Quality Assurance Implementation within a Further Education and Training Provider;

Organisational Perspectives on Efficiency and Effectiveness

An Exploratory Case Study

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Abstract

This study explores efficiency and effectiveness of the quality assurance initiatives in place within a further education and training provider in Ireland, with particular emphasis on the organisational structure from which they originate and the impact that this has upon them.

The literature review presents the concepts of quality and quality assurance, and charts the theoretical development of the field over the centuries. It encompasses the manner in which quality initiatives have been implemented in industry and considers the application of these initiatives to the education sector, from both theoretical and real world perspectives. The review also addresses the influence of organisational structure on implementing these initiatives and the relationship between them.

The research takes the form of an exploratory case study which has utilized qualitative methods to generate its empirical findings. Data was collected through the use of a series of open ended semi-structured interviews. Data was coded and analysed before being sorted and presented in thematically similar groupings.

The organisation structure in place was assessed and has been identified as a formal organisation, consistent with the features of the professional bureaucracy described by (Mintzberg, 1980). Inefficiency and ineffectiveness were discovered within the quality assurance practices of the provider, but were found to be inherent within the initiatives themselves.

This research has found that there is no evidence to suggest that the organisational structure of the further education and training provider has directly impacted upon the efficiency and effectiveness of the quality assurance system in a negative manner, but found indirect links between the two areas which are worthy of further consideration. Organisational culture was identified as a serious potential influence upon quality assurance initiatives success.

Declaration

The author, Andrew John Finn, declares except where duly

acknowledged that this dissertation including all of the material within it

represents his own individual and independent work.

Signed: _____

Andrew John Finn

Dated: _____

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Glossary of Abbreviations

EDI - Employment, Development and Information Centre

ETB - Education and Training Board

EQAVET - European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education

FETAC - Further Education and Training Awards Council

FAS - A defunct state training and employment authority

FET - Further Education and Training

HETAC - Higher Education and Training Awards Council

JIT - Just in Time Manufacturing

QA - Quality Assurance

QQI - Quality and Qualifications Ireland

REVAMP - Revamp Training Programme

SOLAS - Further Education and Training Authority

SQA - Scottish Qualifications Authority

TQM - Total Quality Management

VEC - Vocational Education Committee (defunct)

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.0   Introduction

Over the last four decades the provision of Further Education and Training, (FET), in Ireland has been continuously evolving. There are many reasons which have driven this evolution, including efforts to meet varying skills gaps which have arisen in the Irish labour force, economic conditions, emerging technology sectors and the need of individuals to 'up skill' themselves for participation in a competitive labour market.

This case study examines the real world application of quality assurance policies, process and procedures, commonly referred to as quality assurance systems, within educational organisations. In particular, this study is interested in the effective and efficient application of quality assurance systems within the context of the organisational structure of those organisations.

This chapter briefly outlines the background to the research presented, the rationale and justification for the study and finally the aims and objectives of the study.

1.1:0   Brief Outline of the Study Context

The context in which this study is undertaken comprises of the greater further education and training system in Ireland. External influences have impacted upon

working practices in this sector, particularly with regard to educational quality assurance.

1.1.1   Brief Outline of the Specific Case

This research project takes the form of an exploratory case study. Empirical data collection for this case study focuses upon one single case organisation. The organisation selected for consideration in this study is *The Employment Development and Information Centre, Longford,* (Longford EDI).

This organisation began providing educational programmes for clients in the greater Longford area in 1998, (EDIL, 2014). From small beginnings, Longford EDI has rapidly grown to become one of the largest community training and educational orientated organisations of its kind in the midlands region of Ireland. Quality assurance initiatives within the centre have received acclaim from local and national regulatory agencies.

The centre is a relevant organisation for study for numerous reasons. These reasons include researcher access, as an employee, to the organisation, the scale of this organisation, the complex structure of the organisation and the level of quality assurance initiatives in existence within the organisation.

1:1:2 Brief Outline of the Unit of Analysis

The relevant unit of analysis to this study is personnel who are involved in quality assurance process delivery or adherence within Longford EDI and who have a stake in the case study organisation.

Individuals were selected for inclusion within the study based upon ensuring thoroughness of scope; that is ensuring that all stakeholder groups, with either a strategic or operational stake in the centres quality assurance system, are represented within the empirical data collection phase. In completion of this study the researcher has sought to cover all relevant personnel areas by conducting eight participant interviews.

1.2.0 Justifications for the Research

Quality assurance systems in education are designed to ensure a consistent approach to education, assessment, marking, grading, programme evaluation and stakeholder accountability. Two elements of quality assurance systems, utilised in further education and training in the Republic of Ireland, provide good examples of the core principals of effective quality assurance and include;

- The fair and consistent assessment of learners (FETAC, 2012) (QQI, 2013) (SOLAS, 2014)

- Delivery of educational programmes with regard to national standards (FETAC, 2012) (QQI, 2013) (SOLAS, 2014)

Over the last number of years, Ireland has seen multiple examples of where the standards of the delivery of training, education and certification of learners have been brought into question, due to several differing human and organisational factors. One such situation is the case of Empower Training.

On the 13th of October 2010 the Irish Examiner published an article entitled; 'State accreditation system left with many questions' (Miller, 2010). This article outlined the operations of a now defunct private training provider, Empower Training, who did not adhere to the rules governing its quality assurance agreement with the Further Education and Training Awards Council, (FETAC), (now amalgamated into the new organisation Quality and Qualifications Ireland, (QQI).

The case succinctly highlights how human factors and organisational ineffectiveness negatively affect quality assurance processes, with consequences for all of the stakeholders involved. Stakeholders included funding organisations, regulatory bodies and most importantly learners who were significantly disadvantaged both financially and in relation to receiving expected educational awards.

Most negative occurrences within the sector can be described as providers failing to reach agreed standards of practice or else the abject failure of quality assurance systems due to staff ignorance and occasional malpractice.

It is important in light of negative occurrences such as the case of Empower Training, and in the context of the regulatory environment in which providers operate today, that consistent application of process's are achieved in order to achieve standardisation, effectiveness, efficiency and accountability. Furthermore, the literature review carried out and presented in chapter 2 of this dissertation highlights a gap in existing knowledge in research into the application of quality assurance process in Ireland, with regard to further education and training, and that little consideration is given to the failure phenomenon within the sector in the context of organisational factors rather than human factors.

The research study is designed to examine quality systems efficiency and effectiveness with regard to the organisational structure of a further education and training provider in Ireland.

1.2.1   The Research Question

This research seeks to determine whether the organisational structure in place within a Further Education and Training provider does, in itself, represent a barrier to efficient and effective Quality Assurance process implementation. A case study approach will be used to explore this research question.

The rationale behind the research question design is presented within the methodology section, alongside the relevance and justification of the use of a case study.

1.2.2   Research Aims and Objectives

(Meriam Webster, 2013) defines an aim as 'a clearly defined intent or purpose'. The aims of a project are distinctive from the objectives of that project, which Merriam Webster defines as 'something toward which effort is directed, an aim, goal or end of action'. The overall research topic can be best understood through consideration of the aims and objectives of the proposal.

The aim of this research study is;

- To determine whether the organisational structure in place within a Further Education and Training provider, directly or indirectly, impacts negatively upon quality assurance system effectiveness and efficiency.

The objectives of the research study are;

- To identify the current organisational structure in place in the Employment, Development and Information centre Longford

- To explore whether the administrative requirements of modern quality assurance implementation in further education and training in Ireland has shifted the focus of the quality assurance system away from the needs of learners.

1.2.3 Outline of the Dissertation

The research presented in this dissertation is explorative in nature, is organisation specific and is context specific. In addition to this chapter, this dissertation consists of four further chapters. Chapter Two, Literature Review, outlines areas of relevance and interest to the research question and the aims and objectives of this study. The chapter also illustrates any gaps which can be seen in peer reviewed research with regards to the same.

Chapter Three, Methodology, details and justifies the methodology employed within the overall study; the research methods deployed in the data gathering processes and the procedure used to analyse and present the empirical research findings.

Chapter Four, Empirical Findings, outlines the findings from the empirical data collected as part of this study. The data is presented thematically in grouped sections developed through a data coding process.

Chapter Five, Conclusions and Recommendations, summarises and discusses the findings from the empirical research and seeks to triangulate the findings with both the reviewed literature of Chapter Two and with the authors own direct observations from his career working in the area of quality assurance in this sector. This chapter also presents conclusions and recommendations generated through this process which are pertinent to the case study organisation and its stakeholders.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.0   Introduction

The purpose of this literature review is to research, analyse and synthesize literature such as peer reviewed research papers, journals and academic texts which are relevant to the research topic; in order to chart the development of quality assurance and programme evaluation processes undertaken in the education system. The review also seeks to examine the role of personnel, human factors and stakeholders within the context of these areas taking account of organisational structure.

A systematic approach was used to conduct a review of the historical research into the topic area, starting at the outset of quality initiatives occurring before the industrial revolution. The literature review then charts the progress of quality assurance through developed theory and its application in industry, from this point the literature review changes focus to the area of educational quality assurance and programme evaluation in the 1800s, charting its development into extensive quality assurance processes which are found in contemporary educational settings today.

An emphasis on factors which mitigate against corrective implementation of quality assurance systems also features. Further to this the area of organisational structure is also given significant analysis as it is a focus of the research question and the aims and objectives of this study.

National policy in quality assurance practices in education will also be analysed in the context of practitioner theory in the educational sector, and compared with quality assurance systems identified within other industry sectors.

2.0.1 Definition of Quality

(Collins Dictionary, 2009) defines quality as "the degree or standard of excellence". (Idialu, 2013) states that quality can be described as "standards of something as compared to other things that is the degree of excellence", (2013, p432). This description of quality is a common understanding of what the word quality actually means, this though is in contrast to the understanding of the application of quality initiatives particularly in area of interest in this study ; that being quality assurance in education. Contemporary thinking in implementing quality initiatives in business and education have dramatically shifted focus from the understanding of the word quality to treating quality as a concept, this literature review will also outline this phenomenon in detail.

2.1.0   Early History of Quality Assurance

From the 13th Century until the beginning of the industrial revolution in the early 19th century, 'manufacturing' was largely contained to individual craftsmen. (Kieser, 1989) explains that in medieval Europe it was common for these craftsmen to be

members of a union of sorts, called guilds. Interestingly, (Greift *et al,* 1994) propose that the development of guilds was encouraged by medieval rulers, as a means of ensuring market stability and consequently ensuring civic peace.

(Richardson, 2001) discusses different types of guilds and their associated rules and regulations. The Guilds had strict rules relating to all relevant areas of a business, quality, service, methods and even apprenticeships. Membership of a Guild was proof of quality, and faulty goods could be returned through the guild. The system was designed in such a way as to ensure quality. Sub-standard crafts people would be expelled from a Guild.

(Richardson, 2001) and (Kieser, 1989) discuss different aspects of the operational business environment in which guilds operated. There are many interesting parallels which can be drawn between the medieval guild environment and the modern business environment, from the use of quality marks and standards, to complaints processes, labour protection, competition control, training requirements, even marketing. (Krizov and Allenby, 2004) posit that the guilds even recognised and practiced the concept of guild/corporate social responsibility. Business scale and market size are the most important differences between the two environments.

The medieval business environment began to evolve into the modern business environment with the arrival of the Industrial Revolution in the early 19th Century. The revolution allowed for mass production and national and international transportation on a scale that was previously unimaginable.

2.1.1   The Impact of the Industrial Revolution on Quality

(Kieser, 1989) details the essential difference between the medieval guild and the modern manufactories as the distribution of power and ownership of resources. The craftsperson had previously been responsible for the quality of materials and production of the entire item and their reputation, income and guild status were dependent upon this, but as (Kieser, 1989) further explains, the individual member had little power over the distribution of guild resources.

Post industrial revolution the individual worker became responsible for only a small element of an entire product, transferring all other responsibilities to the business owner and selected employees. The transfer of overall responsibility for materials and production quality away from the producer and towards managers had a significant and negative impact upon overall quality.

2.1.2   Post Industrial Revolution

From the Industrial Revolution onwards, efforts to mitigate this reduction in quality have been a key focus for businesses across the globe. The Quality Assurance discipline has evolved continuously, but can be traced to beginnings in the early 19th century with Adam Smith who formalised the factory method of division of labour. (Roth, 2013) describes this as:

"Smith showed the business community that by breaking a

production process into the simplest possible steps and assigning

each step to a different worker, productivity would increase",

(2013, p25).

In Smiths factory system quality was dependent on workers to realise errors, with occasional spot audits. Defective items were either scrapped or reworked. Most often, the end consumer was to detect failure.

The evolution continued through Frederick Taylor with his concept of efficiency and scientific industrial management, (Roth, 2013), breaking each task into its smallest steps, timing, improving, altering the process as required, to reduce costs and employee numbers while increasing productivity, (Roth, 2013). (Locke, 1982) discusses the specific methods involved in these steps, an example of which is time and motion studies. Inspection departments were introduced under this system, with all products being inspected to avoid them reaching the customer.

(Landesberg, 1999) explains that William Shewart was a pioneer in the use of statistical methods in quality control. Shewarts methods of statistical quality control became sufficiently popular that the US Army actually ran courses in it for staff.

2.1.3   Quality Focus Shift from Product to Process

William Shewart introduced the statistical analysis of the parameters of each step of a process in the late 1920s to ensure that each step was within acceptable tolerances,

(Staton-Reinstein, 2005). It is at this point that process quality rather than simply product quality became a point of study.

(Roth, 2013), (Phelps *et al,* 2007), (O'Connor, 1992) and (Bonstringl, 1992) all discuss the next key figure in the evolution of Quality Assurance as a field, W.E. Deming; who introduced statistical analysis and quality practices in Japan post world war two, from mid-20th century, onwards. He later brought these industrial concepts to the United States. The aims of introducing these concepts were to allow industries in the United States remain competitive with their seemingly more successful Japanese counterparts.

Deming popularised the quality cycle, plan – do – check- act, which together with his '14 quality sins and how to counteract them' forms the basis of the quality system now known as Total Quality Management, although as explained by (Phelps *et al,* 2007), Deming himself did not entitle the system thus.

Interestingly, Authors such as (Staton-Reinstein, 2005) and (Carter, 1994) label the Deming Wheel as originally being Shewart's brainchild. Indeed, according to (Staton-Reinstein, 2005) Deming always credited Walter Shewart as responsible for the original development of the plan-do-check-act wheel.

Over two centuries has passed since the Industrial Revolution and quality control has evolved into quality assurance as different theories and concepts have led to universally accepted key elements; which are now visible in specific quality

initiatives such as ISO9000 standards, EFQM model of Business Excellence and the Six Sigma methodology (Antony and Kumar, 2011).

2.1.4   Comparison of Historical Theoretical Perspectives

(Roth, 2013) synopsises the differences between philosophies underlying the division of labour, scientific management, and Deming's models introduced in the previous section as:

> *"In Smith's model the workers were simply trained how to do their jobs; in Taylor's mode, quantitative tools were used to discover the most efficient way to complete a task, and then the employees were taught that way. In Deming's model, the employees themselves were trained to use the tools to make their work more efficient."*
>
> *(2013, p26).*

(Roth, 2013), (Phelps *et al,* 2007), (Darmody, 2007) and (Locke, 1982) all consider the specific details of some of these approaches. Other areas of divergence between the three theorists which have been identified are in relation to the roles of management, the origins of failures, staff engagement requirements and optimising methods. However there are a number of main elements which can be identified as occurring within all of these theories and these are the division of work into steps, the concurrent operating of steps within a process, standardisation and the continuous development and improvement of process's.

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The quality focus proposed by these original proponents also evolved as time passed, from random spot checking of finished goods with Smith, to total inspection method of finished goods with Taylor, to quality assurance of the process with Shewart, and finally to quality assurance of the process together with statistical based sampling of finished goods with Deming.

The cost of quality, a concept which was originally introduced by Joseph Juran, is expanded upon by management accounting experts, such as (Andrijašević, 2008), (Anderson and Sedatole, 1998) and (Albright and Roth, 1992). Quality Failure has higher associated costs when the failure is discovered externally to an organisation, rather than internally. The Cost of quality is the sum of failure costs, appraisal costs and prevention costs. The evolution of quality assurance reflects the growing comprehension of the costs of quality versus the costs of failure. The appraisal only with the spot checks of completed products in Smiths Factory Model, the avoidance of external failures within the inspection methods in Taylors Model, to failure prevention within the process assessments within Shewart Model, and finally to overall reduction of all relevant costs; internal failure costs, prevention costs, and appraisal costs which could be achieved using the models of Deming.

2.1.5 Contemporary Manufacturing Practices- Total Quality Management

Total Quality Management or TQM aims when implemented within an organisation was to permanently construct an environment of improvement in an as efficient manner as possible and in a continuous fashion (Miller, 1993). This approach proved

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particularly effective in post-world war two Japan where its industry gained a significant market place competitive advantage over its American and European competitors (Vazzana, 1997). Of all of the manufacturing quality practices which have been adopted in the education sector, the principals of TQM have been the most widely adopted.

Of particular significance with this adoption in to the education system is the opposing viewpoints on its merits which are hotly debated by practitioners in this sector. Other manufacturing practices also conceived within the quality spectrum include; Just in Time, JIT, manufacturing and Kanban both of the latter practices though are conceived to improve efficiency in the lead time for a manufacturing business materials and stock, (Agrawal, 2010), and thus have a limited relevance to this study.

2.1.6 Contemporary Manufacturing Practices- IOS 9000

Another contemporary manufacturing practice which has been extremely influential in quality assurance in manufacturing is the ISO9000 standard. Businesses and organisations who adopt ISO standards agree to build into their process eight management principles, (Alkeaid, 2007), which are published by the international organisation for standardisation. According to (Affan and Elikofi, 2013), industry today has had a large up-take of ISO standards.

2.1.7 Contemporary Manufacturing Practices- Lean Manufacturing

Lean manufacturing also has its roots firmly in Japan where industry, particularly the automotive industry, utilised the system to reduce waste and inefficiencies (Gabor and Munteanu, 2010). This was achieved by implementing the seven waste principles of Lean Manufacturing, (Douglas, 2014). The principles relate mainly to physical inputs and outputs and as such are less relevant to service provision than other quality management systems.

2.1.8 Contemporary Manufacturing Practices- SIX SIGMA

Six SIGMA methodologies have much overlap with Total Quality Management principles. Similarly to other industry initiatives the overarching aim of SIX SIGMA is to remove defects and variation from the manufacturing processes (Gabor and Munteanu, 2010).

2.1.9   Quality Assurance outside of Manufacturing

The concepts of TQM, ISO9000, and lean manufacturing presented earlier in this chapter have been presented within the manufacturing settings in which they evolved, but this field of study has expanded and variations on these processes can be seen in operation in almost every business area and government sector. It is interesting to consider the theories and concepts outside of this context. Other sectors

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of business have well developed systems to ensure an environment of quality in provision of services.

In the health sector Total Quality Management is utilised today, (Ovretveit, 2000). One of the first quality management initiatives in Healthcare occurred in the United Kingdom Health Services and was constructed of Maxwell's six dimensions of quality (Maxwell, 1984). Across all sectors, elements of change management and its impact on quality can be seen, (Gabor and Munteanu, 2010). The Education Sector has not been an exception to this phenomenon.

2.2.0   Definition of Educational Quality Assurance and Programme Evaluation

> *"Quality assurance is not a common phrase in the vast lexicon of educational jargon. However, the idea conveyed by the phrase has a long history in education. Two concepts in education are especially concerned with quality assurance: accountability, and programme evaluation"* (Madaus and Stufflebeam, 1984, p 649).

Accountability refers to how a teacher, trainer, lecturer or assessor is held to account for his actions within his or her teaching environment; programme evaluation refers to a process of monitoring educational services for successful consistent implementation, (Madaus and Stufflebeam, 1984). (Idialu, 2013), describes the latter as the expression of a standard by which goals can be achieved by measuring the inputs and outputs of a programme. According to (Scriven, 1991) educational

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programme evaluation is described as "judging the worth or merit of something or the product of a process", (1991, p139).

2.2.1   The Development of Programme Evaluation

Programme evaluation in education has continually developed and changed over the last one hundred and twenty years into the modern discipline it has become today, seven relevant time periods have been identified to chart the main changes and developments involved, (Madaus, Stufflebeam and Kelleghan, 2000). These are the Age of Reform 1792-1900, the Age of Efficiency and Testing 1900-1930, the Tylerian Age 1930-1945, the Age of Innocence 1946-1957, the Age of Development 1958-1972, the Age of Professionalization 1973-1983 and finally the Age of Expansion and Integration which covers the period from 1983 to present day, (Madaus, Stufflebeam and Kelleghan, 2000).

Periods one to seven compile to make an extensive history of programme evaluation, but important elements are noteworthy from the time period as a whole, of particular interest is the first instance of mass evaluation commissioned by Horace Mann, Secretary of the US Board of Education who wanted an assessment of student achievement to assess the quality of a large school systems development, (Stufflebem, Madaus, and Kellaghan, 2000).

The most significant of these periods is the Tylerian Age, named after the man commonly known as the father of modern evaluation, Ralph W Tyler, (Mathison,

2005). Ralph W Tyler's extensive publications have influenced all contemporary works in the area of educational programme and assessment evaluation (Mathison, 2005). According to (Mathison, 2005), Ralph W Tyler pioneered a system of educational evaluation best summed up in his General Statement on Evaluation.

2.2.2 Ralph W Tyler's Statement on Evaluation

(Tyler, 1942) presents a series of steps, which taken together form the basis of the General Statement on Evaluation, and which are summarised below; Formulating a statement of educational objectives, Classifying these objective into major types, Defining and refining each of these types of objectives in terms of behaviour, Defining situations in which student can be expected to display objectives, Devising means for interpreting the results and finally selecting on the basis of clinical trials the more promising appraisal methods.

Tyler's largest and seminal contribution was his 'Eight Year Study' conducted in the 1930s. The eight year study was noted as one of the most successful studies of the twentieth century (Madaus and Stufflebeam, 1989). Later reflecting on his 1930s study, (Tyler, 1987) demonstrates that people who engaged in evaluation activities can work with stakeholders in a quality assured process.

The importance of Tyler's older works is also highlighted by (Mathison, 2005), "Tyler's approach of linking programme objectives to outcome measures organised

the tasks and goals of education evaluation in a frame work that was the dominant paradigm for almost half a century" (Mathison, 2005, p147).

The general statement of evaluation was refined and added to in later years. This period, 1958 through 1972, the Age of Development, saw the interest of national governments in educational quality assurance increase, (Hogan, 2007).

2.2.3 The Impact of the Cold War on the Evaluation of Program Quality

The Age of Development also brought significant change to the process of evaluation particularly in the United States. (Madaus & Stufflebeam, 1984), discuss that as a result of the advent of the cold war American policy makers found it was necessary to increase funding and resource provision into education. The reasoning behind this necessity was that it had become essential to 'up skill' the population in mathematics, science and other areas needed to compete with the perceived communist Russian technological threat (Hogan, 2007), (Madaus & Stufflebeam 1984).

Resultantly, educational evaluation had begun to come of age, as instruments were needed to judge the compliance and output of an expensive education system (Stufflebeam, Madaus and Kellaghan, 2000). Several different approaches, aiming to achieve this, have been identified in literature.

2.2.4   Approaches to Evaluation

(Hogan, 2007) outlines several approaches to evaluation taking account of the aforementioned time periods defined by (Madaus, Stufflebeam and Kelleghan, 2007). This outline is very significant as it maps the change in evaluation techniques over the course of time periods one to seven.

(Hogan, 2007), outlined evaluation approaches which include; The Objectives-Oriented Approach to Evaluation, The Management-Oriented Approach, The Consumer-Oriented Approach, The Expertise-Oriented approach, The Adversary-Oriented Approach, The Participant-Oriented Approach, The CIRO Evaluation Approach, Kirkpatrick's Evaluation Approach and Phillip's Evaluation Model.

The studies and concepts considered by (Hogan, 2007) and (Madaus & Stufflebeam, 1984), describe the historical basis upon which modern day evaluation techniques have developed; demonstrating that the policy, evaluation, accountability, relevant training and clear objectives are the elements which form effective quality assurance processes in education.

The key elements identified within the literature of authors such as (Hogan, 2007), (Idialu, 2013) and (Madaus, 1989) can be expanded to include; elements of national and international policy, effective stakeholder accountability, the need to utilize competent well trained and organised staff, having clear educational outcomes and objectives, utilizing internal and external evaluation of services rendered and ensuring continuous improvements in service provision.

Interestingly, (Idialu, 2013), found that there were several factors which often resulted in educational facilities not following many of the logical steps in the historical evaluation models already outlined.

2.2.5 Factors Mitigating Against Quality Assurance in Education

(Idialu, 2013), concisely outlines several key areas which compromise quality assurance systems in education and are as follows; inadequate funding, staff quality and quantity, lack of appropriate facilities, the need to retrain trainers, poor social attitude, poor remuneration of staff, poor administration and regular supervision of vocational education programmes, examination malpractice, poor assessment methods, absenteeism of teachers / students and a total disregard of accreditation reports.

Within the same journal (Idialu, 2013) outlines succinct proposals for ensuring the adherence to an effective quality assurance model in educational areas which include skill acquisition and competency development of staff, adequate funding, accreditation, adequate staffing and staff development, provision of adequate facilities, enhancement of social attitudes and motivation of Teachers / Lecturers. Oversight of quality assurance models is highlighted as important.

In the republic of Ireland Quality and Qualifications Ireland, QQI, was given responsibility for the oversight and monitoring of quality assurance processes in

training and further education in Ireland by the Qualifications and Quality Assurance Education and Training Act 2012 (QQI, 2012).

2.2.6   The Effect of Policy on Quality Assurance Processes in Education

Quality and Qualifications Ireland is an amalgamation of several bodies within the Irish educational system including the further education and training awards council FETAC and the higher education training awards council HETAC among others (QQI, 2012).

Recommendations from the European Parliament and Council on 18th June 2009 led to the development of a European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for vocational education and training (QQI, 2013). The organisation is now known as the European Quality Vocational Education Training Authority, EQVET (EQVET, 2014).

2.3.0   Convergence of Programme Evaluation and Modern QA Systems

This literature review highlights the convergence of academic research, practitioner theory, and the policy and direction of national and international bodies with regards to modern quality assurance process.

Much overlap of ideas and concepts exist between the Deming's quality circle and Tyler's seminal work, the 1942 General Statement of Evaluation. The objective based approach is one such common theme. (Tyler, 1942) explains the importance of defining, reviewing and redefining educational objectives, which also bears remarkable similarity with the underlying premise of the Deming Quality Circle described by (Myron, 1998).

It is apparent from the literature that modern contemporary multi-sectoral thinking is broadly in line with the literature of (Tyler, 1942), and the later works of authors such as (Madaus, Stufflebeam and Kelleghan, 2000) and (Masitison, 2005). Numerous themes of interest are evident through the historical treatment of the area presented within this literature.

Contemporary research, such as the work of (Idialu, 2013) and (Naidoo, 2013) outlines that the elements of a cohesive quality assurance process in education are readily apparent, but can be hard to implement due to the diversity of factors. Stakeholder development and training in quality assurance processes has become a key component of all quality assurance systems (QQI, 2012).

Several of the historical evaluation models outline the importance of the competence of staff to deliver educational programmes. Interestingly, the awareness of staff competence as a key to effectiveness of quality assurance systems has increased over the efflux of time, in line with the complexity of quality assurance development literature. Additionally, findings include the increased awareness of training and staff development in quality assurance processes, the need for increased awareness by

stakeholders and management of Quality assurance administration and external and internal programme monitoring.

2.4.0 Organisational Culture and Quality Assurance in Education

The concept of quality assurance has gained much credence in the area of education and across its differing sectorial areas from further education, post-primary and higher education, (Naidoo, 2013). Quality assurance as a mechanism is conducted by an organisation, as (Mintzberg , 1980) outlines, to control or direct activities in an efficient and effective manner, in order to attain organisational objectives.

Organisational Culture and Quality Assurance as outlined by (Naidoo, 2013) are significant drivers of effectiveness, efficiency and excellence. (Naidoo, 2013) further outlines that these assumptions though widely acknowledged have not been critically examined, further reinforcing the relevance of this research. (Keup *et al*., 2001) also sees organisational culture as important, and in discussing change implementation in colleges and universities states that understanding culture is a critical component in understanding the change process. (Naidoo, 2013) outlines four cultural aspects which he deems worthy of note which include; the managerial culture, the political culture, the collegial culture and the transformative culture.

(Naidoo, 2013) explains that organisational culture has been linked directly with efficiency and effectiveness resulting in improved quality outcomes, but that this has

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generally been based on an assumption that organisational culture is flexible, not rigid, and as such amenable to change and receptive to the introduction of formal quality initiatives.

2.4.1 What is Organisational Structure?

The organisational structure in place within an entity dictates how activities such as monitoring, direction, role and staff allocation are conducted. These activities are generally directed toward the end goals, ethos or strategic direction of the business (Pugh, 1990). Of principal importance to this study is the effect that the organisational structure has on the effectiveness and efficiency of the quality assurance system in place in the case study organisation.

2.4.2 Types of Organisational Structures

(Mintzberg, 1980) outlines several differing forms of organisational structure and offers a variety of examples of each of these. (Mintzberg, 1980) also alludes to the applicability of each type to differing industries. (Mintzberg, 1980) presented a paper seeking to bring together the common elements of all organisational structure research which had been published prior to his beginning his study. (Mintzberg, 1980) identifies five main types of organisational structure, the simple structure, the machine bureaucracy, the professional bureaucracy, divisionalised form and the Adhocracy. (Mintzberg, 1980) proposes that an organisation "as it searches for

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harmony in its internal processes and consonance with its environment" will favour one of these five models, (1980, p322).

Interestingly, the Adhocracy and Simple Structure are presented as operationally organic and relatively 'young' in age, the machine bureaucracy and the divisionalised form are presented as operationally bureaucratic and 'old' in age, and finally the professional bureaucracy is described as operationally bureaucratic but variant in age, (Mintzberg, 1980). Other elements that separate the types of structure are the levels and types of job specialisation, training, behaviours, organisational size, centralisation, regulation, environment and finally power focus within the organisation, (Mintzberg, 1980).

The differences between the Simple Structure and the Adhocracy, according to (Mintzberg, 1980) are that staff training levels are high in the Adhocracy, the markets in which the adhocracy works drives functional areas, the adhocracy organisational size is small and has many external liaisons and finally the environment context of the adhocracy is more complex and reactionary than that of the simple structure.

The three operationally bureaucratic models, machine, professional and divisional, have many similarities between them, all are large organisations, all can have high levels of horizontal job specialisation, none are highly reactionary to the environment in which they operate, (Mintzberg, 1980).

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The machine bureaucracy is suited to specialised, routine tasks, in large organisations with formal procedure, and tasks are grouped functionally rather than to suit the market. In this model, little use is made of training and a steep apex of control is visible, (Mintzberg, 1980). "Thus the Machine Bureaucracy responds to a simple, stable environment, and in turn seeks to insure that its environment remains both simple and stable.", (1980, p333).

In the professional bureaucracy, highly trained specialists operate with considerable autonomy. High levels of training and retraining are noted within the model, matched with high levels of environmental complexity. This model is most often seen in accounting firms, crafts and schools. (Mintzberg, 1980) explains that

"The complex work of the operating professionals cannot easily be formalized, or its outputs standardized by action planning and performance control systems", (1980, p334).

(Anderson and Brown, 2010), carried out a study seeking to discover if groups functioned better with steeper or flatter hierarchies. Having considered the various findings from numerous researchers, they concluded that the effects of steeper hierarchies were mixed, causing some groups to flourish and some to flounder. (Anderson and Brown, 2010) could not conclusively identify any factors which would indicate whether a steeper hierarchy would suit a particular type of group.

Interestingly the description of (Meyer and Rowan, 1977) of an institutionalised formal organisation is extremely similar in content to professional bureaucracy presented by (Mintzberg, 1980). (Meyer and Rowan, 1977) explain that an institutionalised formal organisation can be:

'generally understood to be systems of coordinated and controlled activities that arise when work is embedded in complex networks of technical relations and boundry spanning exchanges',(1977, p340).

2.4.3 Institutionalised Organisations: Formal Structure as Myth and Ceremony

(Meyer and Rowan, 1977) published a paper entitled "Institutionalised Organisations: Formal Structure as Myth and Ceremony". This paper considered various organisational behaviours, many of which could be responsible for causing systems failures, a topic of utmost interest to this research. The work of Meyer and Rowan has become an important work within this field, though many academics have challenged the applicability of different elements of the study throughout the years with regards to different organisations and context.

(Meyer and Rowan, 1977) outline that organisations are driven to incorporate the practices and procedures defined by prevailing rationalized concepts of

organisational work and are institutionalized in society. (Meyer and Rowan, 1977) further posit that organisations that incorporate these concepts increase their legitimacy and overall survival prospects with little regard to their efficacy. Institutionalised elements take the form of products, services, techniques, policies and function, as Meyer and Rowan posit, as powerful myths; particularly considering that many bureaucratic formal organisations adopt them ceremonially often compromising the organisations efficiency and effectiveness. The core elements or propositions of the paper of (Meyer and Rowan, 1977) are as follows:

Proposition 1: "As rationalized institutional rules arise in given domains of work activity, formal organizations form and expand by incorporating these rules as structural elements.",(1977, p345).

Proposition 2: "The more modernized the society, the more extended the rationalized institutional structure in given domains and the greater the number of domains containing rationalized institutions.", (1977, p345).

Proposition 3: "Organizations that incorporate societally legitimated rationalized elements in their formal structures maximize their legitimacy and increase their resources and survival capabilities.",(1977, p352).

Proposition 4: "Because attempts to control and coordinate

activities in institutionalized organizations lead to conflicts and loss

of legitimacy, elements of structure are decoupled from activities

and from each other." Integration is avoided, program

implementation is neglected, and inspection and evaluation is

ceremonialized.",(1977, p357).

Proposition 5: "The more an organization's structure is derived from

institutionalized myths, the more it maintains elaborate displays of

confidence, satisfaction, and good faith, internally and externally.",

(1977, p358).

Proposition 6: "Institutionalized organizations seek to minimize

inspection and evaluation by both internal managers and external

constituents.",(1977, p359).

2.5.0   Concluding Remarks

This literature review has sought to outline the development of quality assurance systems through history, with particular emphasis on the education sector. The literature review has also sought to consider types of organisational factors, such as structure and cultures and the manner in which the elements of these organisational factors interact with quality assurance systems and change. Many peer reviewed

academic papers have been presented and discussed throughout this process, and will

be triangulated, where viable, in chapter five with the empirical data.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3:0   Introduction

"Research Methodology signals to the reader how the research was

conducted and what philosophical assumptions underpin the

research" (Quinlan, 2011 p177)

(Wahyuni, 2012) defines methodology as "a model to conduct research within the context of a particular paradigm" and a research method as the tools and techniques used to gather and analyse data, (2012, p72). (Wisker, 2008) explains that the methodology concept doesn't refer to the data collection methods used, but to the "rationale and the philosophical assumptions underlying a particular study", (2008, p67). The purpose of this chapter is to outline, explain, and define the methodological basis and research methods undertaken for use in this research in consideration of the perspectives outlined above.

3.1.0   The Research Question

This research seeks to determine if the organisational structure in place within a Further Education and Training provider in Ireland does, in itself, directly or indirectly, represent a barrier to efficient and effective Quality Assurance Process

implementation. Section 3.1.1 outlines the rationale underpinning the research question. This question is broad in nature and scope.

A case study will be used to explore this question. The relevance and justification for the use of a case study is presented in Section 3.2.1.

3.1.1 Construction of the Research Question

As outlined in Chapter 1, the FET system in Ireland has seen many changes throughout the past decade, including the adoption of many new practices and policies by both training providers and their regulatory bodies. The phenomenon under investigation in the research can only be understood within this policy driven context.

The researcher is employed as a training coordinator and trainer; further to this the author is also a QQI recognised external authenticator of training and further education programmes. Within the remit of his role as a QQI authenticator, the author visits and assesses many training and further education facilities within the Republic of Ireland. Consequently the researcher has experience of the processes and procedures being implemented within many of these different organisations. The research question has been formed from the observations of a 'real world' phenomenon witnessed by the researcher over the course of several years in these roles.

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The researcher has observed that the Quality Assurance processes implemented by the FET sector increasingly involves an ever expanding array of highly formalized administration; all of which has been developed to improve quality standards, acquiesce to external agencies and stakeholders and to promote internal transparency. The researcher has also observed that failures continue to occur despite these improvements, a phenomenon which surely warrants further investigation.

Chapter 2 of this dissertation highlights that there is prolific existing research detailing the subjects of design and implementation of quality initiatives within the business and particularly the manufacturing context, but also within the mainstream education sector. The existing body of knowledge is largely concerned with the various components of formal quality assurance systems and their relationship to the theoretical frameworks in which they were originally based, also comprehensively addressing the many human factors which are barriers to successful implementation of such systems both in a business and an education setting.

Despite the comprehensive nature of this literature, a void can be seen within it with regard to the actual efficient and effective implementation of quality assurance processes and their consequent work practices, in the Further Education and Training sector. As such, literature reviewed in the area of educational quality assurance has provided little insight to the observed phenomenon of failure occurrences within the sector despite regulatory improvements.

Interestingly, research focused on the area of organisational behaviour and structure has been considerably more fruitful. Research such as that of (Mintzberg, 1980) and

(Meyer and Rowan, 1977) have considered organisational structure and associated behaviours. These agree that behaviours associated with bureaucratic organisational systems have a tendency to produce many of the distinguishing elements of the described phenomenon. The thesis put forward by (Meyer and Rowan, 1977) in "Institutionalized Organisations: Formal structure as myth and ceremony" outlined in Chapter two, posits that structural rigidity in a formal organisation can hamper successful implementation of strategic processes.

In consideration of current practices within the sector, as a result of the direct observation of the researcher, and considering the evidence presented in the literature chapter; it appears imperative to examine whether the highly formalized administrative and implementation structures developed within the FET sector over the past decade have become a barrier to efficient and effective quality assurance within the sector.

3.1.2   The Nature of the Research Question

(Leonard-Barton, 1990) asserts that "the phenomenon being researched always dictates to some extent the terms of its own dissection and exploration", (1990, p249). (Quinlan, 2011), (Wisker, 2008) and (Brannick and Roche, 1997) outline several approaches to research, including experimental, empirical, exploratory, descriptive, explanatory, action based and predictive. Exploratory research is utilised, according to (Wisker, 2008, p72), to address questions like "Where" and

"Why". Exploratory research is pertinent when little prior knowledge is available to build upon, (Brannick and Roche, 1997).

Although there is existing research on numerous separate related phenomenon's, as discussed in the previous section, there is little existing research on the interrelationship between these variables in the education sector, as confirmed by (Naidoo, 2013). As such, the knowledge sought remains exploratory in nature in the context of its setting.

3.2.0   The Underlying Philosophies of Research

Methodology encompasses the philosophical basis which guides a researcher in choosing any set of research methods. (Quinlan, 2011) explains that research philosophy relates to a researchers assumptions' about reality, and its influence upon a researchers work and theoretical perspectives.

(Collis & Hussey, 2009) define the research paradigm as a philosophical framework which directs the manner in which scientific research should be carried out. (Quinlan, 2011) outlines three main epistemological paradigms, positivism, social constructivism and interpretivism. (Collis and Hussey, 2009) details that for clarity and comprehension that it is useful to consider positivism and interpretivism as the "extremities of a continuous line of paradigms, which can exist simultaneously", (2009, p57).

Positivism is the framework in which science originally developed, from the methods historically used by scientists, such as conducting tests and trials. (Morgan and Smircich, 1980), explain the positivist end of the research continuum as "objectivist research conducted through experiments and surveys etc.", (1980, p492). (Collis and Hussy, 2009) state that positivism is based on an assumption that reality is in itself objective. (Raadschelders, 2011) explains the concept, stating simply that "positivist epistemology holds that what we can know are observable facts", (2011, p918).

The interpretivism paradigm developed as a response to the perceived weaknesses of positivism, that is that people cannot be separated from their social context and that highly structured research designs impose constraints on results. (Quinlan, 2011) states that interpretivism holds that all knowledge is a matter of interpretation. At the interpretivist end of the research continuum, (Morgan and Smircich, 1980) define interpretivism as subjectivist research or as (Collis and Hussey, 2009), describe it, interpretivism is "an exploration of pure subjectivity". (Raadschelders, 2011) describes interpretivism as the acceptance that we can know much more that we can observe.

The research proposed in this study is explorative in nature, to seek to determine if a formal organisational structure in place within a FET provider in Ireland represents a barrier to efficient and effective Quality Assurance implementation, within a specific organisation in current times. It is not possible to separate the research question from its environmental context. Thus the research falls within the interpretivist range.

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3.2.1 The Justification for the use of a Case Study Methodology

(Quinlan, 2011) presents a methodological pyramid, explaining that fundamental philosophies support the methodologies which in turn support the data collection methods. The main methodologies listed are Survey, Case Study, Experimental, Ethnography, Action Research, Grounded Theory and Content Analysis. Other methodologies exist within the business research, social research and scientific research arenas but the methodologies listed are amongst the most common and adaptable of the methodologies discovered in the course of the literature review.
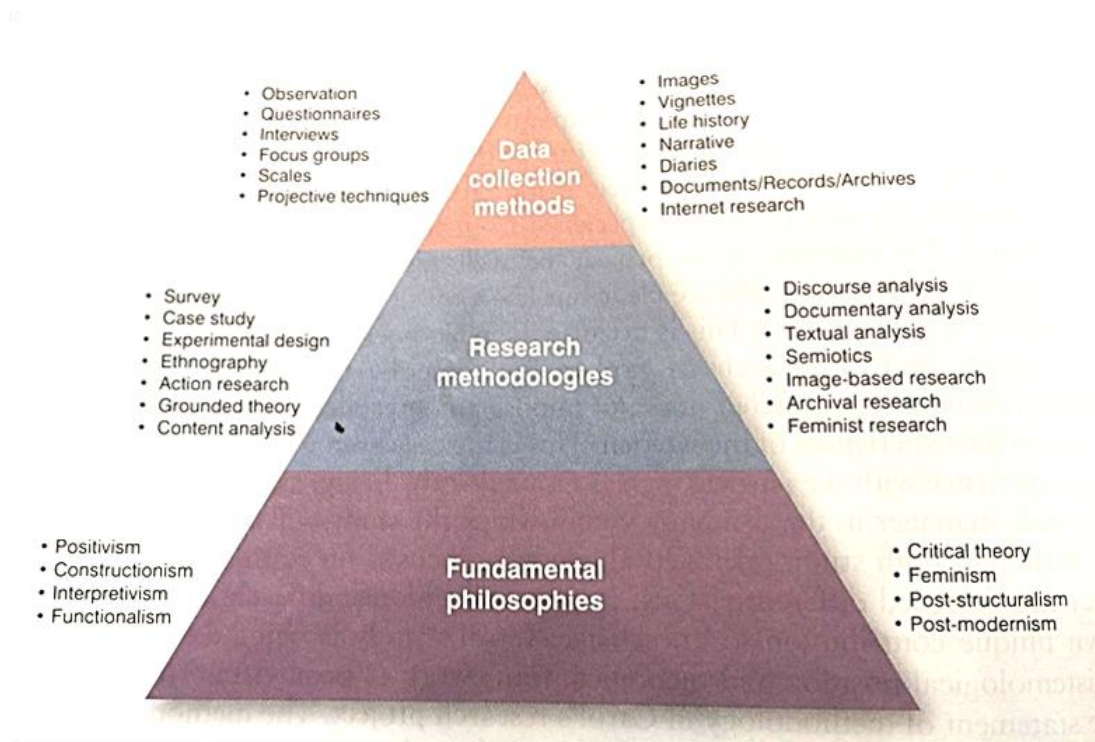
FIG 1, (Quinlan, 2011: Pg104)

All of these methodologies are discussed in detail by (Quinlan, 2011) and (Wisker, 2008). Table 1 has been created by the researcher, and summarises the different aspects of each of these methodologies, and helps to determine the suitability and justifiability of each method to the research question proposed.

Methodology	Underlying Philosophy	Data Format	Information type	Empirical Data Collection Method	Population
Survey	Interpretivist Positivist Constructivist	Primarily Quantitative	Descriptive Explanatory	Scales Questionnaires	Large Scattered Populations
Case Study	Interpretivist Positivist Constructivist	Qualitative Quantitative	Exploratory Explanatory	Interviews Observation	Bounded entity
Experimental Design	Positivist	Quantitative	Exploratory Experimental	Practical Experiments	Adaptive
Ethnography	Positivist Constructivist	Qualitative Quantitative	Exploratory Explanatory	Interviews Questionnaires Observations	Cultural/Ethnic Large scale populations
Action Research	Interpretivist	Qualitative Quantitative	Exploratory Experimental	Interviews Questionnaires Observations	Organisational Populations
Grounded Theory	Interpretivist Positivist	Qualitative or Quantitative	Exploratory Explanatory Experimental	All types	Various
Content Analysis	Interpretivist Constructivist	Qualitative Quantitative	Descriptive Explanatory	Textual, Image Archival Analysis	All Print

Table 1: Methodological Comparisons

The research question is broad in nature, interpretivist in philosophy, and seeks exploratory knowledge. The table leads to the consideration of three possible methodologies, Action Research, Grounded theory and Case Study methodologies.

(Quinlan, 2011) explains Action Research is designed to bring about "change, improvement or development" in the quality of any organisation, (2011, p183). (Quinlan, 2011) and (Wisker, 2008) agree that the main advantage of this type of research is actual organisational improvement rather than theoretical detailing of phenomenon. The researcher, though involved in the organisation, is not in a position to institute actual change and as such this methodology though academically suitable is impractical for use in this study. The Action Research Methodology employs a "planning, action, reflection and evaluation" spiral process of research, (Quinlan, 2011, p183). It is also worth noting that the primary focus of this study is to determine whether a phenomenon exists rather than to execute change.

According to (Quinlan, 2011) Grounded Theory involves building theory from data collected, particularly when little knowledge is known. As the study proposed relates to a specific bounded entity, it will be difficult to generate non organisational specific theory from any results derived. As such this methodology is unsuitable for this study.

In consideration of the arguments presented with regards to Action Research and Grounded Theory Research Methodologies, the use of a Case Study appears to be the most appropriate methodological vehicle in which to consider the topic. A case study is a research method focusing on a past or current situation, considered in context,

based upon both primary and secondary sources of data collected in a variety of ways, (Wisker, 2008), (Brannick and Roche, 1997). (Quinlan, 2011) and (Wisker, 2008) agree that one of the main advantages of the case study method is that it allows an in-depth situation to be fully explored.

(Yin, 2008) explains that a case study is particularly suitable where the research is concerned with "a contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context" (2008, p312). (Quinlan, 2011) agrees, stating that a case study may be used where "the research is located within a bounded entity in a specific space or place, in a particular incident" (201, p182). (Leonard-Barton, 1990) posits that the logical methodology for exploratory research is the case study (1990, p249). The research question is suited to a case study method as it is exploratory in nature, and is particularly context specific, and is suitable for use in an interpretivist study.

3.3.0 Case Study Design

Research design includes consideration of philosophical considerations, methodology, and methods, (Quinlan, 2011). Each of these aspects contributes to 'good' research design. (Brannick & Roche, 1997) outline that research design should consider three main elements:

• The nature of the research itself,

• The underlying research philosophy itself

• The body of work relating to the subject which exists.

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(Quinlan, 2011) further explains that the research methodology used in a research project must be based upon a reasoned logical decision and should be able to withstand scrutiny from readers and examiners.

Consideration of the research methodology employed within this study under the guidance of (Brannick and Roche, 1997); should allow for the methodology to withstand the scrutiny from readers and examiners forewarned by (Quinlan, 2011).

The use of a case study methodology is justified throughout the last section in consideration of the differing methodological options available to researchers. In advance of the formal design of this case study the author has in full considered the theoretical considerations which underpin the phenomenon to be evaluated thorough this research project.

Issues of trustworthiness of data, credibility, conformability and data dependability will be addressed later in the chapter.

(Yin, 2008) outlines the rational for both single and multiple case study designs all of which will include the desire to analyse contextual conditions in relation to a specific case or cases. (Yin, 2008) further outlines that the boundaries of a case and its context are not likely to be sharp. When considered in the light of the statements of (Yin, 2008), the context of this research study is clearly considered to be indelibly attached to the 'real world' phenomenon being investigated.

3.3.1 Context of the Case Study

Of particular importance to the design of the case study is the overarching context of the study. In this research study the context is the operations of a Further Education and Training Sector in Ireland, namely Longford EDI, with particular reference to the quality assurance system operating within it.

The organisation being researched was briefly described in chapter one and it is further outlined, currently and historically, in the Appendix to this dissertation. As outlined, the centre is a relevant organisation for study for numerous reasons. These reasons include researcher access, as an employee, to the organisation, the scale of this organisation, the complex structure of the organisation and the level of quality assurance initiatives in existence within the organisation.

3.3.2 The Case (Unit of Analysis)

As outlined in Chapter 1, the relevant unit of analysis to this study is personnel who are involved in quality assurance process delivery or adherence within Longford EDI and who have a stake in the case study organisation. This includes stakeholders from within the organisation and external to the organisation, who have any influence or responsibility for quality assurance processes and policy implementation.

3:3:3 Data Collection Methods

The type of data collection method used in a research study will vary depending upon the type of knowledge sought. Often these methods can be categorised as either quantitative or qualitative. (Barnham, 2012) presents qualitative and quantitative methods as research philosophies in of themselves. (Wisker, 2008) believes this approach is an "oversimplification", and (Quinlan, 2011) states that the distinction between data types lie only with the methods used, not the underlying philosophy (2008, p106). (Collis and Hussey, 2009) posit a similar view point, and further describe both types of data as being suitable for use with each type of paradigm. (Wahyuni, 2012) agrees and states that "a research method, e.g. an interview, can be used in different research methodologies" (2012, p72).

(Quinlan, 2011) proposes that all research is concerned with the generation of knowledge and seeks to make its own contribution to theory, (2011, p106). Interestingly, (Auerbach and Silverstein, 2003) propose that qualitative data is "hypothesis generating" and quantitative data is "hypothesis testing" and that this is the difference between the data types (2003, p5).

Primary data can be collected using quantitative, qualitative or mixed data collection methods, (Quinlan, 2011) posits that the techniques that will provide the most useful data should be the methods used and that a researcher is limited " only by their own imagination, and by the issue of validity", (2011, p220).

3.3.4 Data Types and Collection Methods

In the main, research studies utilise sources of both primary and secondary data, (Brannick and Roche, 1997). Secondary data sources range from company records, to government statistics, historical data and other studies. Primary data is data which the researcher creates secondary data is data which already exists. Primary data collection methods include; observation, interviews, questioners, focus groups, field diaries. Secondary data includes previous research, documents and oral history Quinlan (2011, p228).

In this study, secondary data collection will encompass a review of the literature, taking into account both historical and contemporary thinking in relation to quality assurance systems and processes in the education sector and its application in other sectors and industries. In addition the literature review will explore best practice both nationally and internationally.

Quantitative research usually focuses on the gathering of numeric data, quantitative research is deductive (Quinlan, 2011). (Quinlan, 2011) states that quantitative methods are often situated in the positivist framework. (Collis and Hussey, 2009) outline that "a survey method can be used in an interpretivist study", (2009, p77), and detail that a descriptive survey supplies a succinct account of a phenomena at a fixed period in time.

(Wisker, 2008) and (Auerbach and Silverstein, 2003) describe qualitative techniques as part of the process of "theory building". Qualitative techniques are used to assess

opinions, feelings, practices, and context, (Wisker, 2008, p191). (Quinlan, 2011) describes qualitative research as focusing upon word rather than numbers (2011, p286) and further explains that it is inductive and subjective.

The primary research proposed by this study involves assessing potential barriers to quality assurance efficiency and effectiveness in a further education and training provider. As the data sought is subjective in nature, interpretivist in epistemology, and seeks to generate theory, qualitative data collection techniques are the most suitable methods.

(Quinlan, 2011) explains that where a researcher can identify and engage key respondents in relation to the study under investigation, one to one interviews are an effective data collection technique. One to one interviews will be the data collection instrument utilised in this case study to collect primary data.

3.3.5 Case Study Research and Triangulation

The merits and disadvantages of case study research methodology have been well documented by many authors, including (Wahyuni, 2012), (Zivkovic, 2012), (Quinlan, 2011), (Yin, 2008), (Wisker, 2008), and (Brannick and Roche, 1997). Advantages include that any relevant fact is a potential source of data, that the act of researching the subject does not materially alter it, the adaptability and scope of the method for use with broad or organisation specific research questions, and perhaps most importantly the level of depth of study that can be attained.

In addition to the many advantages of case study research, methodological literature highlights a number of disadvantages to the method including problems in generalising phenomenon in a single case study scenario, problems building theory from results, difficulties with clarity and specific direction, the potential of researcher bias and most importantly various difficulties regarding validity and reliability.

Several contemporary authors detail differing viewpoints on how to apply safeguards to address the issues with validity and reliability. (Zivkovic, 2012) outlines a method for overcoming the "validity and robustness critiques of the case study methodology", (2012, p94). (Zivkovic, 2012) proposes the use of triangulation to do this by using of several sources of data to support and corroborate each other.

(Yin, 2008) explains that the real advantage to triangulation of data in a case study is the potential for development of "converging lines of inquiry" and that it is the use of these multiple sources of evidence which allows an investigator to address such a broad range of issues, (2008, p2394-2398).

3.3.6 Empirical Research

(Yin, 2008) dictates that the interview as a research instrument is one of the most widely used sources of case study information. Interviews can be of various types, (Wisker, 2008) from informal conversations to structured questionnaires, (2008,

p194). (Quinlan, 2011) explains that interviews can be used to gather quantitative or qualitative data, and that the question type used determines the answer type and thus the type of data gathered.

(Quinlan, 2011) further expounds that 'closed' questions are used to gather short responses, establishing purely factual, countable data, and that 'open' questions are used to gather longer answers which explore understandings and beliefs, (2011, p293). Open questions are used to gather qualitative data. The manner in which questions are asked is also important in the interview process, the more sensitive the data sought is, the less structured an interview should be. As opinions on organisational matters are sought in this research a highly structured interview would be unsuitable.

(Wisker, 2008) and (Yin, 2008) agree that the likelihood of the interview diverging from the guide increases as the level of interview structure decreases, (Yin, 2008) states:

> *"an interviewee may not necessarily cooperate fully in sticking to*
>
> *your line of questions",* (Yin, 2008, p1840).

(Wisker, 2008) presents a solution to the risks involved with an unstructured interview, a semi-structured open-ended interview:

> *"With a semi-structured, open-ended interview, there is a series of set*
>
> *questions to be asked and space for some divergence, with the*

interviewer then returning to the structured interview questions."

(Wisker, 2008, p195).

(Yin, 2008) supports the use this type of interview technique in case study research stating that interviews should be "guided conversations rather than structured queries" (2008, p2200). This method of interviewing is in line with the views of (Quinlan, 2011), who states that in qualitative research the researcher loosely defines the research instrument, thus allowing participants to control and shape the information.

A semi-structured, open-ended interview, using open questions, will be used to gather the empirical data sought in this study. The interview will be administered to a sample of candidates.

3.3.7   Candidate Selection

Sample size and nature "will depend on what you are trying to find out", (Brannick & Roche, 1997, p35). The population sample should be representative of the population of interest to the researcher, (Brannick and Roche, 1997 p36).

The objective of the primary research in this study is to determine whether any barriers exist to Quality Assurance implementation within the Longford, Employment, Development and Information Centre, thus the population of interest in this study were the staff of the centre and staff from a number of regulatory

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agencies and assorted stakeholder groups. In order to ensure as complete an array of perspectives as practicable and to access as thorough a sample of the unit of analysis as possible; candidates were initially selected from the candidate pool to provide coverage of all relevant stakeholders to the organisation.

Candidate availability and willingness taken into consideration, eight candidates were interviewed in the process of this research.

3.3.8 Accessing Participants

(Wisker, 2008) outlines that when contacting candidates to seek interviews; the correct approach is fitting the interview time and place around the interviewee. (Quinlan, 2011) agrees with this advice, and reminds researchers that candidates are free to refuse to take part in studies.

(Quinlan, 2011) explains that potential participants should be provided with information on a research study when contacted initially. As such an email was sent to all candidates requesting that they take part in the research study. The email included a description of the study, an estimate of the time involved, and an expression of confidentiality. A follow up email was sent to any candidate who did not respond to the original contact. Eight potential participants agreed to be interviewed.

3.3.9   The Interview Guide

The empirical data collection instrument selected for use in this study, is the semi-structured, open-ended interview. (Quinlan, 2011) details that in a semi-structured interview the researcher can probe for further information or clarifications from questions freely.

(Wisker, 2008) explains that questions directed at an interviewee must be open ended, clear, never misleading, purposive and should follow on from the last question logically, (2008, p198). (Yin, 2008) explains that the questions asked during an interview, are not necessarily the questions posed by the research but may simply be designed to gather data that relates to the subject, that:

> *"the verbal line of inquiry is often different from the mental line of inquiry"*
> (Yin 2008, p1892).

An interview guide was developed, comprising of 12 questions to be asked of each interviewee, and allowed for other comments to be included at the conclusion of each interview. The questions were developed with consideration of the various thematic areas identified in the literature review and were designed to probe the 'lines of enquiry' presented by the six propositions outlined by (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Appendix 1 contains a copy of the interview protocol.

3.3.10 Interview Pilot

A pilot study is a test of the design of a research instrument, (Quinlan, 2011). A pilot interview was arranged with one of the candidates who agreed to be interviewed as part of this study.

Upon completion of the pilot interview it became clear that the original wording of question nine was overly academic, likely to cause unnecessary confusion to interviewees. As such, the question was rephrased from "stakeholder involvements" to "staff involvements". The overall impact of this change was a light alteration in the nature of the data collected but fortunately did not significantly impact upon the intended 'line of enquiry'.

3:3:11 Conducting the Interviews

In line with the advice provided by (Quinlan, 2011) and (Wisker, 2008), a time and place which accommodated each interviewee was arranged for each interview, at various points throughout the first two weeks of June 2014. Interviewees who were also members of Longford EDI staff were interviewed at the centre, other interviewees at a place which was convenient to the interviewee.

Each Interview was digitally recorded, with the permission of the candidate, using the android voice recording application, Tape-a-Talk. The interviews were then transcribed using a freeware application called Express Scribe.

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3:3:12 Direct Observations

(Quinlan, 2011) defines research related observation as "watching or observing some action, activity or phenomenon and recording it", (2008, p263). Data collected from formal or informal observation is a worthwhile and useful source of evidence in a case study, as adjudged by (Yin, 2008). There are three types of observation, non-participant observation, participant observation and semi-immersed observation, (Quinlan, 2011), (Wisker, 2008), (Yin, 2008).

The three observation types are separated by the nature of the direct relationship that the researcher has to the case study object:

"You cannot be a participant observer unless you are a member of

the group, so no one except a kindergarten child can be a participant

observer of the activities of kindergarten children,"

(Yin 2008, p203).

(Wisker, 2008) believes that observation enables a researcher "to capture what people do rather than what they say they do", (2008, p203).

Participant observation involves the participant being immersed in a phenomenon, allowing a researcher first-hand knowledge and experience of behaviours, (Yin, 2008), (Wisker, 2008). (Yin, 2008) further explains that participant observation is useful in case study research due to the in-depth level of access that the researcher should have to the group under investigation.

(Yin, 2008) cautions that participant observation leads to a risk of researcher bias, as researcher often become inadvertent advocates for the organisation under investigation.

As an employee of Longford EDI and a QQI external authenticator for the FET sector, the researcher has observed many practices within the organisation and the impact of these practices upon quality initiatives. Direct observations have led, in many ways, to both the development of this research question and to the researchers' enthusiasm for the study. Direct observation by the researcher, in addition to the findings from the literature review, also helped to inform the direction of the interview guide.

In order to avoid the risks which (Yin, 2008) highlights, further direct observations appear but sparingly within the discussion upon the findings of this research in Chapter five.

3.4 Data Analysis

Data analysis refers to the means by which the data collected in a study will be processed. The analysis of qualitative data involves "close and thorough reading and coding", (Wisker 2008, p319). Coding is explained in the step by step process described below. (Quinlan, 2011) outlines the steps involved in coding data manually and further explains that there is four stages to data analysis, describing data, interpreting data, drawing conclusions and theorisation, (2011, p365).

The presentation of case study reports is widely discussed by many case study researchers. (Yin, 2008) recommends a Linear-Analytic Structure, presenting findings in a logical and linear manner, making divisions using subtopics. (Yin, 2008) explains that this structure is:

"Comfortable to most investigators and probably the most advantageous when research is research colleagues or a thesis or dissertation committee comprise the main audience for a case study." (Yin, 2008, p3492-3497)

Following the logic of the data analysis model introduced above, the following steps of analysis will be followed;

1. Each interview is transcribed into an individual transcript.

2. All transcripts are amalgamated by question into one document.

3. Each sentence in the amalgamated transcript is assessed for a theme of any nature. A list of themes is compiled, sorted and repeated themes are deleted.

4. The identified themes are assigned codes, which are used to create a coding system. The amalgamated transcript is assessed a further time, and the position of each occurrence of each code is recorded on a coding sheet, using the page and line number of each occurrence. The completed coding sheets are available in the appendices of this document.

5. The coded results are entered into a new document, sorted by thematic code.

6. The findings from the data analysis in the Linear-Analytic structure will be presented in Chapter Four.

3.5   Limitations of this Research (Field Work)

There are several limitations which may impact upon this study, particularly in relation to conducting the field work. Time constraints represent a serious limitation upon this study. The limited time frame allowed may limit not only the length of each interview but the number of interviews it is possible to conduct, thus impacting on the amount of data supplied.

A further time constraint related limitation relates to the fact that it necessitates that the research project is a single case study, limiting data collection to one single organisation. Carrying out the same research upon a second training provider simultaneously would produce more generalizable results, and help solve the reliability issues associated with single case studies.

A further limitation upon this study is that it uses case study methodology, rather than action based methodology so it is unable to effect actual change, though hopefully it may form a basis for future change.

The position of the researcher as an employee of the organisation poses a potential limitation. This risk of researcher bias or lack of objectivity relating from such will be negated in so far as is possible by ensuring that interview questions are not leading, and are open in nature. It was also outlined, politely, to the sample population that it is important to contribute to the study with honestly in relation to personal observations on the processes being study.

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3.5.1 Ethics, Reliability and Validity

(Quinlan, 2011) outlines ethics as "moral principles" governing the conduct of the individual, a group or an organisation. Ethical issues arise in research, and examples of these are discussed by (Quinlan 2011, p72). These issues include;

- Research and Researcher Integrity

- Scholarship of the Researcher

- Issues of Validity

- Honest research development

- Maintaining confidentiality

- The right of privacy of potential participants

- Provision of informed consent

- Care in enquiry with vulnerable populations

(Quinlan, 2011), (Wisker, 2008) and (Yin, 2008) all discuss these issues in detail, explaining when they arise and how to counteract them. It is expected that throughout the research project some of these issues may arise. It is envisaged that conducted research will be completed to the highest standards and that appropriate permissions will be sought from all parties involved in the research.

The informed consent form outlined by (Quinlan, 2011, p81) was adapted to the research study proposed and provided to all interview candidates. The data triangulation which will address the reliability and validity issues associated with

case study methodology will also help to ensure that ethical and rigorous research standards are met throughout this study.

3.6 Summary

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the methodology and overall approach to the research employed by the researcher. The results of the data analysis process described above are presented in chapter four.

CHAPTER 4: EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

4:0   Introduction

The empirical data collected during the primary research portion of this study is presented within this chapter. The data is presented in the linear analytical structure recommended by (Yin, 2008). The empirical research aimed to probe specific elements of the research question, in terms of organisational structure, quality assurance effectiveness and efficiency, staff interaction with the quality assurance system, and to relate the specific phenomenon under investigation to the theoretical precepts of the research question. The interview protocol used the semi-structured, open-ended interview to collect the empirical data.

Eight individuals, including six organisational employees and two further stakeholders were interviewed using the protocol outlined in Chapter 3. All data presented in this section takes the form of direct quotes from the interviewees and the conclusions that can be drawn from the same. All participants completed the Informed Consent form, a copy of which is located in the appendices of this dissertation.

The analysis presented in this chapter has not been based upon answers to specific questions from the interview guide; but is based upon the results of the application of a data coding system, described in Chapter 3. Forty seven themes were evident in the collected data. The number of themes identified within the data when compared with

the number of questions that were actually asked reinforces the assertion of (Yin, 2008) regarding questions as 'devices'.

(Wisker, 2008) discusses the analysis of findings in research and highlights that all conclusions which can be drawn from findings should be made, regardless of whether it was initially sought, (2008, p321). Among the findings presented in this chapter are numerous themes which the research did not originally set out to find. The themes themselves have been analysed for similarities in scope, and have been grouped into major sections accordingly. The findings are presented in this chapter using these eight sections.

- Organisational Structure

- Organisational Culture and Identity

- Quality Assurance Effectiveness

- Quality Assurance Efficiency

- Stakeholder Relationships

- Quality Assurance Perspectives

- Fitness for Purpose

- Change Management Issues

Many of the themes which were evident within the empirical data could be affiliated to more than one major section but were grouped according to the relationship those themes had to one another. Figure 2 represents graphically the relationships which exist between the main themes and sub-themes, which are presented within this chapter.

Organisational Structure
- Perceptions
- Traits
- Role Remits
- Composition
- Influences
- QA Standing
- Expansion

Organisational Culture & Identity
- Team Work
- Environment
- Pride
- Values
- QA Impact
- Dilution
- Local Need
- Community

Quality Assurance Matters
- Reputation
- Scope
- Standards
- Implementation
- Training Ratio
- Into the Future
- Transparency
- Adherence
- Benchmark
- Pressure to Conform

Quality Assurance Effectiveness
- Viewpoints
- Worth
- Assurances

Quality Assurance Stakeholders
- Internal
- External
- Policy Adoption

Quality Assurance Efficiency
- Adaptability
- Paperwork
- Simplification
- Systemic Burdens
- Too Many Hoops

Change Management
- Bedding in Time
- Rate of Change
- Keeping Up
- Communication
- Need for Stability

Quality Assurance System Fit
- Focus Change
- Learners
- Blind Acceptance
- Client Types
- Suitability for LEDI

4.1.0   Organisational Structure

Interviewees were asked to discuss the organisational structure of Longford Employment Development and Information Centre over the course of the interview. Interviewees were not provided any formal guidelines on describing organisational structure. The first theme that was identified during the data analysis process was the structural composition of Longford EDI.

4.1.1   Organisational Structure – Composition

One interviewee explains the structural composition of the organisation from the perspective of her own position:

> *I would be responsible for all the other trainers, there are four in*
> *total including myself, one assistant coordinator, and myself, and*
> *two whom are external. (Greaves, Breda).*

Another participant, who holds the role of centre manager, explains the structural hierarchy and departmentalisation:

> *Well the structure of the organisations is there, there is a*
> *management, voluntary management committee and I report to that*
> *voluntary management committee and there is over four different*
> *departments and all those departments report to me. (Smith, Mary).*

One respondent feels that the structure in place is suitable and has never led to problems:

> *My main line manager would be Tony Lynch, the coordinator of the*
> *REVAMP programme, and over Tony I suppose it would be Mary*
> *Smith centre coordinator. I find that I never really had much*
> *problems, or any issues… I don't have any issues about the*
> *structure. (Sheehan, Donal).*

Another participant presents her own perspective on the organisational structure, which agrees with the comments of the centre manager presented earlier in this section:

> *The structure of the organisation: we have a large board of*
> *management, a centre manager, and then within the centre we have*
> *various offices such as the accreditation office and various training*
> *sections, which relate to various programmes where you have*
> *coordinators and tutors based. We also have information office and*
> *a training education office which deals with all courses enquires,*
> *etc. (Donlan, Gretti).*

The same participant, further details the structure at a later point in the interview, from an operational viewpoint:

> *We do have a training section which deals with courses enquiries,*
> *taking registrations, people wanting to do courses. We also have*
> *the accreditation office which deals the certification at the end of a*
> *course, and obviously the tutors are there and coordinators in*
> *between the two offices. (Donlan, Gretti).*

One interviewee, though in favour of the structure further explains that she feels that it might be too complex:

>*Currently in the catering programme we have a good hierarchy.*
>*We have a good structure. Sometimes it can get a little bit*
>*confusing. (Greaves, Breda).*

The final respondent describes the structure as very formal, suitable and well run; but believes there is room for minor changes:

>*Well, I think the EDI centre is well structured. Possibly there could*
>*be some room for minor changes. I would say a well-structured,*
>*well ran organisation. The structure is formal, I would have to say*
>*very formal. (Lynch, Tony).*

4.1.2   Organisational Structure – Traits Analysis

All respondents described the organisational structure of Longford EDI. These responses were analysed based upon the identifying structure traits outlined by (Mintzberg, 1980). It was discovered that the following traits are considered by the interview panel as describing the organisation. The identified traits are the three tier system, clear lines of communication, strong ethos, highly structured, formal, specialised, generally rigid but with room for minor deviation, externally dependant and overall suited to the organisation.

4.1.3 Organisational Structure – Interviewee Remit

At the beginning of each interview, respondents were asked to describe their role in the organisation and the remit of that role. This question was asked to ease interviewees into the process, and also to determine how they view themselves within the organisation. The answers provided by the panel can be considered in the light of the centre having eighteen permanent staff members who are responsible for operations, supported by multiple temporary staff on various labour activation schemes.

It is interesting to note, that all respondents but one answered this question in a manner which limited their perception of the remit of their role to the section of the organisation in which they are positioned only. The respondent who deviates from this phenomenon simply explains their position:

I am the coordinator of the centre. (Smith, Mary).

A second interviewee explains their department based position:

My role here in the EDI centre is catering coordinator and trainer. I coordinate a FETAC level four catering life skills programme. I deliver three of the modules. (Greaves, Breda).

Another co-ordinator explains a similar perception of responsibility remit, referring to his position within a particular 'project' within the centre:

I am the lead coordinator of Revamp Training Project. It involves

the running of the project. (Lynch, Tony).

An assistant co-ordinator mirrors the viewpoint of the previous comment, stating his role from a departmental perspective:

My role in the organisation here, I deliver two modules, I deliver

Floor and Wall Tiling at level 3, and I also deliver a

Communications module, also level. (Dooney, Padraig).

One respondent describes their position with regards to function rather than department, but still retains a narrow viewpoint of overall remit:

I am the accreditation officer, which involves the internal

verification in all FETAC and SQA related courses… and I deal with

all certification as entering learners for certification on the QBS and

SQA connect systems.. (Donlan, Gretti).

Another respondent details her role as part of the board of management but describes her day to day activities as a form of monitoring the activities of other departments:

I am on the board of management of the centre and I work in the

centre on a daily basis. I suppose I am monitoring as well, on behalf

of the board. (Slevin, Rita).

The next interviewee, an employee of an external stakeholder, the local Education and Training Board formally the Vocational Educational Committee, is contracted

to, and based within, the Employment, Development and Information Centre. This interviewee describes his role also within a defined section of the organisation:

> *I've been with Longford VEC for over twenty years. A number of years ago the VEC asked if I would be interested in working in the EDI centre and I came down and I checked out the EDI centre and what was it all about. My remit at the time was to deliver the mathematics module on the Revamp Training Programme. I have been doing that for a number of years, and also the information technology module as well. (Sheehan, Donal).*

The final respondent, another employee of an external stakeholder, not contracted to the EDI but who retains a significant organisational stake, as she is employed by the funding organisation, provides effective audit of programmes delivered in the Employment, Development and Information Centre Longford:

> *Hi Andrew! My role is as assistant Training Standards Officer and I work in the training standards office where we deal with policy interpretation and the fair and consistent assessment of learners. My role is to support and audit any certification requests from community providers. (Baker, Phillis).*

4.1.4   Organisational Structure - Perceptions

This section presents a further theme which was evident within the compiled respondent's answers. This section is particularly interesting as it gives significant

insight into individual perceptions of the structure of the organisation rather than merely outlining the existing structure.

One interviewee gives the perception that the structure takes some 'getting used to' and dependant on external provision:

> *I am here three years so I am getting used to the structure. We are a*
> *contractor working for SOLAS but we're contracted to providers*
> *here at the EDI centre. So structure is very set and fairly set and*
> *established from the point of view that I know who to contact in the*
> *event of having to find out more information if I can't sort it out*
> *myself within the building. (Greaves, Breda).*

Another participant outlines that in his view, the organisation may need minor changes:

> *Well I think it the EDI centre is well structured, possibly there could*
> *be some room for minor changes, I would say a well-structured well*
> *ran organisation. The structure is formal, I would have to say very*
> *formal. (Lynch, Tony).*

Another assistant-coordinator advocates the organisational structure through its outputs; in the high level of certification received by learners:

> *The opinion I would have on the structure of the organisation is*
> *pretty ok, pretty good. I have worked with it for the last ten years*
> *and my opinion is we have got a lot of certification down through the*
> *years. (Dooney, Padraig).*

The same participant adds an important caveat, that the structure is not necessarily suitable for all learners:

> *You cannot really bring on some people through the structure that's not suitable. (Dooney, Padraig).*

Later in the same interview, the same interviewee relates that the structure in the organisation is very effective and outlines how this relates to elements of quality and the output of the organisation, in this case being the quality of finished learner folders:

> *I think it's very effective. In that we have to get through, let's say sixteen learners, and take my own situation where I would have sixteen folders for Tiling and, I would also have sixteen folders for Communications module. In that sense you would have to have a quality control assurance and to me I would be working to the highest of standards of quality assurance of quality control, and we would be trying to bring everyone up to that standard. I think it works pretty well. (Dooney, Padraig).*

4.1.5   Organisational Structure – External Influences

Another theme that became clear when the data was being coded was that the level of impact that external organisations was perceived to have over the structure of the organisation. One participant believes that the structure is very dependent on the influence of external parties:

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> *We're a contractor working for SOLAS but we're contracted to*
> *providers here at the EDI centre so structure is very set and fairly*
> *set and established. (Greaves, Breda).*

Another respondent explains that external parties influence both structure and quality delivery levels:

> *You have got sponsors who are the employers with different*
> *investments in the projects themselves with different levels of*
> *knowledge, so it's like the quality of the project is hugely dependant*
> *on input from the sponsor. (Baker, Phillis).*

The board of management panel member suggests a thesis that the level of external influence not only impacts upon structure but is actually responsible for completely changing the structure and ethos of the organisation:

> *The structure has actually changed over the years… I always felt we*
> *should be led by the clients, that's what we were set up for initially...*
> *However over the years I think we became that we were more*
> *answering to the funder's people that were funding the different*
> *projects rather than clients. (Slevin, Rita).*

4.1.6   Organisational Structure – Expansion

This section details respondent's views on the expansion of the organisation from humble beginnings at the outset, into the larger organisation it has grown into in

intervening years. This expansion has created both opportunities for the organisation but also significant threats:

> *We did set up a lot of the projects. We set it up, it kind of mushroomed. It was, in effect, to help people who had missed out on the mainstream education. You know how we say mainstream education failed the clients, so that's why a lot of our training courses have been set up. (Slevin, Rita).*

This mushrooming phenomenon is further detail by this interviewee:

> *Well the Revamp project started in 2002, a pilot project. It was for twenty six weeks. It was very successful in the pilot project which led to a forty eight week programme and it also led to the opening of the Revamp 3R store but that's very briefly where it came from where it started the revamp training project. (Lynch, Tony).*

The enlargement of the organisation is explained in real terms by this interviewee by him explaining the enlargement of the fixed assets operated by the organisation:

> *I was with Revamp for almost the beginning and have seen it come to what it is today. It started off in very poor premises, a kitchen of a house, and moved on to a bigger premises where we also developed a shop, which turned into what we have today in a shop open to the public, selling recycled furniture. We branched off totally off into the training section and we are concentrating with that now. (Dooney, Padraig).*

This interviewee further outlines his belief that Longford ED1 has come a long way in recent years a reference to the rapid growth of the organisation:

I have seen it grow and grow in the education side, because in the beginning it was a supervisory role. At the moment there is a big emphasis on certification and I think that is the way we are going today. (Dooney, Padraig).

4.1.7 Organisational Structure – Standing of Quality Assurance

Of particular importance to this study is the link between quality assurance processes, policies and procedures and the organisational structure, with particular regard to what impact, if any, one has had on the other. Each interviewee was asked about the relationship between the two areas. 50% of interviewees expressed that they believe that the linkage levels between quality assurance and organisational structure is suitable, a further 37.5% of interviewees felt that it was at least partially suitable and one participant felt it was not.

One participant expresses that the linkage level is suitable, and that this has been proven by experience:

I would say the majority of it is appropriately linked all right to the structure to the actual organisation… The policies and procedures which are in place have worked so they are there…... If they do change I am aware of it. (Greaves, Breda).

A second interviewee expresses his view that the quality assurance structure in place has not been compatible with some of the client groups which access the centre, a view which is noteworthy as it questions the fitness of purpose of the quality assurance system:

> *Partially these are well linked, I'm not sure that it's suitable for*
> *some of the target groups we have from time to time. you know,*
> *Some lads we are taking on have left the education system very*
> *early, some of them are not readily suitable with the system that is*
> *currently in place, maybe the system is not suitable to them it's hard*
> *to say which. (Lynch, Tony).*

Another respondent has clearly outlined the link between the quality assurance system and the organisational structure, by identifying that the differing sections of the organisation perform the differing constituent elements of the quality assurance processes; that is that the differing departments are mirroring quality assurance functional components:

> *We do have a training section which deals with courses enquiries,*
> *taking registrations, people wanting to do courses etc. We also have*
> *the accreditation office which deals the certification at the end of a*
> *course, and obviously the tutors are there and coordinators in*
> *between the two offices. (Donlan, Gretti).*

This interviewee has conveyed her opinion that within the organisational structure choices made by management effect interaction levels with the quality assurance system, in this case starting learners on block intake:

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It is for in centre set block intake courses and it's easy to roll out,
but for continuous intake community based programmes, which are
based here in this centre, I think it's difficult for them to implement.
(Baker, Phillis).

4.2.0   Organisational Culture and Identity

Interviewees were asked to consider the culture of the organisation and the impact that the quality assurance system has upon the culture of the organisation. Numerous themes in relation to the culture and identity of Longford, Employment, Development and Information centre were detailed by the participants. In this section those themes are explored. It is noteworthy that many of the references to organisational identity and different culture traits occurred when participants were discussing different questions during the interview process.

4.2.1   Organisational Culture and Identity – Community

A sense of the position of the organisation as serving the local community recurred throughout the interview process. One participant conveys this simple but honest appraisal of the organisation, which also reflects the cultural attitude of the organisations work within the community:

Hopefully we have done more right than wrong.

(Dooney, Padraig).

Another interviewee details the remit of the organisation in relation to providing service of worth in the community and a feeling that staff are fortunate to be in such circumstances:

> *There is an unemployment centre here where we are very fortunate*
> *that we are in a position to deliver two Local Training Initiative*
> *programmes, so the demand for the town which is a small enough*
> *town is being, I suppose, looked after. (Greaves, Breda).*

This interviewee has outlined how from small beginnings within the community itself, the organisation grew with a culture of service within the community in education, for the community:

> *The culture in this organisation started back a good number of*
> *years ago…It started off in very poor premises, a kitchen of a*
> *house, and moved on to a bigger premises, where we also*
> *developed a shop, which turned into what we have today. We*
> *branched off totally off from that into the training section and we*
> *are concentrating with that now… I have seen it grow and grow in*
> *the education side… It is designed for the poor learner who may*
> *have dropped out of school, give him a second chance. (Dooney,*
> *Padraig).*

This respondent agrees, explaining clearly that the culture is based in providing services 'for the people', free of charge, to under-served clients, namely people who are facing unemployment:

> *The idea of the culture of the organisation was to help and aid the*
> *unemployed. To begin training and education in areas; preferably*
> *for free, as much as possible and in some case get some funding.*
> *Most of the people who work within the organisation are working on*
> *the ethos that it is for the people and for the learners, and to do as*
> *much as possible, to get the learners to get to where they want to go.*
> *(Donlan, Gretti).*

4.2.2 Organisational Culture and Identity – Local Need

The original purpose of the organisation, to fulfil specific needs in the local community forms was another theme which was identified through the data analysis process. One contributor explains in the interview that the services grew to serve the need of the local population, many of whom had been isolated from the mainstream education system:

> *To help people who had missed out on the mainstream education.*
> *You know how we say mainstream education failed the clients so*
> *that's why a lot of our training courses have been set up. (Slevin,*
> *Rita).*

A further participant outlines the culture of the organisation as being based upon serving a local need, by facilitating people from different statuses, backgrounds and cultures, essentially an open door policy:

> *It's a centre for unemployed people, the culture of the target group,*
> *is people who are long term unemployed. People that have just*
> *become recently unemployed, or people who are at a crossroads. It*
> *can facilitate different people's statuses backgrounds and cultures.*
> *(Greaves, Breda).*

This respondent has clearly outlined a key original element of the culture of the organisation which is to provide their clients with sufficient soft skills to empower them into participation into the local community:

> *I suppose retraining of young people to get them back into world of*
> *work again, to work on their soft skills, people probably don't*
> *realise, from people's attitudes, peoples mentality, you know, people*
> *learn how to appreciate what they have, set goals, set aims. but and*
> *again, to come out with a qualification that help them enter the*
> *world of work that would be the main culture of the programme.*
> *(Sheehan, Donal).*

Another participant, in imparting her view that by clients utilizing the services of the organisation, the organisational culture is to equip the client with new skills which would aid labour market activation or facilitate entry into further education, also sums up what the local need is:

> *They are going to get a better chance of doing further education and*
> *training and or their employment prospects. (Donlan, Gretti).*

One interviewee has questioned if the organisational structure has changed to an extent that the purpose of the organisation has become lost or diluted as the focus of the organisation has changed:

> *The structure has actually changed over the years, it has become diluted maybe or something. I always thought we were a three tier structure, so you had the board of management, you had the staff and then you had the clients who were the most important. I always felt we should be led by the clients, that's what we were set up for initially, was to help people that are distanced from the labour market that were having, problems. with social welfare payments or whatever. (Slevin, Rita).*

4.2.3 Organisational Culture and Identity – Dilution of Purpose

A theme which became evident throughout the interviews was that many of the staff felt that there was a dilution of purpose, consequent of the enlargement of the organisation, in so far as the original aim was to provide local people with 'soft skills' but that this purpose has been overcome with the funding requirement and levels of certification of learners and given educational awards of participant groups:

> *I always felt we should be led by the client's; that is what we were set up for initially… However over the years I think we became that we were more answering to the funder's; people that were funding the different projects rather than clients. (Slevin, Rita).*

Another contributor outlines that the contemporary requirements of administration and implementation of processes, policies and procedures, has left less time to have hands on interaction with clients:

The paper trail is increasing all of the time. It can take away from the purpose of having a particular group or programme. (Greaves, Breda).

4.2.4 Organisational Culture and Identity – Teamwork

An observation which was evident to the author while conducting the interviews, before the data analysis process had even taken place, was the sense of teamwork between staff members in their mission to provide service within the community. Unsurprisingly then, the coding process undertaken by the researcher identified this recurrent theme, which is demonstrated in the following three excerpts:

Any way I can in helping out any tutors or co-workers I will do my best. (Dooney, Padraig).

So yeah it was a team together. (Sheehan, Donal).

Well the one thing about working in the EDI is that I think there is a great sense of team. Working together as a team and a group. I know from a personal point of view that any issues I have had, other coordinators been very good in sorting me out, we help each other out, we all are involved in it, we all have to adhere to it, and you

know, I think it is important that we all help each other out.
(Sheehan, Donal).

4.2.5   Organisational Culture and Identity – Pride

Many examples of how staff members have demonstrated pride in the services they provide can be readily extracted from several of the differing interviewees transcripts. One interviewee has detailed his sense of pride and opinion of the high standards of services provision:

> *It has been shown through audit that we are up there with the very*
> *best with regard to delivering training. (Lynch, Tony).*

Another respondent outlines with pride her own appraisal of the outcomes of internal monitoring activities which have verified and confirmed the high standards of provision of the areas overs which she has responsibility:

> *I can only say that it is excellent, and in the last couple of years we*
> *have had IVs and it has been brought to my attention that they were*
> *of a very high standard, especially from the IV point of view, that our*
> *internal verified outcomes is second to none. (Greaves, Breda).*

The following excerpt was taken from the coding of the transcript of the accreditation officer, who has overall responsibility for the internal monitoring of activities. The excerpt outlines her ethos in relation to auditing services provision:

> *Making sure everything is signed and sealed, that everything is*
> *dotted and crossed and all of that. (Donlan, Gretti).*

This interviewee shows his pride in the pursuit of a standard of excellence:

> *We have to make sure that nothing leaves the premises for external*
> *authentication unless it's properly adhered to and that we have*
> *everything done out to the very best of our ability. (Dooney,*
> *Padraig).*

4.2.6   Organisational Culture and Identity – Work Environment

Another theme which was identified through coding them empirical data collected as part of this research study, is that the working environment of Longford EDI is universally accepted as being a pleasant and supportive working environment. This section outlines the attitudes of the interviewees to these conditions in the work environment:

> *Yes as I said there a few minutes ago, the culture has always been*
> *one of support and encouragement. (Slevin, Rita).*

Another respondent notes simply:

> *We all are involved in it (Sheehan, Donal).*

Further excerpts relevant to this theme can be found in Section 4.2.4 Teamwork.

4.2.7 Organisational Culture and Identity – Sense of Values

A sense of high morals and values conveyed by staff working for the organisation represents another strong cultural theme which has been detected through the data analysis process. Fairness, decency, obligation, openness, empathy and a real desire to help others shines through the data collected under this theme.

One interviewee outlines his sense of empathy and the desire to really make a difference in relation to the client groups:

> *It is designed for the poor learner who may have dropped out of*
> *school, give him a second chance. (Dooney, Padraig).*

Another respondent outlines his sense of obligation to 'do right' by the organisation and learners, and the resultant guiding value of needing to undertake services provision properly:

> *Trying to make sure what needs to be done is done, and done*
> *properly, and done when its meant to be done. (Sheehan, Donal).*

The centre manager contributes her belief that it is one system for all:

> *You know that there is the one system for all, that it is a fair and*
> *equitable system. (Smith, Mary).*

At another point in the interview that contributor further outlines her view of overall organisational openness, that it should be easily understood and accessed:

I mean all of the stakeholders, they can all see at a glance what is happening, and that at the same time that it's transparent. (Smith, Mary).

This contributor explains that Longford Employment, Development and Information Centre is in itself fair and equitable, adding the interesting viewpoint that this reinforces the quality assurance system, rather than the quality assurance system enforcing this:

We would have a fair and equitable system and that the quality assurance should follow this. (Smith, Mary).

4.2.8   Organisational Culture and Identity – Impact of Quality Assurance

Strong opinions were conveyed in the interviews by participants in relation to the impact that quality assurance initiatives were having on the organisation and its culture with regard to service provision. Each interviewee was asked whether they felt that the quality assurance system impacted upon the organisations culture. 62.5% of respondents felt that it did have an impact positively or negatively, 12.5% of respondents felt it had a partial degree of influence, and the remaining 25% of respondents did not feel it had any real impact on culture one way or the other.

One interviewee simply outlines that the organisational culture has a bearing on the implementation of quality assurance initiatives and vice versa:

Well I think they impact on each other. (Smith, Mary).

One contributor relates the impact of quality assurance initiatives as being so administration heavy as taking away from having a particular group:

It can take away from the purpose of having a particular group or programme. A lot of policy's maybe change too much, too quickly, and there is a lot of administration expected at the same time. Some of it might be just irrelevant you now. (Greaves, Breda).

One participant feels that the rigidness of the quality assurance system is negatively impacting upon service provision and affecting culture in this way:

As a matter of fact I think that it's (quality assurance system) too ridged. Like I said,, originally when we set up we were very much operating to the needs of the clients. So that you had time, plenty of time to give them. You would see where people excelled, whereas now it has to be; there is a time line at the start of the year and you just have to make it. You just have to drag it and people, so we are nearly turning into the regular education system. (Slevin, Rita).

4.3.0   Quality Assurance Effectiveness

Each interviewee was asked various questions in relation to the existing quality assurance system in Longford EDI. When the primary data was analysed numerous themes relating to the effectiveness of the existing quality assurance system were

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identified, including the scope, perceived value, perceived purpose and its effectiveness with regard to ensuring program quality. The main findings regarding each of these themes are presented in this section.

An assessment of the responses of the interview panel highlights that overall all participants rate the existing systems positively, with 75% of respondents stating the system is effective and the remaining 25% of respondents believing the system is at least partially effective.

4.3.1 Quality Assurance Effectiveness - Viewpoints

One interviewee explains that the quality assurance system is well organised and effective:

> *The quality assurance in relation to the training is very good and its well organised. (Slevin, Rita).*

Another respondent, a project coordinator, agrees:

> *Its partially effective or let's say probably it is very effective. (Lynch, Tony).*

A third participant believes that the quality assurance system is effective currently but fears that it may not be suited to the future:

> *I think the quality assurance system is effective for what we have at the moment. If the training changes or we go to another level of training we may have to review it. (Smith, Mary).*

One interviewee, the centre accreditation officer, feels the strength of the system is based upon assurance by continuous rechecking of assessors work, in the manner of Adam Smith:

> *I believe it is very effective. In particular, for every learner doing a course, no matter what course it is, a tutor assess their work for them, and will give them their provisional result; it is then 100% checked by the Internal verifier, so every students work is again checked, and then an external authenticator will come in and check again on a sampling basis usually. (Donlan, Gretti).*

Another respondent explains that the system ensures that processes are followed through in reality, and this is the key to its effectiveness:

> *It seems. to be fairly effective, in that you know everything has to be seen to be done correctly, everything has to be seen to be done properly. When we say we do something we actually do and have to follow through on it. So it is having a positive effect in those terms.. (Sheehan, Donal).*

At a further point in the interview this participant explains that the quality assurance system has become an entire functional area in its own right:

> *You know the quality assurance, again, that's quite a big area in its self, like. (Sheehan, Donal).*

A final contributor highlights that the quality assurance systems. provides goals for attainment and the key to the systems effectiveness is there:

> *I think it's very effective… You would have to have a quality control*
> *assurance, and to me I would be working to the highest of standards*
> *of quality assurance of quality control, and we would be trying to*
> *bring everyone up to that standard. Yes I think it works pretty well.*
> *(Dooney, Padraig).*

Interestingly, this contributor also explains that a strong advantage of the quality assurance system lies in its functionality with regard to modules offered through SOLAS:

> *I think it is the quality assurance system would be quite good for the*
> *sense that we are dealing with modules that are outlined by SOLAS*
> *which is formally FAS and we would be in the situation within our*
> *organisation that were given templates to deliver that module.*
> *(Dooney, Padraig).*

4.3.2   Quality Assurance Effectiveness - Perception of Worth

All interviewees were asked whether they felt that the existing quality assurance was worthwhile. 100% of respondents agreed that the system is worthwhile. One interviewee explains:

> *I do think they are worthwhile… it trying to make sure what needs to*
> *be done is done, and done properly, and done when its meant to be*

> *done, and again these quality assurance processes and policies are*
> *there to make sure everybody adheres to it. (Sheehan, Donal).*

A second participant believes that the system is 'certainly' worthwhile and another participant agrees that it is 'absolutely' worthwhile, explaining that it helps Longford EDI become a 'professional' organisation, and a third participant feels that it has improved the whole training area:

> *Oh certainly. (Smith, Mary).*

> *Absolutely, if you did not have them in place you would not have*
> *goals or timelines, you need all of that to be a structured*
> *professional organisation. (Greaves, Breda).*

> *Well of course everything is worthwhile if it is improving the whole*
> *evidence system. It has been an improvement to an existing training*
> *area. (Lynch, Tony).*

A further contributor values the system as it provides a framework for dealing with learners:

> *I think they are (worthwhile) because I think if you had not got goals*
> *ahead of you, you would not be going too far with some of the*
> *learners we would be dealing with. (Dooney, Padraig).*

A final contributor values the system not only as a framework for dealing with learners in training but also helps to form other procedures, such as disciplinary or complaints:

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From my work, from every aspect, even from a tutors aspect of it, to know that there is certain policies in place to cover anything that might come up in a training programme. If there is any difficulties in a class, there is a policy and a procedure that is there to help deal with it. If it is the student that is having issues, there is a policy and procedure for their side to help them to go about them e.g. appeals process disciplinary, complaints processes etc., again having internal and external process involved in them. So, I think it is very worthwhile it can give the thing a higher standard for the students and to tutors involved. (Donlan, Gretti).

4.3.3 Quality Assurance Effectiveness – Assurance for Assurance Sake?

Interestingly, a number of participants raised the theme of the purpose of the quality assurance system, suggesting that it often monitored employees more than learners, and focuses on achieving quality assurance goals rather than providing positive learner outcomes:

The quality assurance system is probably more for ourselves as trainers and managers. The young people that we're dealing with, I suppose are, our main areas are to get them through their different modules and get them through their assessments, and to make sure they are properly done, rules and regulations, are properly adhered to. (Sheehan, Donal).

I always felt that they were nearly maybe a reflection of and on staff rather on learners, if there is enough evidence of them completing work through video or through photographic evidence. I think that

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really is enough to get them through the certification process.
(Lynch, Tony).

I think there is a lot of internal monitoring, though I don't know, I
think there could be more valuable and supportive monitoring done
as opposed to just completing monitoring forms. and paper work.
(Baker, Phillis).

Another interviewee does explain that in addition to learner outcomes, adherence to the system is of additional benefit to learners:

Well speaking from my own experience after delivering four catering
programmes. We followed the guidelines in the quality assurance
and it has equipped and helped previous learners sure to go on to
further education that would be the main progression, or to
employment. (Greaves, Breda).

4.4.0   Quality Assurance Efficiency

The efficiency of implemented quality assurance systems in the Employment, Development and Information centre Longford is another key topic area upon which a number of themes centred. The efficiency of the equality assurance system was outlined by participants throughout the data collection process. The results of the data analysis in this area are in contrast to the findings discovered in relation to the overall effectiveness of the quality assurance system.

As a group participants feel that the quality assurance systems in place are effective in themselves, but overwhelmingly the participants report that systems are inefficient. The main areas of concern with regard to efficiency are presented in this section.

4.4.1   Quality Assurance Efficiency – Systemic Burdens

One theme which recurred throughout the data analysis process is that participants feel that the quality assurance system is too cumbersome on a number of levels. One interviewee explains that the quality assurance system is cumbersome, a theme which is detailed by the majority of respondents who have an operational stake in these systems:

> *From a personal point of view I find it to be quite cumbersome at*
> *times. I find a lot of paperwork, and, you know, trying to get dates*
> *set round internal verifications, external verifications and peer*
> *reviews and stuff like that. (Sheehan, Donal).*

Another interviewee has detailed similar complaints to the latter interviewee, and further expresses the view that the quality assurance system is a reflection on staff rather than on learners:

> *I always felt that they (QA elements) were nearly, maybe, a*
> *reflection of and on staff, rather on learners… The present QA*

> *system is creating an awful lot of work for staff, which can be very,*
> *very, time consuming. (Lynch, Tony).*

Another interviewee, an auditor of quality on behalf of the funding agency, understands through the context of auditing of quality assurance activities, that it is resource heavy and should be reviewed:

> *I think it is resource heavy so that could be looked at. (Baker,*
> *Phillis).*

This interviewee describes the administrative requirements of the quality assurance system as presumably necessary though too heavy a burden:

> *It wouldn't have to be there unless there was a need for it. But from*
> *a personal point of view I feel they have gone overboard. (Sheehan,*
> *Donal).*

4.4.2 Quality Assurance Efficiency – Paperwork

One of the overriding themes which prevailed throughout this research was the volume of instances which participants referred to the frequency of undertaken paperwork whilst completing quality assurance elements of their work duties. This interviewee states that everything has to be seen to be done correctly:

> *…everything has to be seen to be done correctly (paperwork)….*
> *(Sheehan, Donal).*

This participant also outlines the extra paperwork put upon staff through implementing the quality assurance system:

You know its paperwork heavy. It's a lot of extra work for people.
(Slevin, Rita).

Basic comments about perceived unnecessary quantities of paperwork have been an overriding theme in all of the interviews. A further participant explains that there is too much paperwork, and that it is continuously increasing:

The paper trail is increasing all of the time… it can take over. It can
get a little bit confusing, less is more. (Greaves, Breda).

This participant outlines his view of the paperwork needing to be less time consuming:

At the best paperwork should be less and less time consuming.
(Lynch, Tony).

A further interviewee comments on the theme of paperwork and its perceived usefulness:

The paperwork ends of things how to tick all the boxes of what's
required without the level of proof that currently required. (Baker,
Phillis).

A further candidate agrees, explaining the system is about the paperwork rather than quality assurance matters:

I feel they have gone overboard, and you know with the amount of
paperwork than what's required. (Sheehan, Donal).

Interestingly a brief analysis of the data coding sheets used to thematically analyse the data collected in this study, shows that the theme of paperwork volume was brought identified sixteen separate times by participants. This excerpt highlights one participants view on the volume of paperwork:

If I had to make a change I would I suppose maybe, less paperwork,
more clarity to it. Yeah if I was making changes I, would have less
paper work. (Sheehan, Donal).

Only one interviewee offers any suggestions on methods of reducing paperwork levels. Many of the programmes that Longford Employment, Information and Development Centre are delivered on the basis of a continuous intake of learners, a practice which is considered to be in line with the culture of the organisation.

However this participant outlines that the block intake of learners is more compatible with the efficient implementation of quality assurance process than continuous intake of learners, as it is less administratively heavy:

It is for in centre set block intake courses and it's easy to roll out but
for continuous intake community based programmes which are not
based here in this centre I think it's difficult for them to implement
and its paperwork heavy. (Baker, Phillis).

4.4.3 Quality Assurance Efficiency –The Case for Simplification

All of the respondents mention the theme of possible simplification of the quality assurance system, which includes quality assurance processes, policies and procedures. Many of the comments relate to the paperwork theme presented in the previous section. However, in many cases the argument was not based on paperwork levels:

> *I would have to say it (quality assurance system) is worthwhile,*
> *though it could have been made even easier or simpler... (Lynch,*
> *Tony).*

A clear and definite response from this interviewee:

> *It should be simplified. (Slevin, Rita).*

Though this participant does not explicitly call for a simplification of the quality assurance system she does though outline some of the current issues being experienced in the delivery of it at an operational level, with simplification as an implicit theme:

> *There might be too many policies and procedures in place, and they*
> *might duplicate each other. (Greaves, Breda).*

This interviewee echo's that of the other interviewees:

> *I think the whole thing could be simplified, (Lynch, Tony).*

4.4.4 Quality Assurance Efficiency – Too many Hoops

The topic of efficiency also came up on several occasions throughout the interviews. Systemic inefficiencies are presented in earlier sections of this chapter and relate to both the levels of paper work and the numbers of different policies and procedures. An additional efficiency related theme which was identified through the data analysis process is that participants feel that some steps are unnecessary and often inherently ineffective for a variety of reasons. The time consuming nature of these inefficiencies are summed up by one participant:

> *The present QA system is creating an awful lot of work for staff,*
> *which can be very time consuming. (Lynch, Tony).*

The same participant further explains that some elements of the systems. are simply unnecessary and cause unnecessary work:

> *I am not sure it is completely necessary to have both internal and*
> *external monitoring, external probably is essential. I am just not*
> *sure for the need of both. Its more work more preparation. (Lynch,*
> *Tony).*

Another contributor identifies a further procedural problem area within the external authentication process, a key constituent element of the quality assurance system. She views the procedure as too expensive and describes it as generally oversampled; that is that the quantity of learner material being sampled by external authentication processes is unnecessarily high:

> *I think the external monitoring is of value but I think that comes at a*
> *very high price to the organisation and I think that it is over*
> *sampled. (Baker, Phillis).*

The same contributor also explains that the way in which the internal monitoring is carried out is too procedure based, and could be reoriented to better avail:

> *I think there is a lot of internal monitoring, though I don't know, I*
> *think there could be more valuable and supportive monitoring done*
> *as opposed to just completing monitoring forms.. (Baker, Phillis).*

Another interviewee highlights the inefficiency of having increasing levels of administration:

> *Well it's (administration) getting more and more, all of the time*
> *(Greaves, Breda).*

Further to this, the same interviewee outlines her view that much of the policies can become partially confusing; which must be, in its self, causing inefficiency and posits that's the number of policies, together with the confusing nature of this, can cause errors of omission:

> *It can get a little bit confusing, less is more, mm, there might be too*
> *many policies and procedures in place, and they might duplicate*
> *each other, and because of that you may miss out on an important*
> *one. (Greaves, Breda).*

4.4.5 Quality Assurance Efficiency – Adaptability

Throughout all of the interviews the theme of quality assurance system adaptability recurred in response to the full spectrum of questions asked of participant's. Interesting this is an area of disagreement amongst the interviewees, some identify the system as rigid, and others feel it is adaptable. One interviewee explains that issues arise with organising work around dates for the completion of particular elements of the quality assurance processes:

> *You know, trying to get dates set round internal verification, external*
> *verifications and peer reviews, stuff like that. (Sheehan, Donal).*

The same interviewee outlines that over time the system ought to become more adaptable:

> *We might be able to tweak it to suit ourselves better… (Sheehan,*
> *Donal).*

Another contributor believes that the cultural ideology of the organisation impacts upon the adaptability of the non-regulatory portions of the quality assurance system in relation to making changes to meet the needs of learners and clients, within the overall quality assurance framework; and explains that this adaptability is the key to maintaining high quality assurance standards:

> *With different learners coming in, where its realised that this policy*
> *or procedure does not suit, it can be changed to suit the particular*
> *grouping of students or particular issues that are coming up pin*

particular classes and such like that. So it is an advantage that the
policies and procedures are not completely set in stone while they
are in place they are filled and adhered to, but they can be changed
to suit to make things better and easier for students and for tutors
alike. So I think the levels of it because it can be changed keep it to a
high standard at all times. (Donlan, Gretti).

A final respondent conveys his pragmatic approach to necessity of adaptability in the quality assurance system:

Enhance your procedures, learn by your mistakes and move forward.
(Sheehan, Donal).

4.5.0 Quality Assurance Matters

One key area of interest outlined initially in the literature reviewed for this research was the interaction and relationship of external stakeholders with implemented quality assurance processes. Thematic coding of the data collected through the interview stages highlighted a number of themes relating to stakeholders and the external effects of the quality assurance.

When these themes are grouped together they address one specific thematic area, the importance of having quality assurance systems in place, that is why 'Quality Assurance Matters' in and to Longford Employment, Development and Information centre.

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4.5.1   Quality Assurance Matters – External Reputation

Interviewees were asked whether they viewed the quality assurance system as having any impact upon external legitimacy. Interviewees clearly demonstrate the importance of having high standards in relation to quality assurance implementation as ensuring the external legitimacy of the organisation. One participant explains that the quality assurance system helps Longford EDI be a 'professional' organisation:

> *You need all of that to be a structured professional organisation,*
> *especially when it comes to training. (Greaves, Breda).*

Another contributor expands on a similar 'professional' theme, simply noting the importance of the quality assurance system in the promotion a culture of continuous improvement:

> *We have to work to a standard. I think the quality assurance system*
> *is important to the organisation. We have down through the years*
> *have had different changes and modules and everything else, and*
> *unless you had all of them assurances you wouldn't be able to work*
> *to those guidelines. (Dooney, Padraig).*

This interviewee conveys her view that reputation and legitimacy is an earned process:

> *You know, just prove your quality, prove your worth through that*
> *process. (Slevin, Rita).*

Another contributor outlines the reputational legitimacy acquired through effective quality assurance initiatives conducted within the organisation:

>*It has a very positive impact upon the organisation from an out-siders point of view of other training organisations. It has a positive impact also as it has shown through audit that we are up there with the very best with regard to delivering training. (Lynch, Tony).*

A further participant outlines the positive effects for people looking in:

>*It will have a positive effect for external people looking in, to say "yeah this is what we do, this is how we do it, when we do it". You know that it is quality assured by x, y and z, so definitely I think it is important in every aspect of it definitely. (Sheehan, Donal).*

One interviewee outlines her view of the impact that high standards of adherence to quality assurance requirements have had upon the organisation; beyond assuring quality; that it allows the centre maintain a position which is externally defensible:

>*As a centre, having that level of quality assurance in place, puts it on a higher standing; as per if there was no quality assurance. Kind of gives them a better leg to stand on in a sense. (Donlan, Gretti).*

This interviewee relates that legitimacy of the organisation through quality assurance is essential for dealing with stakeholder groups, and why reputation matters:

>*There's a lot of semi state bodies, different strands of funding, so the quality assurance has to be in line with the policy's that are in place. (Greaves, Breda).*

4.5.2 Quality Assurance Matters – Assurance of Standards

Another theme which has been identified through the data analysis process is that participants feel that the quality assurance system has become a benchmark for standards and often defines the standards to which the organisation works. One interviewee outlines his opinion of the adherence of standards:

> *When we say we do something we actually do and have to follow*
> *through on it. (Greaves, Breda).*

This interviewee outlines the importance of the quality assurance system in adherence to standards:

> *Making sure everything is signed and sealed, that everything is*
> *dotted and crossed and all of that. (Donlan, Gretti).*

A further respondent outlines his view of the need for quality assurance and the need for the consequent adherence to its standards:

> *We need to have it. We need to keep it tight. (Dooney, Padraig).*

This respondent details the small items, which need to be picked up on in the process of adherence of standards, and how the quality assurance system provides a system of checks and measures which reduces possible escalation:

> *It's important that something is picked up on, if it may be something*
> *small, maybe a signature that's missing, or maybe a page that maybe*

there is a wrong code on or something, something small like that. It
may be something that might let you down. Then the quality
assurance system kicks in there before it leaves the premises.
(Dooney, Padraig).

This respondent details the link between quality assurance standards and the validity of the final certificate received by learners:

Yes I think when you're dealing with standards and somebody's
work is an outcome, a cert is being measured against a standard it is
important (Baker, Phillis).

This participant outlines her belief that the quality assurance system is focusing too much upon the quality assurance of assessment standards, possibly neglecting other areas of provision such as the delivery of the actual training:

I*t ensures that the certs the learners get in as much as possible is*
the correct cert, but I don't think it takes into account the ratio of
assessment to training, so while it might quality assure assessment
that isn't a an indicator of how the training is quality assured
(Baker, Phillis).

At a further point within the interview process the same contributor details their view in relation to adherence in the standards of services provision; demonstrating, implicitly, the risk of relying on the quality assurance system to define standards:

So it's like the quality of the project is hugely dependant on input
from the sponsor (Baker, Phillis).

4.5.3   Quality Assurance Matters – Perceptions on Adherence

Some participants have made differing comments on adherence with regard to the quality assurance system:

> *We don't know what that means to that individual learner, a level 3,*
> *4, 5 or whatever cert they get they may not realise the market worth*
> *of it. (Baker, Phillis).*

The second interviewee looks at it from providing a base for concise evidence gathering and validation:

> *Well of course everything (quality assurance implementation) is*
> *worthwhile if it is improving the whole evidence system (Lynch,*
> *Tony).*

4.5.4   Quality Assurance Matters - Transparency and Accountability

The interaction between the quality assurance system and the organisation, with regards to transparency and accountability, was outlined by several interviewees during the course of the interview process. One contributor explains that the quality assurance system monitors everything that occurs within the organisation, ensuring accountability:

> *I think the quality assurance on that is pretty good it keeps a tab on*
> *all that is going on. (Dooney, Padraig).*

This respondent agrees with the sentiments expressed by the previous contributor and explains that the quality assurance systems, implementation leads everybody into adherence with it:

> *I suppose, how do I put it trying to make sure what needs to be done*
> *is done, and done properly, and done when its meant to be done, and*
> *again these quality assurance processes and policies are there to*
> *make sure everybody adheres to it (Sheehan, Donal).*

Another interviewee specifically explains why the organisation requires transparency, that when you prove your quality, your worth through that process:

> *There is transparency. You know, just prove your quality, prove your*
> *worth through that (quality assurance) process (Slevin, Rita).*

This person explains that by having a fair and equitable system everyone can see what is happening, implicitly explaining the need for transparency:

> *Well I think the fact that you have a fair equitable system… All of the*
> *stakeholders, I mean that they can all see, at a glance, what is*
> *happening, and that it's the same, that it's transparent. (Smith,*
> *Mary).*

A further interviewee outlines eloquently her view of the actuality of a transparent system:

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Making sure everything is signed and sealed, that everything is
dotted and crossed and all of that. (Donlan, Gretti).

This contributor further believes that by implementing quality assurance initiatives that learners know where they stand, essentially that the process is accountable and transparent for learners in particular:

They pretty much know the ins and outs of it so they know where they
stand through a whole course. (Donlan, Gretti).

The same interviewee posits in another section of interview that the quality assurance processes are transparent and accountable to learners, due to the level of internal and external checks being applied to learner evidence:

No matter what course it is that a tutor assess their work for them,
and will give them their provisional result, it is then 100% checked
by the Internal verifier so every students work is again checked, and
then an external authenticator will come in and check again.
(Donlan, Gretti).

4.5.5   Quality Assurance Matters – Quality Assurance as a Benchmark

Alongside the theme of transparency and accountability presented in the last section, a theme which has been popular with interviewees is the theme of quality assurance requirements as a benchmark. This issue repeatedly emerged throughout the array of questions asked to interviewees. One contributor views the quality assurance system as setting operational parameters:

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Oh certainly you have to have systems. to operate to. (Smith,
Mary).

Another interviewee details her opinion that the quality assurance system provides goals and timelines for the organisation, ensuring professionalism; goals and timelines which she implies were lacking prior to the application of the system:

Absolutely, if you did not have them in place you would not have
goals or timelines; you need all of that to be a structured
professional organisation. (Greaves, Breda).

This participant mirrors the views of the last interviewee, feeling that the quality assurance system leads to the setting of goals a benchmark to be followed, which is a necessity with regards to some of the learner groups that the organisation caters too:

I think if you had not got, goals ahead of you, you would not be
going too far with some of the learners we would be dealing with
(Dooney, Padraig).

A final interviewee comment on this benchmark phenomenon:

They are trying to benchmark and trying to come out with I suppose,
how do I put it trying to make sure what needs to be done is done,
and done properly, and done when its meant to be done. (Sheehan,
Donal).

4.5.6   Quality Assurance Matters - Pressure to Perform / Conform

A theme which unexpectedly arose through the interviews was the concern of some staff in relation to the client groups accessing services of the organisation; particularly with the ability of staff to implement quality assurance processes. One participant explains that there is pressure upon staff to keep students throughout the courses regardless of their behaviour, and that there is pressure to ensure that these students do not fail to meet the standards required for awards:

> *I suppose we feel pressure to make sure that all these lads get*
> *through some of these awards you know, but at times it is a tough job*
> *for us having to keep them for the forty eight weeks. We would have*
> *had situations recently where lads should have been suspended or*
> *terminated for poor behaviour and verbal abuse to our staff and all*
> *that, we felt it necessary to keep these lads to get them through some*
> *of the minor awards (Lynch, Tony).*

Another respondent believes that the level of output from learners / clients may not be to a sufficient level, and explains that the case occurs where it is necessary to 'revisit' previous assessments for learners who are falling below the standards, a practice which is not in line with normal practice:

> *That they might think it is good enough for them, but it might not be*
> *good enough for what the system wants, and you may have to go*
> *back to update some of their materials to bring it up to the standard*
> *that is where it might impact. (Dooney, Padraig).*

4.5.7 Quality Assurance Matters – Ratio of Training to Assessment

The opinion of staff members regarding the ratio of training to assessment within the organisation was another theme which emerged from the data analysis process. These concerns are particularly relevant in relation to quality assurance as the processes nearly always utilise the quality of the assessment process as the key measurement of overall quality assurance:

> *I do think that we need to include that its assessments, it is only the*
> *assessments that are being assessed. However, I do think the*
> *methods and the, everything else, goes into it (quality). There is a lot*
> *more that happens before the students sit down to do that assessment*
> *(Slevin, Rita).*

Another participant agrees with the concerns expressed in this comment, and continues to further highlight this critical point:

> *I don't think it takes into account the ratio of assessment to training,*
> *so while it might quality assure assessment that isn't a an indicator*
> *of how the training is quality assured. (Baker, Phillis).*

4.5.8 Quality Assurance Matters – Quality Assurance into the Future

Due to the continuing changes within the environment of the education sector it was not surprising to the researcher that this theme of future changes would emerge at the

interviews. The amount of data collected in relation to this area justified the creation of a full section in this chapter, Quality Assurance – Change Management, to treat of this topic. As such, the majority of the relevant data is presented in that Section. One interviewee explains the growth of the area to date, commenting that quality assurance has become a large area of its own right as a result of changes:

> *Yeah there have been a lot of changes I mean no doubt about it; you*
> *know the quality assurance again that's quite a big area in its self*
> *like. (Sheehan, Donal).*

Another interviewee presents constant evolution of the system and details the changes that she would like to see into the future, though it is interesting to note that many of these changes relate to the marking and grading system applied to learners assessments which is ultimately the primary element which is quality assured both by internal and external oversight:

> *Well Andrew I suppose the majority of it is that we are talking about*
> *quality assurance and quality assurance is an important part of it*
> *and that we would move on. Like I said in that last question I would*
> *like to see that that change would be made that we would move away*
> *from the referral and successful. I don't think it's a fair reflection on*
> *a lot of the learners that we would have in our organisation. I know*
> *that's the system that's used in all the training centres that SOLAS*
> *run. Now maybe that will change when all that goes in under the*
> *new ETB board. It's one of the things that if I was asked a question*
> *on I would be expected that would be my bit that I would put forward*
> *that that would take place rather than referral and successful.*
> *(Baker, Phillis).*

Another respondent agrees that the creation of the new ETB board will herald further change for the organisation, though not limited to the quality assurance system:

> *Then to put in the changes with SOLAS, and their mergers with the ETBs, and the effect that going to have on peoples contracts, peoples hours, stuff like that, there is going to be a lot of change, ahead of us. (Sheehan, Donal).*

4.5.9   Quality Assurance Matters – Implementation

Interviewees views of the implementation of the quality assurance system arose many times throughout the interviews with staff, its importance as a theme is further highlighted by the author as it is closely linked to the overriding themes of effectiveness and efficiency which are of vast importance in this research. This interviewee feels that the quality assurance system is difficult to implement in many of the scenarios which occur at Longford EDI but provides insight into what may be utilised to ease of implementation of the quality assurance system:

> *It is (harder) for in centre set block intake courses and it's easy to roll out but for continuous intake community based programmes which are not based here in this centre I think it's difficult for them to implement (Baker, Phillis).*

Another interviewee feels that quality assurance should be expanded upon, to encompass other activities provided to clients, outside of training and education:

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> *I think we need to include it (quality assurance) with all of the*
> *services; maybe we are a bit lax there. Where we are very strong on*
> *the training, we are not that strong on everything else. (Slevin, Rita).*

A final interviewee believes that smaller organisations can implement a quality assurance system more easily than larger ones:

> *I think if I was to look at it in terms. of provider, say Local Training*
> *Initiative, community training centre, national learning network, etc.*
> *I think in the smaller programmes it seems. to be the easier to*
> *implement. (Baker, Phillis).*

4.5.10 Quality Assurance Matters – Scope and Supportiveness

This theme was conveyed by only two respondents during the interview process. One interviewee whose views are noteworthy as an auditor of the programmes offered by the case study organisation explains that the system could be more valuable to the organisation if it became more supportive:

> *I think there could be more valuable and supportive monitoring done*
> *as opposed to just completing monitoring forms. (Baker, Phillis).*

Another contributor explains that the scope of the system should actually be expanded to include non-training related services:

> *I think we need to include it with all of the services. (Slevin, Rita).*

4.6.0   Quality Assurance System Fit

Several of the interviewees have outlined their views in relation to the fitness of the quality assurance system for the client groups who access the organisations services. This section is particularly interesting within the context of this study as it is a thematic grouping which the author had not originally considered as part of this research project. Overall, the ethos of serving the community in which the organisation operates can be identified throughout this section. This thematic group is presented in a number of sections generated by the data coding process.

4.6.1   Quality Assurance System Fit - Client Types

The target client groups of Longford EDI are discussed by numerous interviewees. It is interesting that all comments made by interviewees in relation to the target groups echo the comments made by the group regarding the organisations culture and ethos which were presented in Section 4.2. One participant outlines the client types served by the organisation, highlighting the inclusive environment the organisation seeks to provide:

> *It is a centre for unemployed people, the culture of the target group,*
> *there is people who are long term unemployed, people that have just*
> *become recently unemployed or people who are at a crossroads. For*
> *people who are here it can facilitate different people's statuses,*
> *backgrounds, and cultures. (Greaves, Breda).*

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This participant further describes the client selection ethos of the organisation:

> *I suppose retraining of young people to get them back into*
> *world of work again. (Sheehan, Donal).*

This interviewee details his opinion that the quality assurance system may not be fit for the organisations clients:

> *I am not sure that it's suitable for some of the target groups we have*
> *from time to time. you know, Some lads we are taking on have left*
> *the education system very early, some of them are not readily*
> *suitable with the system that is currently in place, maybe the system*
> *is not suitable to them it's hard to say which (Lynch, Tony).*

4.6.2   Quality Assurance System Fit - Focus Change

Another theme that was detailed in the interviews was the change of organisational focus from the inception of the organisation to the present time period. This participant outlines her belief that the organisation should be led by learner needs but that this has shifted to the needs of funders instead:

> *I think we became that we were more answering to the funder's*
> *people that were funding the different projects rather than clients… I*
> *always felt we should be led by the clients. (Greaves, Breda).*

A further participant explains that the organisation is warping into a mainstream educational provider, which is in direct opposition to the needs of the organisations clients:

> *Like I said originally when I set up we were very much operating to the needs of the clients so that you had time plenty of time to give them. You would see where people excelled, whereas now it has to be there is a time line at the start of the year and you just have to make it and you just have to drag it a people so we are nearly turning into the regular education system. (Slevin, Rita).*

4.6.3 Quality Assurance System Fit - Blind Acceptance

One theme which became evident through the interviews was that of a blind acceptance of some of the interviewees on the need to implement some of the quality assurance process, procedures and policies, particularly in relation to its appropriateness:

> *Well we are part of the congress centres network, and the quality assurance system is the same with all, so I presume it is appropriate for the organisational structure (Smith, Mary).*

Another participant mirrors the last participants point:

> *As far as I am concerned, seems. to be needless but it is obviously there for a reason it wouldn't have to be there unless there was a need for it (Sheehan, Donal).*

A final participant outlines a differing view that the quality assurance in place has to be in line with the policies:

> *So the quality assurance has to be in line with the policy's that are in*
> *place (Greaves, Breda).*

4.6.4 Quality Assurance System Fit - Learner Interaction

This section details the learner's interaction with the quality assurance system as perceived by interviewees; the following excerpts were data rich and covered an interesting variety of commentary across a broad range of themes associated with learner interaction:

> *I suppose we feel pressure to make sure that all these lads get*
> *through some of these awards you know, but at times it is a tough job*
> *for us having to keep them for the forty eight weeks (Lynch, Tony).*

This participant outlines how the organisation has developed a communication mechanism between learners and coordinators:

> *In most sense, a lot of the tutors will go through the system with the*
> *trainees when they start here as to how the whole process works and*
> *involves; so a trainee would know that if for example that if they*
> *have trouble with a subject (Donlan, Gretti).*

Further to this the same interviewee outlines:

They pretty much know the ins and outs of it so they know where

they stand through a whole course (Donlan, Gretti).

Another participant posits that learners need the formalised procedures that the quality assurance system encourages:

I think that a lot of learners that we would be dealing with do need

procedures and I think you have to have these in place so we work to

a quality assurance that we get to that goal. (Dooney, Padraig).

This interviewee outlines her view that the learners have high levels of interaction with the course coordinators and the organisation backed up with the appropriate policies and procedures, if such is required:

If the student that is having issues there is a policy and procedure

for their side to help them to go about them e.g. appeals process

disciplinary, complaints processes etc., again having internal and

external process involved in them (Donlan, Gretti).

4.6.5   Quality Assurance System Fit - Fitness for Client Groups

In continuation of the question of whether the quality assurance system is a good fit for client groups, and consequently the organisation, numerous comments present the different but non-conflicting perspectives offered by participants in this research study.

One interviewee describes that many of the clients have left mainstream education, and the very formal structures of which mainstream education comprises; and the queries what must be considered the crux of this theme, whether they are a bad fit for the organisation or whether perhaps the organisation is a bad fit for them:

Some lads we are taking on have left the education system very early, some of them are not readily suitable with the system that is currently in place, maybe the system is not suitable to them it's hard to say which. (Lynch, Tony).

Another interviewee argues that the quality assurance system is too ridged to fully meet the needs of learners and client groups:

As a matter of fact I think that it's too ridged. (Slevin, Rita).

Another participant, who holds responsibility for directing learner disciplinary procedures, makes another interesting point with regard to the application of the system:

We would have had situations recently where lads should have been suspended or terminated for poor behaviour and verbal abuse to our staff and all that, we felt it necessary to keep these lads (Lynch, Tony).

Interestingly one contributor feels that the system is a good fit for the organisation and its learner groups, outlining her belief that many of the quality assurance policies have been crafted by relevantly experienced persons and organisations:

A lot of the policies and procedures that are in place in the
assurance system have been complied by individuals have
experience of the type of target group of people who would come
into this building. (Greaves, Breda).

4.7.0   Quality Assurance Stakeholders

The array of differing stakeholders with an interest in the quality assurance processes ranged from personnel within the organisation to party's external to the organisation that fund the organisations educational activities, many of these stakeholders are already discussed by interviewees throughout other themes earlier in the interview with details outlined in previous sections. From the latter information it was detailed that participants discussed both internal and external stakeholders.

4.7.1   Quality Assurance Stakeholders - Internal Stakeholders

Several participants outline differing stakeholder's involvements within the organisation and in delivering the outputs of the quality assurance system. One interviewee explains that one of the most important pivotal areas for quality assurance in the organisation is the accreditation office, describing how the department functions as a go between for trainers, assessors and the upper levels of management:

The accreditation office would be very much aware of quality
assurance procedures and making sure tutors and other relevant
staff are kept up to date when necessary changes come into it.
(Donlan, Gretti).

A second respondent who is an internal stakeholder themselves; a trainer and co-coordinator in the organisation, outlines the changing relationship of internal stakeholders with external parties:

Well my own view on that is that over the course of the last number
of years, that the last three to four years in particular, we went from
mostly FETAQ level 3s and fours to what SOLAS formally known as
FAS brought in. Most of these, of their own modules, and their
modules there are based on FETAC criteria. (Dooney, Padraig).

4.7.2 Quality Assurance Stakeholders - External Stakeholders

Many people identified external stakeholders and their interactions within an organisation which is so dependent on other stakeholders and entity's to provide end services to its clients. Listed below are several themes related to this in the transcripts. This participant outlines her role as an external stakeholder:

So my role is to support and audit any certification requests from
community providers (Baker, Phillis).

Another participant and stakeholder outlines his initial interaction with regard to the organisation:

I've been with Longford VEC for over twenty years, and a number
of years ago the VEC asked if I would be interested in working in the
EDI centre and I came down and I checked out the EDI centre and
what was it all about. My remit at the time was to deliver the
mathematics module on the revamp training programme. (Sheehan,
Donal).

Another participant who is an external stakeholder outlines an issue she has in interacting with this organisation and others that are similar to it, questioning the objectivity of the system in its entirety:

We are asked on the one hand to support providers in implementing
and assuring quality assurance; and on the other hand we are asked
to audit them. I think that the structure should be very different; it
should either be a support role or an audit role for all and not a
combined role. It would be more objective if it was done like that.
(Baker, Phillis).

The centre manager relays that she feels that the interests of all stakeholders are ensured by delivering a fair and equitable system:

Well I think the fact that you have a fair equitable system, it works
over everything for stakeholders. There would be the committee, the
funders, the staff, I mean all of the stakeholders. (Smith, Mary).

The same interviewee outlines that changes which have been happening with external stakeholders will mean the organisation having to have to change some of its processes and procedures:

I suppose the funding has changed, programmes will change, with

the ETB taking over some of the programmes means we will

probably have to adopt some of their systems., and I suppose as

programmes change I suppose the quality assurance changes.

(Smith, Mary).

4.7.3   Quality Assurance Stakeholders –Policy Adoption

Another theme of interest to the author was the view of respondents in relation to policy adoption and its consequent overarching impact on the ensuing work practices. This interviewee outlines his view that adopting quality assurance policies and procedures has positive effects:

I think the quality assurance on that is pretty good it keeps a tab on

all that is going on (Dooney, Padraig).

Another interviewee explains the quality assurance system should be fluid as it must remain in line with delivered policies:

So the quality assurance has to be in line with the policy's that are in

place (Greaves, Breda).

This final respondent details that sometimes it is unclear who to go to if there is a query with a particular issue or policy as there have been so many adopted:

Sometimes it can get a little bit confusing when you are working for a contractor. Do you go straight to the contractor or depending on the query you have? Or do you go straight to we will say. (Greaves, Breda).

4.8.0   Change Management

Throughout this research study what has been conveyed by interviewees in all of the themes is the rapid sustained growth which the organisation has encountered. This growth has been present since the organisations inception, it is however no surprise that as a consequence of such rapid growth many issues have been identified by participants in the area of managing change.

4.8.1   Change Management – Bedding in time

One theme clearly outlined by participants was the amount of time allowed for quality assurance processes, policies and procedures to bed in. Many of the responses clearly relate to much of the literature review in chapter two. One respondent details their view that it takes many years for a process or system to 'bed in' properly:

So maybe when we get another three four five years under our belts
it may become easier, and again we might be able to tweak it to suit
ourselves better (Sheehan, Donal).

Another interviewee outlines that there has been too little time for bedding in of processes due to the continuous level of change which has occurred within the sector:

There's huge, there has been a huge level of change and it's very
hard to keep up with that and because people only get certified from
the assessment point of view once or twice a year (Baker, Phillis).

A further contributor agrees with this view, offering a similar opinion:

It is difficult as I said before to try and comprehend the whole
process as yet and until we get a number of years behind us and we
get to learn about the process better (Sheehan, Donal).

A further comment from the same interviewee on the same issue sums. up the general feeling which was given by participants in this study:

Again it is new, new to us all (Sheehan, Donal).

4.8.2   Change Management – Rate of Change

Another occurrence respondents detailed in relation to quality assurance initiatives was the theme of overall change in this environment with particular emphasis on the

rate or speed of such change. This interviewee outlines her view that policies change too much too quickly:

> *A lot of policy's maybe change too much, too quickly, and there is a*
> *lot of administration expected at the same time. (Greaves, Breda).*

Another interviewee also agrees with the last respondent in relation to the rate of changes in the quality assurance system:

> *There has been I suppose a good many changes within this whole*
> *QA training for the last while. It seem to be for the last while there*
> *has been constant changes and constant reviews. (Lynch, Tony).*

High rates of change were referenced repeatedly throughout the interview with another participant, who explains the level of uncertainty for the future that this has caused:

> *There has been a lot of change within the last couple of years and to*
> *be honest with you I could not actually say what the changes will be*
> *next year. From a personal point of view, just to state that there will*
> *be a lot of uncertainty and em as long as I have a job you know at*
> *the end of it that's the main thing. (Sheehan, Donal).*

> *It's a time of change, it has been for the last number of years and it*
> *will be for the next foreseeable number of years. What those changes*
> *are, I don't know. I hope they will be positive but there will be some*
> *negative change there as well so…. (Sheehan, Donal).*

4.8.3   Change Management – Keeping up to Date

Several participants have also detailed issues in keeping up to date with both changes in the organisation and changing elements in the quality assurance system. The accreditation officer believes that centre personnel are keeping up to date with applicable quality assurance policies and processes:

> *So they would pretty much know what they are doing, in keeping up to date in any changes that might be in the quality assurance so that tutors would be aware of what quality assurance processes (Donlan, Gretti).*

This respondent outlines her view that quality assurance processes will adapt and keep up to date with changing circumstances:

> *Like as it changes we may have to review the systems. (Smith, Mary).*

One participant, while discussing the dangers associated with frequent changes in the quality assurance system offers a very pointed comment:

> *Some of it might be just irrelevant you now. (Greaves, Breda).*

4.8.4   Change Management – Need for Stability

Two participants have also outlined the need to have stability quality assurance processes particularly in relation to changes being worthwhile and succinct.   This interviewee details his feeling that a level of uncertainty exists:

> *There has been a lot of change within the last couple of years and to*
> *be honest with you I could not actually say what the changes will be*
> *next year. From a personal point of view, just to state that there will*
> *be a lot of uncertainty (Sheehan, Donal).*

Another participant outlines the need for a finalised structure:

> *I do think that by now there should be a finalised structure in place*
> *that there would be no more changes for a while. It seems to be for*
> *the last while there has been constant changes. (Lynch, Tony).*

4.8.5   Change Management – Clear lines of Communication

This interviewee outlines her view that there are effective lines of communication in the organisation:

> *We're a contractor working for SOLAS but we're contracted to*
> *providers here at the EDI centre so structure is very set and fairly*
> *set and established from the point of view that I know who to contact*
> *in the event of having to find out more information if I can't sort it*
> *out myself within the building (Greaves, Breda).*

4:9 Summary

This chapter has presented the findings from eight interviews which were conducted with employees and stakeholders of Longford Employment Development and Information Centre in order to examine numerous issues relating to the effectiveness and efficiency of quality assurance systems within the centre. Chapter 5 will discuss the main findings of this research and make recommendations for consideration into the future.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusions

5.0   Introduction

"You know the quality assurance, again,
that's quite a big area in its self, like"
(Sheehan, Donal).

This chapter presents a review of the findings of the empirical research within the context of the literature reviewed in chapter two, with particular reference to (Naidoo, 2013), (2:26), (Mintzberg, 1980), (2:28) and (Meyer & Rowan, 1977), (2:30). Where possible the findings of the literature review, the empirical research, and the direct observations of the researcher are triangulated. The comment of Donal Sheehan reflects the increasing importance of the quality assurance system within Longford EDI. This chapter seeks to address and assess this phenomena.

5.1   Organisational Structure – Triangulation and Discussion

Within the interview stage of this research study respondents were asked to describe their role in the organisation and the remit of that role. This first question was asked to ease interviewees into the process, and also to determine how they viewed themselves within the organisation. It is interesting to note that almost all respondents answered this question in a manner which demonstrated that their

perception of the remit of their role was limited to existing within the section of the organisation in which they are themselves positioned. Only one respondent described their position with regards to function rather than department, (4:67).

This departmental perception of the organisation was reinforced by interviewees when they were asked to discuss the organisational structure of Longford Employment Development and Information Centre over the course of the interview. In order to reduce the risk of researcher bias as outlined in the Methodology Chapter, Interviewees were not provided with any formal guidelines on describing organisational structure.

Hierarchy, departmentalisation and formality were presented by various participants as structural descriptors of the organisation. Respondent descriptions of the organisational structure of Longford EDI were analysed based upon the identifying structure traits outlined by (Mintzberg, 1980), (2:28). It was discovered that the following traits are considered by the interview panel as describing the organisation.

- Multi-tier system

- Strong ethos

- Highly structured

- Formal

- Specialised

- Generally rigid

- Externally dependant

- Communicative

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Some interviews also reported that there was room for minor deviation at a local level, and overall the panel reported that the structure is suited to the organisation. These traits suggest that the organisational structure of Longford EDI is a professional bureaucracy as defined by (Mintzberg, 1980). In addition there are significant similarities between this structure and the institutionalised organisation outlined by (Meyer & Rowan, 1977), (2:30). The institutionalised organisation describes these organisational features as systems of coordinated and controlled activities that arise when work is embedded in complex networks of technical relations and boundary spanning exchanges'.

Respondent discussion about the organisational structure led to the development of a further theme, identified by the data coding process as Perception. The theme offers insight into individual perceptions of the structure of the organisation, rather than merely outlining the existing structure. One assistant co-ordinator advocates the organisational structure through its outputs; in the high level of certification received by learners, (4:69).

Although numerous candidates felt that the structure is suitable for the organisation many added caveats to this approval. One participant felt the structure though suitable may be too complex. This complexity has frequently been a direct observation of the researcher, and can be attributed to the rapid organisational growth achieved through the last number of years.

Another participant supposes that the structure is not necessarily suitable for all learners, (4:70). A further respondent posited that the organisation may need minor changes, (4:69), while another contributor stated that structure takes some 'getting used to' and is dependent on external forces, (4:69). These external forces framed another theme that is the level of impact that external organisations was perceived to have over the structure of the organisation. Participants believe that the structure is very dependent on the influence of external parties. The board of management panel member expresses that the level of external influence not only impacts upon structure but is actually responsible for completely changing the structure and ethos of the organisation, (4:74).

Interestingly, one contributor explained that choices made by management culture effect interaction levels between the quality assurance system and the organisational structure, (4:74). This is further reinforced by the assertions of (Naidoo, 2013), that these are mutually inclusive, that is that one cannot be separated from the other. The theme of external influence relates directly to the expansion theme which was also identified within the empirical data collection phase. Respondents discussed the expansion of the organisation from the "kitchen of a house", (4:76), into the larger organisation it is now and the impact, opportunities and threats that this presents to the organisation.

Of particular importance to this study is the link between quality assurance processes, policies and procedures and the organisational structure, with particular regard to what impact, if any, one has had upon the other. Each interviewee was

asked about the relationship between the two areas. 50% of interviewees expressed that they believe that the linkage levels between quality assurance and organisational structure is suitable, a further 37.5% of interviewees felt that it was at least partially suitable and one participant felt it was not.

One interviewee expressed the view that the quality assurance structure in place has not been compatible with some of the client groups which access the centre, a view which is noteworthy as it questions the fitness of purpose of the quality assurance system, Another respondent clearly outlined the link between the quality assurance system and the organisational structure, explaining that the differing departments are mirroring quality assurance functional components, (4:74).

5.2   Organisational Culture and Identity - Triangulation and Discussion

Interviewees were asked to consider the culture of the organisation and the impact that the quality assurance system has upon the culture of the organisation. It is noteworthy that many of the references to organisational identity and different culture traits occurred when participants were discussing different questions during the interview process. A sense of the position of the organisation as serving the local community recurred throughout the interview process and this theme must be considered to be the predominant trait identified by interviewees. One interviewee

even went as far as to explain that they felt fortunate to be in a position to work in a provider of a service of worth in the community, (4:76).

Indeed the working environment of Longford EDI was universally accepted as being a pleasant and supportive working environment. Another contributor explained that the culture of the organisation is based in providing services 'for the people', (4:77). (Naidoo, 2013), (2:26), argues that organisational culture and quality assurance have been both presented as significant drivers of effectiveness, efficiency and excellence in higher education institutions.

Although the review of literature conducted by Naidoo was concerned with the higher education sector, it is significant as the conclusions drawn from this study have not been critically examined in the body of existing literature; particularly in relation to relationship between elements of quality systems such as efficiency and effectiveness, in the context of culture and organisational structural change. Interestingly, many of the contributor responses clearly outline the link between the changing organisational structure, the culture of the organisation, and efficiency and effectiveness, an empirical finding which is reinforced by the conclusions of (Naidoo, 2013).

The original sense of purpose of the organisation, to fulfil specific needs in the local community, was discussed by participants throughout the interview process with regards to culture. Contributors explain that the organisation grew to serve the need of the local population, many of whom had been isolated from the mainstream

education system and who hail from different statuses, backgrounds and cultures, (4:78). The provision of 'soft skills' to this market to allow them to participate in the community is the need with which study participants felt connected. One interviewee has questioned if the organisational structure has changed to an extent that the very purpose and culture of the organisation has become lost or diluted as the focus of the organisation has changed, (4:.79).

This fear of dilution of purpose represents a key finding of the empirical research portion of this study. Participants discussed that the original purpose has been overcome by funding requirements and levels of certification of learners. One respondent explained that the quality assurance system itself was negatively impacting upon this, as it has left less time to have hands on interaction with clients, (4:80).

An observation which was evident to the author while conducting the interviews, before the data analysis process had even taken place, was the sense of teamwork between staff members in their mission to provide service within the community. Unsurprisingly then, the coding process undertaken by the researcher identified this also.

Many examples of how staff members have demonstrated pride in the services that they provide can be readily extracted from several of the differing interviewees transcripts. Interviewees felt pride in the standard of services provision in particular and portrayed a general feeling of the continual pursuit of a standard of excellence,

(4:82). A sense of high morals and values was conveyed by staff working for the organisation, representing another strong cultural theme which was detected through the data analysis process. Fairness, decency, obligation, openness, empathy and a real desire to help others shines through the data collected under this theme, (4:83). Contributors frequently reiterated a desire to really make a difference to the client groups. One responded presented an interesting perspective that the fact that Longford Employment, Development and Information Centre is in itself fair and equitable, and that this reinforces the quality assurance system, (4:83).

Strong opinions were conveyed in the interviews by participants in relation to the impact that quality assurance initiatives were having on the organisation and its culture, with particular regard to service provision. Each interviewee was asked whether they felt that the quality assurance system impacted upon the organisations culture. 62.5% of respondents felt that it did have an impact positively or negatively, 12.5% of respondents felt it had a partial degree of influence, and the remaining 25% of respondents did not feel it had any real impact on culture one way or the other. One contributor explained that quality assurance initiatives are so administratively heavy as to take away from client groups, (4:85); and a further participant reasoned that the rigidness of the quality assurance system is negatively impacting upon service provision and affecting culture in this way, (4:85).

Interestingly, it is readily apparent form contributor responses that there exists an interdependency of factors such as culture, organisation structure and the consequent

efficiency and effectiveness of the quality assurance system; a phenomenon that is in agreement with the findings of (Naidoo, 2013).

5.3 Quality Assurance Effectiveness - Triangulation and Discussion

Each interviewee was asked various questions in relation to the existing quality assurance system in Longford EDI. An assessment of the responses of the interview panel highlights that over all, participants rate the existing systems positively, with 75% of respondents stating the system is effective and the remaining 25% of respondents believing the system is at least partially effective. When the primary data was analysed numerous themes relating to the effectiveness of the existing quality assurance system were identified, including the scope, perceived value, perceived purpose and its effectiveness with regard to ensuring program quality.

Participants expressed views of system as being currently effective but not future ready, effective only as a result of continuous rechecking of assessor's work. Interestingly this quality assurance method is almost regressive, being in practice closest to the system devised by Adam Smith (2:11). This method is considered effective because it ensures that processes are followed through in reality and provides goals for the organisation. Participants also describe the system as effective in that it provides frameworks for dealing with external stakeholders.

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100% of interviewees, (4:85-91), agreed that the existing quality assurance is worthwhile as well as effective. Participants described the system as 'certainly' and 'absolutely' worthwhile, explaining that it helps Longford EDI become a 'professional' organisation, further reinforcing the earlier conclusion of this chapter that Longford EDI would be categorised as a professional bureaucracy under the definitions of (Mintzberg, 1980), (2:28). Considering the descriptor traits of each of Mintzberg's models, the primary data describes the organisations origins from a simple bureaucracy, through an adhocracy, and finally to its current classification, the professional bureaucracy. The defining traits of this bureaucracy include; highly trained specialists operate, using considerable autonomy.

High levels of training and retraining are noted within the model, matched with high levels of environmental complexity. (Mintzberg, 1980) further explains that the complex work of the operating professionals cannot easily be formalized, or its outputs standardized by action planning and performance control systems. This concept is echoed by the participants of the empirical research study, who convey issues which have occurred in implementing quality initiatives, or utilising the language of (Mintzberg, 1980), a control system, (2:26). The direct observation noted by the researcher over the course of numerous years within the organisation is that the high level of autonomy which is described by Mintzberg is also a prevalent part of operational culture within Longford EDI.

Interestingly, a number of participants raised the theme of the purpose of the quality assurance system, suggesting that it often monitored employees more than learners, and focuses on achieving quality assurance goals rather than providing positive

learner outcomes (4:115-116). This is in harmony with the proposition of (Meyer & Rowan, 1977) that some initiatives are implemented as institutional myths and not for reason of intended purpose and efficacy.

5.4   Quality Assurance Efficiency - Triangulation and Discussion

The efficiency of the equality assurance system was outlined by participants throughout the data collection process. Participants detail that the quality assurance systems in place are effective in themselves, but overwhelmingly the participants report that systems are inefficient. Again, this reinforces the argument of (Mintzberg, 1980), that control systems are difficult to implement in such organisations. Every element of the quality assurance system was of interest to the empirical research phase of this study, but the perceived inefficiency of the system, and the frequency of recurrence of this theme throughout the empirical data, cannot be over emphasised.

In addition to being in line with the expectations of (Mintzberg, 1980), this theme correlates with the work of (Meyer & Rowan, 1977), in that the adoption of policies and procedures, or institutionalised myths, by an organisation does not inherently lead to efficiencies and the attainment of organisational objectives.

A related theme which recurred in the empirical research was the belief that the quality assurance system is much too cumbersome on a number of levels. Differing respondents outline differing elements of the system detailing that it is resource heavy and should be reviewed. A final interviewee details that the administrative requirements of the quality assurance system as presumably necessary though too heavy a burden effectively mirroring other respondents comments in relation to systemic burdens, (4:92).

Clear comments about perceived unnecessary quantities of paperwork have been an overriding theme in all of the interviews. One participant explains that there is too much paperwork, and that it is continuously increasing, (4:94). Other participants outline views of the paperwork needing to be less time consuming. Further interviewee comments on the theme of paperwork and its perceived usefulness. Participants also explaining the current system are about the filling up of paperwork rather than quality assurance matters.

Interestingly a brief analysis of the amalgamated transcripts used to analyse the data collected in this study shows that the paperwork volume was raised sixteen separate times by participants. Only one interviewee offers any suggestions on methods of reducing paperwork levels by changing the intake process for learner's, however this participant outlines that the block intake of learners is more compatible with the efficient implementation of quality assurance process than continuous intake of learners, as it is less administratively heavy.

The concept of Total Quality Management was discussed in chapter two, (Phelps, et al 2007), (2:13), (Miller, 1993), (2:15) and (Vazzana, 1997), (2:16). A fundamental element of total quality management involves removing inefficiencies from the process of delivered services. This also is mirrored in the reduction of waste principles of Lean Manufacturing which were presented in Chapter 2, (2:17). The direct observation of the author is that to date, Longford EDI has achieved little with regard to removing duplication and cumbersome processes. Many of the interviewees put forward the case for simplification of processes, unknowingly reiterating the lessons of the contemporary manufacturing quality assurance field. Interviewees outline the volume of policies and procedure in place and even question their relevance to the organisation and to quality control.

Participants feel that some steps are unnecessary and often inherently ineffective and time consuming. One contributor outlines that the way in which the internal monitoring is carried out is too procedure based, and could be reoriented to better avail, (4:113). Interestingly, no participant puts forward opinions on how this simplification of processes could materialise. Other quality initiatives such as ISO9000, presented in Chapter two, (2:13), which built upon theory in the field of ensuring an environment of quality also outline this concept of reorientation systems to better suit end needs. Clearly the implemented quality assurance processes, though technically meeting mandatory quality assurance elements, have not been sufficiently 'Tweaked to better suit ourselves', as one respondent describes it, (4:99).

The theme of adaptability also recurred in response to the full spectrum of questions asked of participant's. Interesting this is an area of disagreement amongst the interviewees, some identify the system as rigid, and others feel it is adaptable. The direct observation of the author is that the system is not adaptable. Some participants convey the belief that the cultural ideology of the organisation impacts upon the adaptability of the non-regulatory portions of the quality assurance system in relation to making changes to meet the needs of learners and clients, within the overall quality assurance framework.

One respondent conveys his pragmatic approach to necessity of adaptability in the quality assurance system, (4:100), "Enhance your procedures, learn by your mistakes and move forward". This approach mirrors that of many of the pioneers of quality assurance in other sectors such as Edward Deming's popularised quality Plan- Do-Check-Act cycle in manufacturing, (2:13), and other elements of the popularised Total Quality Management, (2:15).

5.5   Quality Assurance Matters - Triangulation and Discussion

Thematic coding of the data collected through the interview stage highlights a number of themes relating to numerous areas which affect quality assurance. When these themes are grouped together they address one specific thematic area, the overall importance of the quality assurance system; that is 'Why Quality Assurance matters' to Longford education, development and information centre.

Participants were asked whether they viewed the quality assurance system as having any impact upon external legitimacy. Respondents clearly detail the importance of having high standards in relation to quality assurance implementation as ensuring the external legitimacy of the organisation whilst promoting a culture of continuous improvement. One participant conveys her view that reputation and legitimacy is an earned process, and a further participant comments that the positive effects for people looking in externally and that it allows the centre maintain a position which is externally defensible. Another interviewee outlines in a strong fashion her view that it allows the centre maintain a position which is externally defensible.

An externally defensible position can be achieved through consistent quality assurance process adoption. The lack of defensible position was a primary failing which can be noted in the case of Empower Training, (1:04), which was researched for the initial justification for conducting this research.

The belief that quality assurance system has become a benchmark for standards also features in comments by interviewees, other comments by participants back this proposition, (4:107). One respondent explains that small items need to be picked up on in the process of adherence of standards, and that the quality assurance system provides a system of checks and measures. Other responses explore the link between quality assurance standards and the validity of the final certificate received by learners. An interesting belief that was expressed by a participant is that the quality assurance system is focusing too much upon the quality assurance of assessment standards, possibly neglecting other areas of provision such as the delivery of the

actual training. Other participants look at in from providing a base for concise evidence gathering and validation while others ask if adherence to standards is understood by learner groups.

Transparency and accountability, a pillar identified by (Madus and Stufflebeam, 1984), (2:18), was outlined by several interviewees during the course of the interview process. One contributor explains that the quality assurance system monitors everything that occurs within the organisation, ensuring accountability, another respondent agrees with those sentiments and explains that the quality assurance systems, (4:106). Implementation can lead everybody into adherence with the systems.

All of the respondents spoke with pride on their positive and right thinking efforts in improving transparency. Interestingly this theme is one which is in stark disagreement with the sixth detailed proposition of (Meyer & Rowan, 1977) which outlines that organisations try to minimise inspection. The researcher has also observed that practices implemented in this centre have always had a genuine purpose, which in turn builds a culture of transparency in line with the core principals of the organisation.

An interesting but telling view which was expressed by several participants and is detailed in this quote by a respondent explaining why the organisation requires transparency: that "you prove your quality, your worth through", (4:101). Others outline that having a fair and equitable system allows all stakeholders to see what is happening, implicitly explaining the need for transparency. One participant explains

that by implementing quality assurance initiatives learners know where they stand, essentially that the process is accountable and transparent for learners in particular. A key conclusion of this research is that the organisation itself through its very culture ensures that quality assurance framework is effective with regards to transparency and accountability. Quality assurance requirements are perceived as a benchmarking tool by several contributors. This issue repeatedly emerged throughout the array of questions asked to interviewees, (4:103). Differing interviewees detail their opinion that the quality assurance system provides goals and timelines for the organisation, ensuring professionalism; goals and timelines which she implies were lacking prior to the application of the system.

A theme which unexpectedly arose through the interviews is the concern of some staff in relation to the client groups using services of the organisation. One participant explains that there is pressure upon staff to keep students throughout the courses regardless of their behaviour, and that there is pressure to ensure that these students do not fail to meet the standards required for awards. Respondents who participated in the interviews all detailed at length efforts to provide a strong environment where learners were facilitated through assessment processes in a properly regulated environment, what regulatory agencies call quality assuring assessment. A phenomenon detailed by several participants, which was not originally a consideration of this study, is the difficulty in motivating disengaged learners into responsible participation in assessment processes.

One interviewee believes that the level of output from learners may not be to a sufficient level, and explains that the case occurs where it is necessary to 'revisit' previous assessments for learners who are falling below the standards, a practice which is not in line with normal requirements of the assessment processes and consequently not in line with the quality assurance systems requirements, (4:109). This observation highlights the fact that the application of the quality system is not evenly applied, that within the formalised institution the control system is not fully functional in any event.

A direct observation of the author is sufficiently communicated through the concerns expressed by some participants in relation to the ratio of training to assessment within the organisations provision of training activities. Of further concern is that many of the participants in the empirical study did not appear to differentiate between assessment processes and quality assurance processes. These concerns are particularly relevant in relation to quality assurance as the processes nearly always utilises the quality of the assessment process as the key measurement of overall quality assurance.

It is evident that from the concerns regarding the ratio of training to assessment, which were detailed by participants, that this overemphasis of assessment may be problematic. (Idailu, 2013), (2:23), outlines several areas which should be considered in relation to quality assurance in vocational education and training. Participant concerns and direct observation lead to the conclusion that these areas should be used to provide a benchmark for the measurement of a quality system and include;

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Skill acquisition and development by staff, adequate funding, accreditation, provision of adequate facilities, enhancement of societal attitudes and the motivation of teachers, tutors and lectures.

(Idailu, 2013), also emphasises the importance of evenness of application of systems, which ties closely to participant concerns regarding training to assessment quality assurance ratios. Currently approximately 3-5% of a learners contact time on an educational programme is spent in conducting assessments but 95% of quality assurance measurement output is considered in relation to assessments. This is clearly unsuitable. It also offers a possible explanation as to why participants in the empirical portion of this study struggled to separate the quality assurance system from the assessment system.

In summary interviewees believe that meaningful monitoring of overall training and educational activities should form part of the quality assurance system in a meaningful measurable way. One interviewee posits constant evolution of the system and details the changes that she would like to see into the future, though it is interesting to note that many of these changes relate to the marking and grading system applied to learners assessments which is ultimately the primary element which is quality assured both by internal and external oversight, (4:111).

Interviewee viewpoints detail that the quality assurance system should be expanded upon, to encompass other activities provided to clients, outside of training and education. The theme of scope and supportiveness was conveyed by only two

respondents during the interview process. One interviewee whose views are noteworthy as an auditor of the programmes offered by the case study organisation explains that the system could be more valuable to the organisation if it became more supportive.

Through the empirical evidence gathering, target client groups of Longford EDI are discussed by several participants. One participant outlines the client types served by the organisation, highlighting the inclusive environment the organisation seeks to provide to staff and clients, (4:114). Another participant outlines his view that in his opinion the quality assurance system may not be fit for the organisations clients.

This fitness for purpose issue repeatedly arose throughout the interviews, that as a result of the change of organisational focus from the inception of the organisation to the present time period, that the organisation is less able to meet its own purpose. A general consensus from participant detailed that the organisation should be led by learner needs. This occurrence is further detailed by other participant comments in relation to the same phenomenon; the organisation is warping into a mainstream educational provider; which is in direct opposition to the needs of the organisations clients. This occurrence again directly relates to aspects of the changing organisational structure which has been ongoing.

An important theme which became evident through the interviews was that of a blind acceptance of some of the interviewees on the need to implement some of the quality assurance elements. Learner's interaction with the quality assurance system as

perceived by interviewees is another unexpected area that the data revelled covering an interesting variety of commentary across a range of themes. Other participants outlined how the organisation has developed a communication mechanism between learners and coordinators and management, another interviewee posits that learners need the formalised procedures that the quality assurance system facilitates this.

In continuation of the question of whether the quality assurance system is a good fit for client groups, and consequently the organisation, numerous comments present the different but non-conflicting perspectives offered by participants in this research study, (4:118). One interviewee describes that many of the clients have left mainstream education, and the very formal structures of which mainstream education comprises; and the queries what must be considered the crux of this theme, whether they are a bad fit for the organisation or whether perhaps the organisation is a bad fit for them. Other participants argue that the quality assurance system is too ridged to fully meet the needs of learners and client groups, (4:119).

5.6   Quality Assurance Stakeholders - Triangulation and Discussion

Contributors in the empirical research section of this study identified an array of differing stakeholders with an interest in the quality assurance processes, ranging from personnel within the organisation, to party's external to the organisation that fund the organisations educational activities. Much of the data collected with regard

to these stakeholders is discussed earlier in this chapter but specific themes in relation to stakeholders were nonetheless identified through the data coding process.

Several participants outline differing internal stakeholder's involvements within the organisation and in delivering the outputs of the quality assurance system. One interviewee explains that one of the most important pivotal areas for quality assurance in the organisation is the accreditation office, describing how the department functions as a go between for trainers, assessors and the upper levels of management (4:122). Another respondent who is an internal stakeholder themselves; a trainer and co-coordinator in the organisation, outlines the changing relationship of internal stakeholders with external parties due to changes to regulation, structures and certification types.

Direct observation by the researcher notes that stakeholder involvements within these processes has evolved and changed to encompass a variety of changing external variables. The researcher would describe the relationship between stakeholders as a collaboration of resources, designed to meet the local needs of clients and community, further linking the organisational culture, organisational structure and quality systems to that of its other stakeholders.

Many contributors identified external stakeholders and described their interactions within an organisation which is already so dependent on other stakeholders and entity's to provide end services to its clients. The centre manager relays that she feels that the interests of all stakeholders are ensured by delivering a fair and equitable

system but that the quality assurance system must change as the stakeholder organisations themselves evolve. This level change will continue due to the continued reorganisation of the sector outlined in the introduction section.

(Meyer & Rowan, 1977), (2:29-31), outline that much policy adoption within organisations is simply designed to acquiesce external agencies and may not be important to the organisation. The participants of the empirical research section of this study reflect this proposition to varying degrees. In addition to identifying the internal and external stakeholders, respondents discussed policy adoption and its consequent impact on and alteration of work practices.

One respondent explains that the level of policy adoption from so many sources can become confusing (4:151) in practices and with regards to communication channels. Policy adoption has also been linked to the overall change the organisation has witnessed as the changes required are dictated by external agencies through various policies directives. Policy adoption aptitude is a skill that Longford EDI will need going into the future, as the sectorial reorganisation discussed throughout this dissertation continues to impact upon the organisation.

5.7 Change Management - Triangulation and Discussion

The rapid and sustained growth which the organisation and indeed the further education and training sector has encountered was discussed by interviewees during the empirical data collection phase. One theme clearly outlined by participants was

the amount of time allowed for quality assurance processes, policies and procedures to bed in, with respondents generally feeling that changes do not have enough time to bed in (4:125) before further change arrives. This finding is worrisome because of the continued change expected for the organisation and sector in coming years.

Contributors explained that changes to the quality assurance system often occur more often than the learner group's change, forcing staff to play catch up. The rate of change is considered to be too high. Several participants detailed problems in keeping up to date with both changes in the organisation and changing elements in the quality assurance system; only one respondent believed that the staffs of Longford EDI is keeping up to date with change (4:127). The researcher supports many of the existing policies and quality assurance initiatives, but has likewise observed for the allowance of sufficient bedding in time in relation to quality assurance processes.

One participant, while discussing the dangers associated with frequent changes in the quality assurance system queries whether much of the change is relevant, which must bring into the spot light the current level of staff buy in to the change which is a key issue in change management, (4:152).

(Meyer & Rowan, 1977), (2:29-31), posit that much of this policy adoption within organisations is designed to acquiesce external agencies, which developed from institutionalized myths, and that these undertakings may not increase efficacy in the organisation. The author would dispute this assertion of (Meyer & Rowan, 1977) with regard to implementing quality assurance in education, pointing to the fact that

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much of the implemented changes occurring in adopting quality assurance processes policies and procedures have been instigated form contemporary theory to increase accountability and programme evaluation, although it must be accepted that much of the contemporary work in the field is much later than, and often directionally influenced by, the study of (Meyer & Rowan, 1977).

A key finding of the empirical research is that the organisation needs stability from change for a number of years to allow it to truly adopt recent systems. Two participants have also outlined the need to have stability in quality assurance processes. The rate of change has also given rise to uncertainty and concerns for the future of the organisation (4:153). It is a logical conclusion that the correct implementation of such quality assurance systems requires that reasonable and fair amounts of time are allowed before significant revision.

5.8   Discussion

The highly departmentalised formalised structure in place in present times in the organisation was overwhelmingly detailed by interviewees and can be identified as a professional bureaucracy as defined by (Mintzberg, 1980). The original organisational structure of Longford EDI can be considered to have been a Simple Bureaucracy, before expanding to become an Adhocracy, before reaching its current size and structure in recent times. In addition there are significant similarities to the

institutionalised organisation outlined by (Meyer & Rowan, 1977), (2: 30), which describes these organisational features as 'systems of coordinated and controlled activities that arise when work is embedded in complex networks of technical relations and boundary spanning exchanges'.

Contributors convey the opinion that the quality assurance system is effective, though it can be noted from the results of the data coding process that many factors which conflict with the stated opinions of contributors emerged. In particular contributors question the quality assurance systems effectiveness for the client groups who interact with it. In line with many modern quality initiatives, such as Total quality Management, ISO 9000 and lean manufacturing, many participants explain that little has occurred in recent years to remove unnecessarily burdensome and cumbersome processes' in the organisation.

Descriptions of the culture, ethos and relevance of the organisation highlight that its original purpose was meeting the needs of the local area, working with individuals on soft skills development and employability skills. Much of the target market of the centre are long term unemployed or have exited the education system at an early age due to a variety of socioeconomic reasons. As a consequence mainstream education services did not meet the needs of learner groups due to the righty of their systems. Interestingly, one contributor explained that choices made by management culture effect interaction levels between the quality assurance system and the organisational structure, (4:74). This is further reinforced by the assertions of (Naidoo, 2013), that these are mutually inclusive, that is that one cannot be separated from the other.

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The author believes that a fair a and reasonable effort is needed by learners to progress through differing levels of educational attainment, in real terms though, many of these client groups could be classed as disengaged, which consequently subverts the objectives of given programmes. In working with these groups of learners the organisation has struggled to implement the full variety of formal requirements of the quality assurance system. The empirical findings of this case study certainly presents the case that the system, more so than the learners, needs to be able to adjust to the variety of different scenarios that exist within the FET sector as a whole.

Many participants talk about the array of what one participant calls external forces, which are directives from funding and regulatory agencies for specific levels of adherence with given requirements, meaning having to implement undesirable elements of quality assurance processes, perceived to be difficult with certain categories of learner groups. This is also has similar features to the Mayer and Rowan proposition number 1 (2:31) that organisations integrate these undesirable policies as structural elements.

Implementation of such a rigid quality assurance system whilst trying to supply services to client which culminate in the attainment of educational outcomes has shifted the focus of the organisation. The original focus was upon meeting the soft skill needs of learners, which would usually be delivered in a holistic approach which would not have a certification outcome. , The current focus has moved to a

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rigid approach which facilitates learners through a process with defined vocational educational outcomes, aiming to increase employability rather than developing the 'person'. Unfortunately participants report pressures to push learners through the system, regardless of learner capacity, which in itself undermines the efficacy of the focus shift.

The organisation has expanded through the aid of many external agencies as discussed in chapter 1. Additionally the organisation has implemented many processes, including quality assurance initiatives, in a manner which is consistent with the ethos of the organisation; that is to ensure fairness and equity. This has been achieved with an overall sense of teamwork and pride on the part of staff which was well detailed by interviewees in the data collection process. Participants clearly demonstrate a keen understanding of why quality assurance is necessary and the variety of differing reasons for this. Participants also understand the need for processes to be transparent and accountable, in agreement with (Maddus and Stufflebean, 1984), (2:18).

Participants all became animated during the interview process when the theme of efficiency was raised due to an overwhelming belief that the quality assurance processes are inefficient, cumbersome, resource heavy, include levels of unnecessary paperwork, duplication and at times is merely confusing. These views are in direct contrast with that which would be expected from an efficient environment.

All persons interviewed strongly agreed that both quality assured and unassured services were carried out in a transparent manner which would bolster external legitimacy. Participants express a sense of pride in the levels at which services are provided by the centre which goes beyond simply achieving an environment of proven legitimacy. One respondent even feels that services are provided to such a high level that it allows the centre maintain a position which is externally defensible as well as saleable and fundable again this occurrence is at odds with the Mayer and Rowan proposition number three (2:31).

The findings of this study with regard to the legitimacy of Longford EDI are in contrast to the outcomes of the organisation identified for 'Empower Training', a company who was studied in the research question development phase of this case study. Empower Training did not through quality assured high quality provision of services create for their organisation a position of legitimacy, and resultantly were not externally defensible.

Another area of concern which became evident throughout the data collection process, tangential to the original 'mental lines of enquiry' was a theme participant's term the ratio of training to assessment. Participants explain that the quality assured elements of programmes mainly focus upon the output of assessment, and not on the provision of training which gives the knowledge skills and competence to the learner to undertake such assessment. Taking account of the detailed cumbersome quality assurance system it seems at odds with the concepts of an environment of excellence that any system would should have an overwhelmingly focus on such a narrow

portion of the overall process in providing an educational service. An increase even to the levels of the pareto effect would surely be an improvement in this area. (Idialu, 2013) outlines in the reviewed literature other areas of educational provision that also could be effectively quality assured and measured which are not fully taken into account within this education and training environment.

A further area of concern which can be identified from the empirical findings of this research is the inability of participants to clearly differentiate between assessment processes guidelines and various elements of the quality assurance system. Works reviewed in the literature by (Hogan, 2007), (Mathison, 2005) and (Tyler, 1987) all provide direction in areas where quality assurance could be enhanced throughout the full array of the educational process.

The continuing changing regulatory environment, consequent of the continued reorganisation of the sector; is an area of concern to staff within and external to the organisation. Participants feel that more time is needed to allow the bedding in of new processes policies and procedures before further changes are instigated.

5.9 The Mayer and Rowan Propositions

Of particular interest to this study were the propositions of (Meyer and Rowan, 1977) as discussed in the literature review presented in Chapter two of this

dissertation. Many of the propositions in simple terms explained why organisations adopted policies that were on the surface not leading to efficiencies in the operations of the organisation. Though many of the propositions are discussed throughout this chapter, it is interesting to consider them as a whole with regard to the organisation, and as such a summary analysis is presented here.

Proposition 1: "As rationalized institutional rules arise in given domains of work activity, formal organizations form and expand by incorporating these rules as structural elements.", (1977:345).

The study demonstrates that the organisation has embedded domains of work activities, which do not automatically lead to efficient and effective systems and that in the case of Longford EDI these activities often relate to the quality assurance system.

Proposition 2: "The more modernized the society, the more extended the rationalized institutional structure in given domains and the greater the number of domains containing rationalized institutions.", (1977:345).

This proposition sums up one of the key overall findings of this study. The organisation is significantly influenced by the constraints of the external modern

environment through mandatory policy adoption of quality assurance processes regardless of fit, training or practicality.

Proposition 3: "Organizations that incorporate societally legitimated rationalized elements in their formal structures maximize their legitimacy and increase their resources and survival capabilities." (1977:352).

The study clearly finds that Longford EDI has incorporated societally legitimised rational elements in the way of formalised quality assurance systems. The organisational perspective in relation to this proposition is that it is a positive idea, that the organisation can prove its legitimacy upon the strength of high quality educational provision, thus ensuring its own survival.

Proposition 4: "Because attempts to control and coordinate activities in institutionalized organizations lead to conflicts and loss of legitimacy, elements of structure are decoupled from activities and from each other." Integration is avoided, program implementation is neglected, and inspection and evaluation is ceremonialised.", (1977:357).

This proposition was not the basis of any major theme which recurred in the empirical data. Interviewees felt that Longford EDI takes the inspection of services

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both internally and externally very seriously but did express that the quality assurance system is concurrent to the training provision which is carried out. As such the activities are decoupled, but not ceremonialised.

Proposition 5: "The more an organization's structure is derived from institutionalized myths, the more it maintains elaborate displays of confidence, satisfaction, and good faith, internally and externally.", (1977:358).

The organisation does show high levels of confidence and good faith though this is borne from a sense of pride and achievement at providing its services to the highest of levels, a cultural trait, rather than having adopted structures as a result of the quality assurance system.

Proposition 6: "Institutionalized organizations seek to minimize inspection and evaluation by both internal managers and external constituents.", (1977:359).

Interviewees clearly feel that there is far too much internal and external evaluation of services at Longford Employment, Development, and Information Centre. However contributors were unable to separate these functions from the issue of legitimacy and overall approved of the impact of the internal and external evaluations level. A

conundrum which again highlights the requirement for simplification rather than replacement of current practices.

5.10   Conclusions

This section considers the overall relationship between the case study research findings and the original research questions. It is presented in consideration of the aims and objectives of the study as presented by chapter 1(1:06). The first of the objectives of this study was to identify the current organisational structure in place in the Longford Employment, Development and Information centre. Through research of appropriate academic literature, empirical research and data analysis the organisational structure of Longford Employment, Development, and Information Centre, has been identified as a formalised institution, in line with the description of (Meyer and Rowan, 1977), which is consistent the Professional Bureaucracy described by (Mintzberg, 1980).

The second objective of this research case study was to explore whether the administrative requirements of modern quality assurance implementation in further education and training in Ireland has shifted the focus of the quality assurance system away from the needs of learners. The findings overwhelming show that this is the case in Longford Employment, Development, and Information Centre. The organisational focus has shifted from soft skill development of learners onto the

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provision of defined educational services of a vocational and educational nature in order to meet with the requirements of the formalised quality assurance administration.

The overall aim of this case study was to determine if the organisational structure of Longford Employment, Development, and Information Centre is, in itself, impacting upon the efficiency or effectiveness of the quality assurance system, either directly or indirectly. This aim is best considered in two sections as the impacts relate to first efficiency and then effectiveness.

With regard to the efficiency of the system, the findings prove that the system is highly inefficient but that this is as a result of the administrative requirements of the quality assurance system itself, and in any case is dependent upon external forces. Many of the quality assurance processes adopted by the organisation are clearly highlighted as inefficient in themselves. The findings do not conclude that the organisational structure of Longford Employment, Development, and Information Centre impacts upon the efficiency of the quality assurance system in place within the organisation.

The quality assurance system is superimposed upon the organisation by external agencies. The direction from which quality assurance change originates is such that the organisation is not in a position to refuse to accept or to implement it. Findings show that system change is implemented within Longford EDI as required, but that the organisation struggles to keep up with the rate of change within the sector. These

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difficulties have implications upon efficiency, the evenness of application and overall effectiveness of the quality assurance system.

With regards to effectiveness, the findings of this case study show that in the current environment the quality assurance system is effective only with respect to measuring the quality assurance outcome of assessment processes, and in providing sound information for transparency, accountability and legitimacy, to third parties on the conduct of measured processes.

The organisational structure of Longford EDI has been found to be formal in nature, but inseparable from the implemented quality assurance system upon which it is dependant. Both the structure of the organisation and the system of quality assurance are required if education services are to be rendered. The findings of the empirical study imply that the functionality of this relationship is secured by a third element, the culture of the organisation itself. It is not apparent from the empirical findings that the organisational structure is, in itself is, directly, impacting upon the efficiency and effectiveness of the quality assurance system, currently.

The findings also suggest that the organisational structure may be indirectly impacting upon the quality assurance systems, currently, through alteration to the organisations underlying culture. The evidence demonstrates that culture and ethos of the organisation currently ensure that staff willingness to interact with the quality assurance system is at a sufficient level to ensure the effectiveness of the quality

assurance system. The data also suggests that the changes in organisational structure are leading to ethos changes within the organisation.

This study has found that the original ethos of the organisation could be found in its culture of service to a community which fell outside of the mainstream education system. The culture will shift from this ethos as the organisation becomes increasingly part of the mainstream education system which this study has confirmed is occurring within Longford EDI.

In the future, as the organisation continues to adapt to changes in the FET sector, there is a risk that the organisational structure will change so much that there will be a considerable alteration in organisational culture within Longford EDI. It is difficult to predict the likely impact which could result from the removal of this lynchpin, Culture and Ethos, from propping up the functional relationship between the organisational structure of Longford Employment, Development, and Information Centre and its quality assurance system.

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5.11   Limitations upon the Research Study

Several limitations impacted upon this case study. A significant constraint was that the number of organisational factors that were examinable within the timeframe allowed led to the study focusing mainly on organisational structure. Time

constraints also affected the number of external stakeholders who could be included in the empirical research portion the study. The number of organisations studied in the case also limits generalizability opportunities and the potential to generate theory from findings.

5.12   Recommendations for Further Research

The research carried out for this case study, although addressing many points of interest to the original research question, has generated many further questions of interest to the topic. Time constraints upon the case study did not allow for these questions to be pursued, but they form the basis of further research which should be considered within the organisation. These recommended areas for further research are as follows:

- Examine the process in relation to delivery of educational provision to disengaged learners within formal, ridged quality assurance systems.

- Engage is Business Process Reengineering and new work practices development in order to increase efficiency in delivering quality assurance processes in education.

- Examination to of the ratio of training and assessment in measuring quality assurance outputs with regard to making recommendations to expand the elements of audit.

- Examine organisational culture within the organisation with a view to maintain culture in a climate of frequent change and uncertainty.

5.13 Concluding Remarks

There is no evidence to suggest that the organisational structure itself has directly impacted negatively upon the efficiency and effectiveness of the quality assurance system operating within Longford Employment, Development, and Information Centre.

The organisational structure of Longford EDI has been found to be formal in nature, but inseparable from the implemented quality assurance system upon which it is dependant. The findings of the empirical study imply that the functionality of this relationship is secured by the culture of the organisation itself. As the quality assurance system causes the organisational structure to change, the culture ethos of the organisation itself is shifting. This poses a risk to the future functionality of the relationship. As such the possible indirect impact of organisational structure upon the quality assurance system is of concern, though not yet having impact.

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This exploratory case study has examined many matters relating to the implementation of a contemporary quality assurance system in a community based further education and training setting. As a consequence of the coding of data and the vast array of topics detailed by participants, many case relevant findings emerged. In doing so, this study has created a small addition to current knowledge while raising countless questions for further research. Most importantly the findings also present numerous considerations which should be attended to when future quality assurance implementation efforts are attempted by Longford, Employment, Development and Information Centre.

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7.0   Appendices

7.1   The Interview Guide

1. Please outline your role and its remit within the organisation?

2. What is your opinion of the structure of this organisation?

3. In your opinion is the quality assurance system appropriately linked to the organisational structure?

4. Please describe in your opinion the culture of the organisation?

5. In your opinion does the quality assurance system impact upon the culture of the organisation?

6. How do you view the effectiveness of the existing quality assurance system?

7. Do you think implementing quality assurance processes, policies and procedures are worthwhile?

8. In your opinion does the quality assurance system impact upon the legitimacy of the organisation?

9. How would you rate the various staff involvements in adherence with the quality assurance system?

10. What is your opinion of the internal and external monitoring of training and education activities within the organisation?

11. How do you view the levels of quality assurance policy and procedural change which occurs within the training environment?

12. Do you believe that any specific changes should be made to the existing quality assurance system?

13. Any other comments?

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Research Study title : *Quality Assurance Processes, Effectiveness and Efficiency*

Researcher name   : ANDREW FINN

Researcher's status   : Final year student BA Honours in Human Resource Management

Programme location : National College of Ireland, Mayor Street Dublin

Contact details   : 043/66/76887   or   0877713838

Researchers Email   : andrewjf_82@yahoo.ie

Dear Sir/Madam,

You are invited to participate in a research study designed to determine if formal organisational structures in place within a further education and training provider are in itself a barrier to effective and efficient quality assurance process implementation ***. If you would like to participate in this research I would very much appreciate it if you would read this form and then sign at the bottom of the second page. Participation in this study will involve an interview, which will last approximately fifteen minutes.

All information if requested will remain anonymous. The interview will be audio-recorded; the information gathered will be transcribed by the researcher and coded by theme.

Please read the following statements and if you understand the statements and if you wish to participate in this study, please indicate your agreement to take part by ticking the boxes:

I have read and I understand the description of the study	
I willingly consent to participate in the study	
I understand that I can withdraw from the research at any point in time	

I understand that the interviews will be recorded	
I understand that the researcher may take written notes	

NOTE:

If you require that your identity in relation to your contribution to this study to remain anonymous please indicate this beside your signature on this page please.

Participant's signature:

_____

Name in block capitals:

_____

Researcher's signature: _____

*** Both the research study's title and its design are works in progress and as such

may use different wording in the finished research project.

7.3 The Case Study Organisation; Information and Hierarchical Table

The EDI Centre in Longford was established in 1998 by the Longford Community Resources Ltd and the Longford District Council of Trade Unions and is one of 37 Congress Unemployed Centres affiliated to the Irish Congress of Trade Unions in Ireland.

In 2011 the Employment Development Information Centre (E.D.I. Centre) relocated to an easy accessible location on Mastertech Business Park close to the main shopping areas. The purpose built building has bright, spacious training rooms and specially designated craft areas and computer training rooms. The locally based Centre provides a range of education and support services to unemployed people living in County Longford and the surrounding areas.

The overall aim of the Congress Network of Unemployed Centres is to help meet the needs of people who are at present unemployed. Centres operate in line with the ethos and philosophy of the Trade Union Movement. As each of the 27 Centres nationwide operates in its own distinctive area – decisions on local operations are guided by a board of management within each Centre. Responding to local needs and situations, the range of services within each centre varies. The focus of work in Longford EDI Centre is on: Information Provision and Dissemination, Mediation and Pre-employment supports, Education and Training and Enterprise Development Delivery of outreach services to rural areas (Longford EDI, 2014).

The chart overleaf was developed by the researcher to demonstrate the relationships between various stakeholders within the context of the structure of Longford Employment, Development, and Information Centre.

1. Quality & Qualifications Ireland, QQI

Accreditation & Quality Assurance Oversight

2. SOLAS

Further Education Training Authority

Quality Assurance Agreement with QQI

Policy & Procedures, Funding, Oversight

3. Education & Training Board, ETB/Solas Training Centre Athlone

Learner Results Approval

4. Training Standards Office

5. External Authentication

Verification of Adherence to National Standards

6. QA Policy & Procedure Compliance

7. Internal Verification of Results

Verification of Adherence to National Standards

8. Training Centre Manager

9. Training Project Coordinator

10. Learner Appeals Process

11. Tutors/Assessors

12. Learners in Training

13. QA Agreement

14. Induction of Learners

15. Selection of Learners

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7.4   Photographs detailing the growth of Longford EDI over the past decade

The above photograph, figure 4, shows the organisation in its first premises over ten years ago.

The second photograph, figure 5, shows the large building the organisation now occupies.

7.5   Transcription of one Interview for demonstration purposes;

Please note that a copy of all interview transcripts can be provided if required. This is the transcript of the Interview of Padraig Dooney, held in the Longford EDI Centre.

A: Please outline your role and its remit within the organisation?

PD: Well Andrew, my role in the organisation here is, emmm, I deliver two modules, I deliver…… I deliver Floor and Wall Tiling at level 3, and I also deliver a communications module also level 3, and any way I can in helping out any tutors or co-workers I will do my best.

A: What is your opinion of the structure of this organisation?

PD: Ehhhh……. the opinion I would have on the structure of the organisation is pretty o.k, pretty good. I have worked with it for the last ten years and emmm…… my opinion we have got a lot of certification down through the years and that we have not been doing anything really major wrong. Hopefully we have done more right than wrong and it shows with some good learners emmm…… You cannot really bring on some people through the structure that's not suitable.

AF: In your opinion is the quality assurance system appropriately linked to the organisational structure?

PD: Emmm….. yes. I think it is the quality assurance system would be quite good for the sense that we are dealing with modules that are outlined by SOLAS which is formally FAS and we would be in the situation within our emm…… organisation that were given templates to deliver that emm….. module. I think the quality assurance on that is pretty good it keeps a tab on all that is going on.

AF: **Please describe in your opinion the culture of the organisation?**

PD: The culture in this organisation started back a good number of years ago, I was with Revamp for almost the beginning and have seen it come to what it is today. It started off in em…. very poor premises, a kitchen of a house, and moved on to a bigger premises where we also developed a shop, which turned into what we have today in a shop open to the public, ehh selling recycled furniture. We branched off totally off into the training section and we are concentrating with that now. We don't really have anything to do with the shop element side of it, and the refurbishment of furniture side for me. I have seen it grow and grow in the education side, because, eahhh, in the beginning it was a supervisory role. At the moment there is a big emphasis on certification and I think that is the way we are going today. It is designed for the poor learner who may have dropped out of school, give him a second chance.

AF: **In your opinion does the quality assurance system impact upon the culture of the organisation?**

PD: Emmm…… the quality assurance system and the culture of the organisation. I think the organisation itself works well. eahhh…. We have come a long way in the last number of years. quality assurance would be more important today than it was a number of years ago. There wasn't as much emphasis on folders or how a folder was put together. I know the first folders I completed were very simple and quality assurance would not have been there but todays folders, that are finished product, would be top standard and we would have been told that by authenticators down through the number of years that we produce a good quality folder. **Does that impact on the type of participants you have on the programme?** It sometimes can, in the sense that they might think it is good enough for them, but it might not be good enough for what the system wants, and you may have to go back to update some of their materials to bring it up to the standard that is where it might impact.

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AF: **How do you view the effectiveness of the existing quality assurance system?**

PD: I think its very effective. In that we have emmm…. to get through, lets say if you have sixteen learners, and eahhhh, and take my own situation where I would have sixteen folders for Tiling and, emm, I would also would have sixteen folders for Communications module, so in that sense you would have to have a quality control assurance and to me I would be working to the highest of standards of quality assurance of quality control, and we would be trying to bring everyone up to that standard. emmmm…… yea I think it works pretty well……

AF: **Do you think implementing quality assurance processes, policies and procedures are worthwhile?**

PD: Yea, I think they are because I think if you had not got, emmm, goals ahead of yea…… you would not be going too far with some of the learners we would be dealing with. emmmm…. , laziness would be part of the culture emmmm…. maybe timekeeping things like that eahh…. people fall down on things like that, people are going to fall behind and I think that a lot of learners that we would be dealing with do need procedures and I think you have to have these in place so we work to a quality assurance that we get to that goal.

AF: **In your opinion does the quality assurance system impact upon the legitimacy of the training organisation?**

PD: Yea I think so….I think the whole thing was set up to deliver what we do. emmm.. We have to work to a standard. emmmm…. I think the quality assurance system is important to the organisation. We have down through the years have had different changes and modules and everything else, and unless you had all of them assurances you wouldn't be able to work to those guidelines.

AF: **How would you rate the various staff involvements in adherence with the quality assurance system?**

PD: Emmmm….. I think it's important that various staff are involved in the quality assurance system because we will take it that the tutors may be under pressure to get folders finished on a deadline. and emmm… We have been an through an Internal Verification system that would kick in before that folder passes on to an External Authentication. and emmm….. Its important that something is picked up on, if it may be something small maybe a signature that's missing or maybe a page that maybe there is a wrong code on or something, something small like that it maybe something that might let you down when the quality assurance system kicks in there before it leaves the premises.

AF: **What is your opinion of the internal and external monitoring of training and education activities within the organisation?**

PD: Well just as I after saying in the last question there. emmm…… I think it's a good thing. emmmm We need to have it. We need to keep it tight. We have to make sure that nothing leaves the premises for external authentication unless its properly adhered to, an emmmm…., and that we have everything done out to the best of our ability.

AF: **How do you view the level of quality assurance policy and procedural change which occurs within the training environment?**

PD: Well my own view on that is that over the course of the last number of years, that the last three to four years in particular, we went from mostly Fetac level 3s and fours to what SOLAS formally known as FAS brought in. Most of these, of their own modules and their modules there based on FETAC criteria, so I would have seen a lot of changes where I think that the marking system is, lets say, is not a very good system, where instead of grades you have successful and referral but emmmm definitely there is emmmmm…. It works pretty good within our own system.

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AF: **Do you believe that any specific changes should be made to the existing quality assurance system?**

PD: The only one that I believe that should be made is to the SOLAS modules which have only successful and referral marking systems. It's a total loss to see where a learner would have a high grade and a low grade, because you could have a guy coming in there at between 90 and 95 percent and he is getting a successful as a pass and you could have a guy coming in between forty five and fifty. I think that they should think about within the quality assurance system that they could em simplify it in the sense that to put in the old grading system where FETAC had where you had a pass, merit and distinction, and you got a better reading of the learner themselves, that would only be my opinion delivering a level four and that's the way I marked the papers before and I think you got a better reflection of emmmm… where the learner was going.

AF: **Have you any other comments you would like to make in relation to the above questions?**

PD: Well Andrew I suppose the majority of it is that we are talking about quality assurance and quality assurance is an important part of it and that we would move on and like I said in that last question I would like to see that that change would be made that we would move away from the referral and successful and I don't think it's a fair reflection on a lot of the learners that we would have in our organisation and I know that's the system that's used in all the training centres that SOLAS run now maybe that will change when all that goes in under the new ETB board. It's one of the things that if I was asked a question on I would be expected that would be my bit that I would put forward that that would take place rather than referral and successful.

AF: **Perfect, thank you for your participation.**

7.6   Themes and Coding Sheets, typed for presentation.

1. Organisational Structure

Theme	Page Number : Line Number, from Amalgamated Transcript							
Structure Composition	01:11	03:04	03:17	3.19	4.12	5.14	16.2	
Growth over the years	06:13	6.3	07:19	07:27	10:04			
Perception of the Structure	22.2	03:09	3.11	03:15	04:04	04:09	04:17	10.4
	12:09							
Position of QA in the organisation	04:31	05:07	05:13	05:19				
External Influence on Structure	03:01	03:28						

2. Culture & Identity

Theme	Page Number : Line Number, from Amalgamated Transcript							
Community	04:06	05:01	07:05	07:21				
Local need / targeted delivery/Diverse/non trad	02:26	05:02	06:16	06:27	08:01	15:08		
Teamwork	02:09	04:14	17:19					
Dilution of intended purpose	03:02	19:31	21:01					
Pride	13:07	15:02	16:05	18:10	18:24	19:07		
Internal Support and encouragement	06:12	02:08	17:22					
Sense of Values (Fairness, Equity Etc	06:19	07:29	14:13	14:22	16:08			
Impact of QA on Culture & Vice Versa	08:12	08:19	20:05					

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3. QA Effectiveness								
Theme	Page Number : Line Number, from Amalgamated Transcript							
QA Effectiveness	04:24	05:25	11:08	11:16	11:25	12:09	12:19	21:12
	11:17							
Is Quality Assurance Worthwhile	13:11	13:09	13:15	13:20	13:30	14:01	14:09	
Assured Quality of Delivered Programmes	10:05	05:03	09:06					
QA outcomes not learning outcomes	10:20	10:24	11:02	11:19	18:29			

4. QA Efficiency								
Theme	Page Number : Line Number, from Amalgamated Transcript							
Cumbersome Admin	06:02	11:22	12:06	12:29	18:16			
Paperwork levels	05:21	06:02	11:22	12:25	12:28	19:21	19:30	22:02
	22:06	22:17	23:02					
Need for Simplification	13:17	21:25	22:01	22:05	22:18	23:03		
Frequency of IVS, Peer reviews, Ease etc., too many hoops	18:14	19:01	20:03	22:02	22:16			
Adaptive?	06:06	11.9	19.1	20.2				

5. Stakeholders								
<u>Theme</u>	Page Number : Line Number, from Amalgamated Transcript							
Multiple QA directives	05:24	05:26	14:25	19:26	16:16			
External Stakeholders Influences	01:24	02:03	02:11	03:29	04:27	06:20	06:23	07:12
	14:18	16:10	17:04	18:02	19:24	21:15	21:27	09:12
Internal Stakeholder Viewpoints marking schemes	16:28	21:04	22:21	23:22				

6. QA Matters								
<u>Theme</u>	Page Number : Line Number, from Amalgamated Transcript							
External Reputation	13:12	14:18	14:22	14:25	14:29	15:05	15:14	15:20
	15:28	14:32	18:22					
Assurance of certain level of standards	03:32	09:13	11:28	12:02	12:21	13:27	13:30	17:11
	18:18							
Perceptions in relation to adherence to standards	13:15	15:15						
Transparency & Accountability	05:27	09:26	11:27	14:11	14:19	16:11	18:21	
QA as a benchmarker, standard setter, procedure developer	13:09	13:11	13:21	14:01	14:09			
Pressures to perform/conform/pass/time	08:30	10:14	10:22	17:10				
Ratio of training to assessment	11:02	12:03	13:05					
QA into the future	21:15	21:13						
Implement-ability	05:21	13:06	17:04					
Need to broaden in scope and in supportiveness	18:28	09:23						

7. Fitness for Purpose.								
<u>Theme</u>	Page Number : Line Number, from Amalgamated Transcript							
Client types	02:26	05:08	06:14	06:24	06:31	08:01		
Fitness for the Clients	05:07	05:09	05:20	08:14	08:23	08:28	10:11	11:12
	14:03							
Blind acceptance that it must be necessary	04:27	12:28	14:25					
Increasing Mainstreamness	08:16							
Learner Interaction/Comprehension of QA	09:03	09:07	09:20	09:28	13:24	14:03	15:18	17:15
New Focus on staff from developing soft skills to adherence to QA	08:03	08:13						

8. Change Management								
<u>Theme</u>	Page Number : Line Number, from Amalgamated Transcript							
Clear line of communication	03:12							
Understanding the need to implement QA	19:20	20:03						
Implementation of what is outlined to us	05:05	15:24						
Keeping up to date	12:22	16:24	21:03	21:29	22:12			
Level/speed/rate of change	01:17	05:23	19:30	20:02	21:13			
Not sufficient time for processes to bed in	06:04	12:18	19:10	20:24	20:25			
Need for finalised system	16:19	20:09						

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