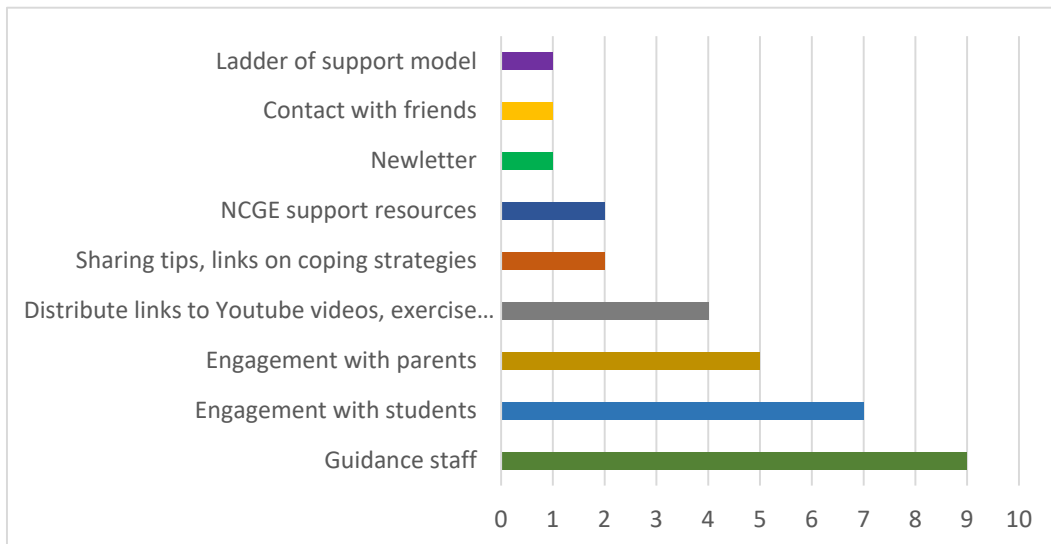


Figure 9 Other supports for students not already mentioned

ETB’s reported that wellbeing support, counselling support and subject choice guidance support is operating in a remote context. Guidance Teachers and Chaplains are in regular contact with vulnerable students and have also prioritised exam classes.

Students are encouraged to stay in contact with their friends and advised that peer learning is one of the most effective methods to support curriculum engagement. Schools have informed students to use technology sensibly to connect and learn together.

Actions and online initiatives of youth organisations

In response to the open question “What actions/procedures have Youth Organisations in your area introduced to support vulnerable young people during this time period?” the ETB’s reported the following.

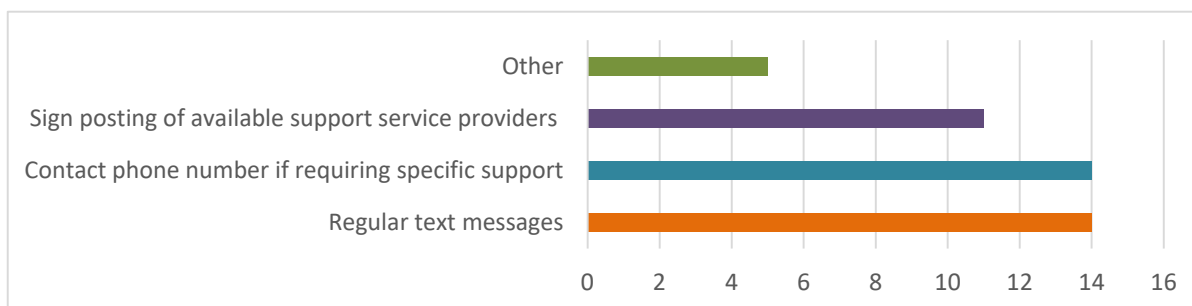


Figure 10 Actions taken by Youth organisations to support vulnerable young people

The use of text messaging and providing contact numbers for specific supports was reported by 75% of ETBs. While signposting of available support service providers was indicated by 11 of the 16 ETBs.

In the other reported actions, funded services are providing an online presence. This could be 1 to 1 support, interactive SKYPE/Support sessions. ISPCC are utilising their What Works Package. YWICM Services are all offering a 10am to 10pm daily online service, so that their young people can link in with their local youth workers daily. Organisations are also providing supports via social media including Snapchat, Facebook and on websites. Counselling is also provided via phone and video. ALP using online VLE to continue tuition.

Actions and online initiatives of youth organisations (cont'd)

In response to the open question *“What online initiatives have Youth Organisations introduced to provide social interaction for young people during this time period?”* the ETB’s reported the following.

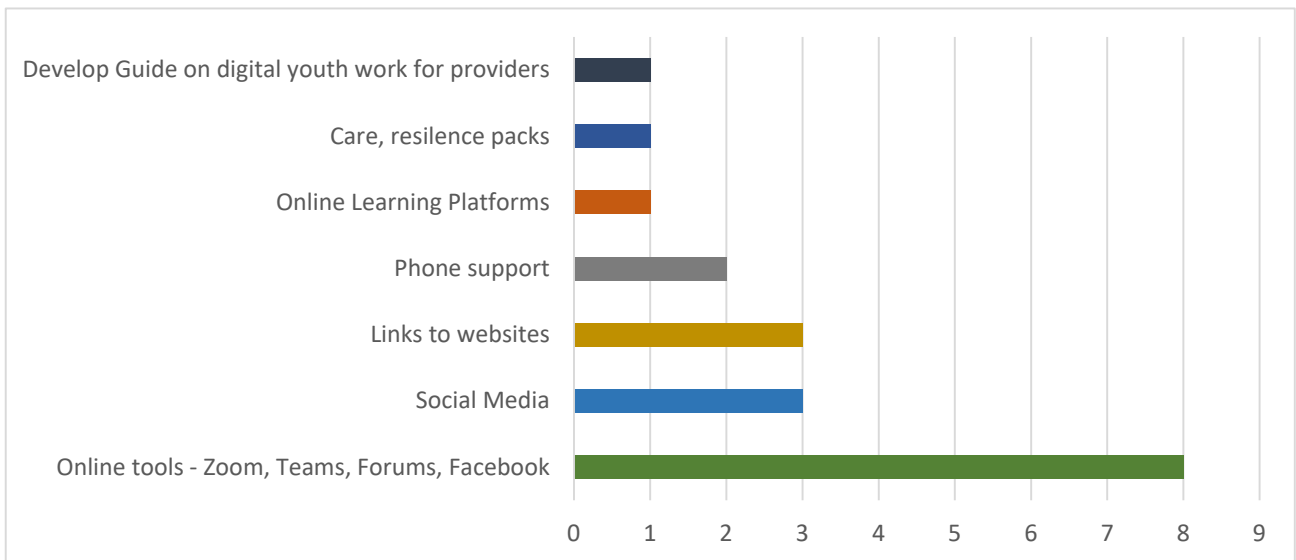


Figure 11 Social interaction initiatives by Youth organisations

Youth organisations are actively using the broad spectrum of on-line resources and platforms to provide opportunities for social interaction. These include forums and networks established via Zoom, MS Teams and Facebook augmented by some with phone support. The organisations provide links to relevant websites and communicate using social media.

Reaching out to vulnerable young people whilst keeping within the HSE guidelines presents challenges but some youth organisations and ETBs are working together to provide the care packages and IT resources and supports their needs.

Continuity of essential services

In response to the open question “What arrangements are in place to continue to ensure that payroll deadlines are met, and creditors can be paid?” the ETB’s reported the following.

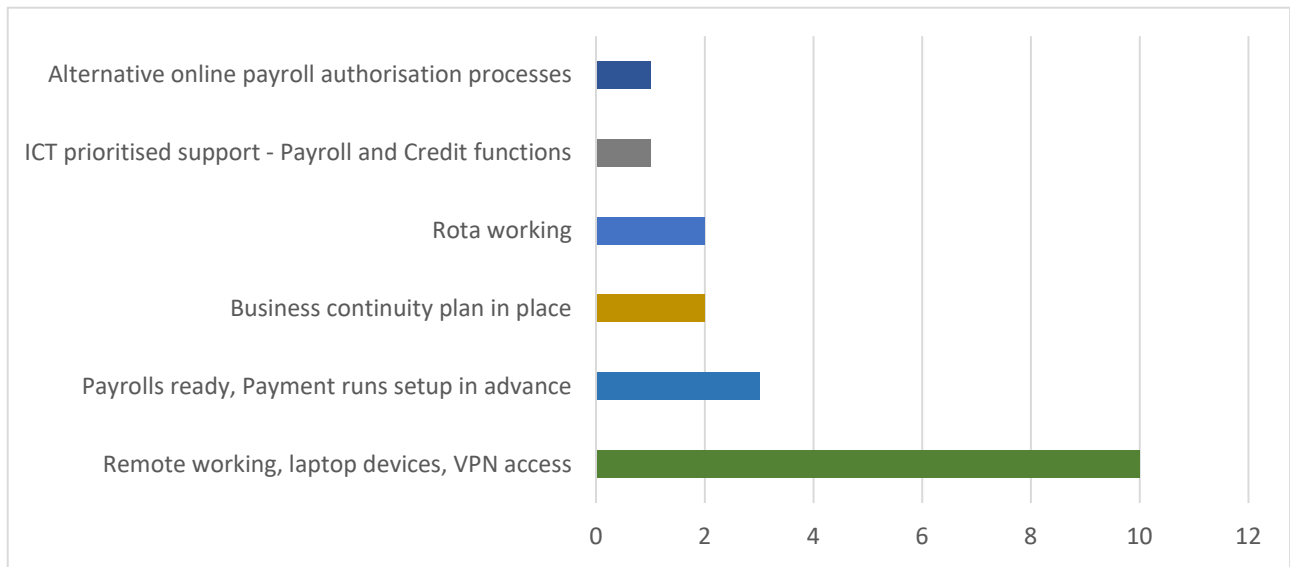


Figure 12 Arrangements to support financial services continuity

ETBs reported that payroll, pay admin and creditor staff have been enabled to function fully off site and/or payment runs had been setup in advance. VTOS and Youthreach payments have been processed for up to 3 weeks in advance and scheduled for payment on appropriate pay dates. Payments will also be processed remotely by interfacing with the ESBS.

Business continuity planning is evident in all cases and mentioned specifically, had been already been in place and implemented. The separation of critical team members by distance and alternating rota’s was also evident to ensure continuity of service.

Continuity of essential services (cont'd)

In response to the open question “How will your ETB maintain HR, Finance and school/centre payments over the longer term?” the ETB’s reported the following.

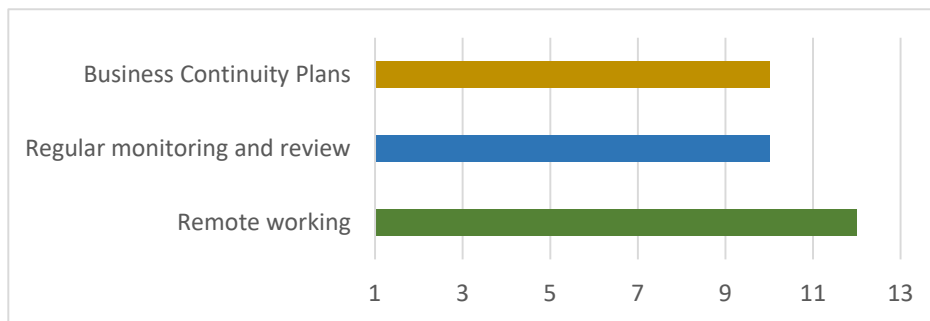


Figure 13 Maintaining HR/Finance and payments in the longer term

ETB business continuity plans are in place to ensure the provision of these services. The capacity for staff to work remotely and effectively is the key driver to maintaining a functioning finance and payroll system. This includes having the requisite equipment, VPN access and appropriate alternative on-line authorisations. In order to meet this demand, some ETBs have prioritised ICT support for payroll and creditor functions.

Payments will be maintained under the current contingency arrangements and will be subject to regular monitoring and review.

On the wider HR functions such as recruitment, some ETBs are advertising posts and shortlisting with interviews suspended and may consider remote interviews in the longer term, while others are proceeding with remote interviews via Microsoft Teams.

ETB’s also indicated that Board meetings have proceeded remotely to approve accounts.

Links to Online Materials

In response to the request *“Please insert here links to online materials that can be useful for other ETBs”* the ETB’s reported the following.

ETBs reported that they are developing materials at present, such as training videos which can be then shared. Considerable work has already been progressed through the respective CE and Director Forums and their supporting networks to share resources, links, and best practice and to develop alternative assessment approaches.

A collection of links is provided below which is not exhaustive but reported through the survey.

www.qualifax.ie

www.careersportal.ie

www.careersnews.ie

www.welfare.ie

www.jobs.ie

www.indeed.ie

www.publicjobs.ie

www.citizensinformation.ie

www.cao.ie

www.hse.ie

www.ecollege.ie

www.skillsoft.com

www.skillssummary.ie

www.samaritans.org

www.pieta.ie

www.iacp.ie

www.apcp.ie

www.iahip.org

www.igc.ie

Any other comments

In response to the request “For any other comments” the ETB’s reported the following.

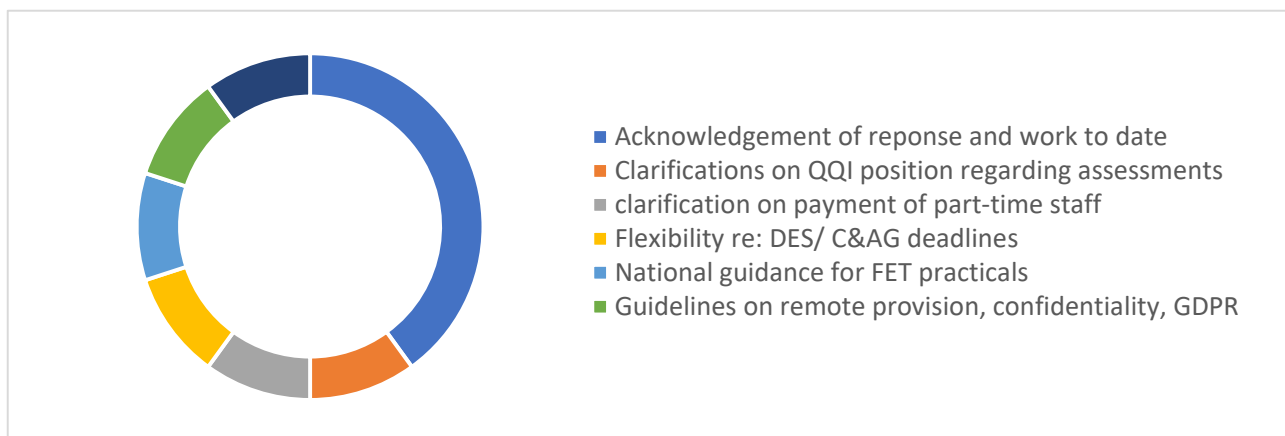


Figure 14 Other comments from ETBs

ETB’s acknowledged that while Schools and Centre’s have responded incredibly well to the current crisis, it is important that we do not overestimate what can be done regarding teaching and learning. Time did not allow for a planned remote learning process and therefore the expectations need to be managed in all communication. ETBs are very early in the response and communication and support to learners will significantly improve in the next few weeks as staff become more familiar with the circumstances and available technologies.

Access to broadband and the availability of devices remains an issue for some learners who are interested in remote learning. Specific guidelines around the provision of guidance and information in a remote context would be welcomed.

Supports around any GDPR requirements emerging from the remote learning model were also raised and guidance around what's best practice regarding delivery of confidential services using Apps and by phone. IT Departments have performed remarkably well to ensure that the infrastructure, equipment, and training have been provided to ETB staff.

The contribution of ETBI to supporting the sector was also acknowledged.

Supports that ETBI could provide to the sector

In response to the open question “Do you have suggestions on the support ETBI could provide?” ETB’s identified the following high-level needs.

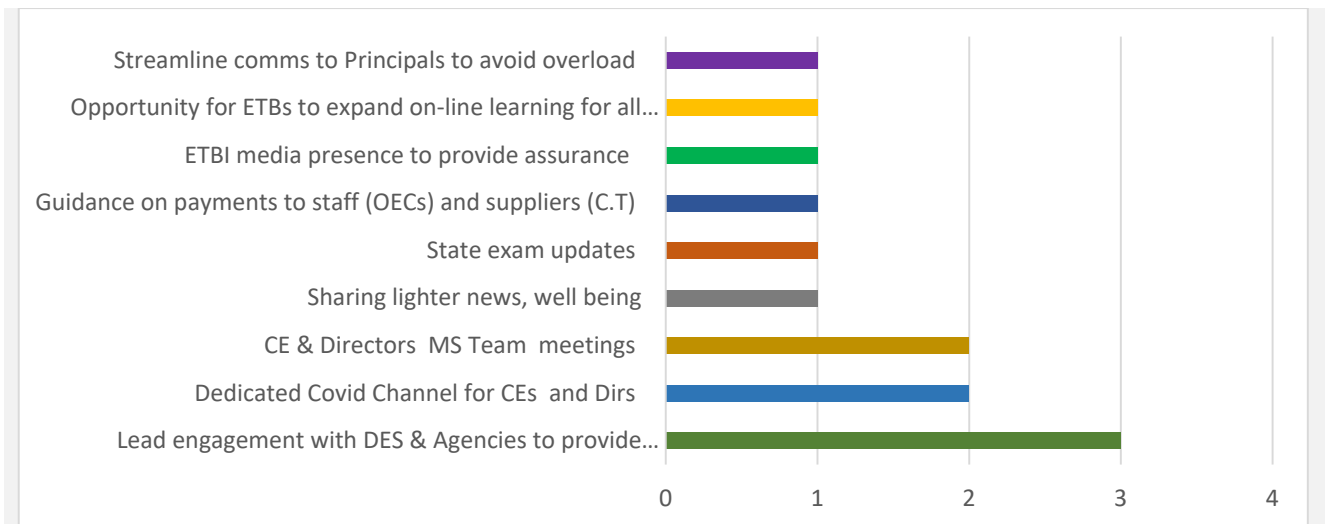


Figure 15 Suggestions on the support ETBI could provide

At this challenging time, ETBs require clear information and guidance, appropriate dedicated information channels and a streamlined approach. Suggestions include ETBI taking the lead in engaging on behalf of the sector with the Department of Education and Skills and other government agencies in order to provide clear guidance on all Covid-19 related matters.

Some ETBs expressed a desire for ETBI to continue facilitating a ‘business as usual’ approach to CE and Directors Forum meetings via a move to MS Teams. ETBs also suggested the creation of a dedicated Covid-19 information channel for CEs and Directors.