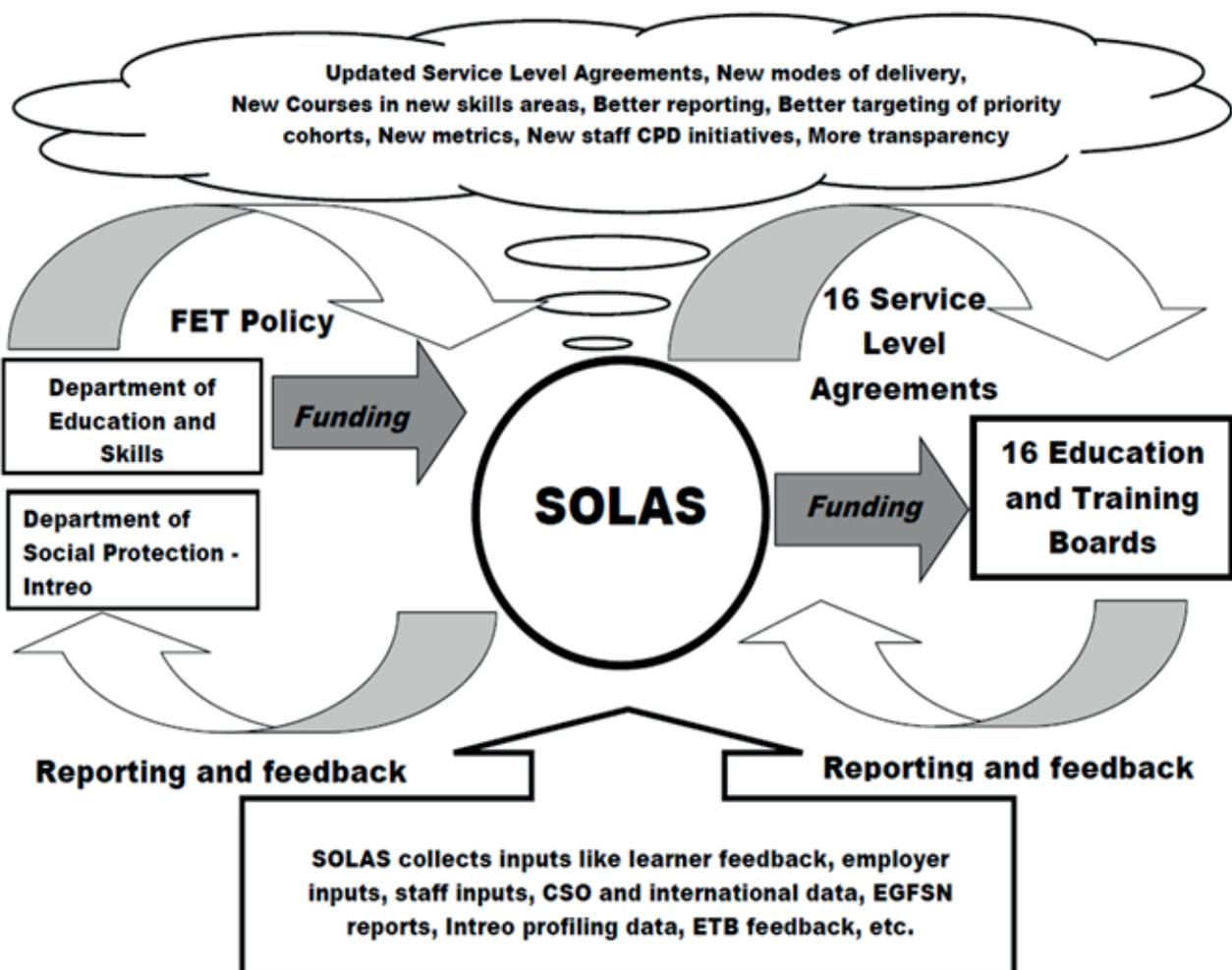


## What's happening in Further Education and Training?

### Overview

In July 2011 Minister Ruairi Quinn announced the formal disbanding of FÁS and the establishment of SOLAS (the Further Education and Training Authority). SOLAS proposes to establish an integrated further education and training service and to co-ordinate education and training activities delivered by the VEC and FÁS to date. In 2012 the Education and Training Boards Bill (2012) was introduced, which sets out to replace the existing 33 VECs with 16 Education and Training Boards. Meanwhile, the Department of Social Protection announced the roll out of Intreo, a one stop shop which aims to help people on the live register to access employment, guidance or further education and training. The Department of Social Protection through Intreo and employers will have a key role in shaping the further education and training services to meet the needs of people on the live register and the labour market.





## AONTAS Brief AGM 2013

### How have the new structures developed over the past year?

- In November 2012, the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act formally established QQI (Quality and Qualifications Ireland) which brings together FETAC, HETAC, NQAI and the Irish Universities Quality Board. The QQI Board includes a learner representative from the Further Education and Training Sector, Una Buckley;
- In December 2012 the Department of Education and Skills published 'An Action Plan for SOLAS'. The Action Plan sets out a timeframe and process for the establishment of SOLAS, the integration of FÁS training centres to ETBs and the development of the Further Education and Training Strategy;
- In January 2013 the Minister for Education and Skills introduced draft legislation for the establishment of SOLAS;
- The Education and Training Boards Bill (2012) has been debated in both Houses of the Oireachtas, will return to the Dáil for final approval and is expected to become legislation in the near future;
- Nine Intreo centres are operational around the country with the service expected to be available nationwide in 2014.

### What are the next steps?

The enactment of the Education and Training Boards Bill allows for the formal establishment of the 16 new Education and Training Boards. 6 FÁS Training Centres will move to the relevant Education and Training Boards by the end of 2013. A reduced number of local elected representatives from each ETB area will remain in place until the local elections in 2014. Changes in the composition of the Board in 2014 include an adult learner representative and an employer representative, both of whom will be nominated by bodies to be named by the Minister for Education and Skills.

The Further Education and Training (SOLAS) Bill has been referred to the Oireachtas Select Sub Committee on Education and Skills and is scheduled for discussion on May 1st at 1pm. The legislation will then return to the Dáil with a number of recommended amendments. Following this discussion in the Dáil the legislation will be debated in the Seanad and return again to the Dáil before it can be enacted as legislation. When passed, the legislation will allow for the formal establishment of SOLAS and the development of the Further Education and Training Strategy.



## AONTAS Brief AGM 2013

### What commitments do the new structures give to adult learners?

The need for SOLAS to be 'learner centred' was one of three themes emerging from the initial consultation process. The Action Plan for SOLAS proposes the development of a Learners' Charter which would inform the delivery of the services from a learner's perspective. The SOLAS legislation does not include a reference to the Learners Charter and does not outline how SOLAS will be 'learner centred'.

Following a successful campaign by NALA, adult learners will be entitled to a representative on the new Education and Training Boards. Nominating bodies named by the Minister will be required to nominate two learners residing in the ETB area (one man and one woman), one of whom will be approved by the ETB members.

### How has AONTAS responded to the structural changes in the sector?

AONTAS has responded to the changes through providing information to members and advocacy activities following the publication of the draft legislation. Specific actions AONTAS has taken in response to SOLAS include:

- An extensive submission to the SOLAS consultation process in January 2012
- Provision of information on developments within the FET sector at our AGM, GM and at CEN meetings through presentations from key agencies
- Two roundtable events, to facilitate dialogue and inform key decision makers and elected representatives from a learner perspective
- Development of a response to the draft legislation, circulated to the Minister for Education and Skills, Minister for Training and Skills, members of the Oireachtas Sub Committee on Education and Skills, Independent Senators and stakeholder organisations. AONTAS has met with various stakeholders who have a role in the legislative process.

### AONTAS AGM 2013

The AGM this year has a particular focus on the establishment of the ETBs. Four learners with experience of further education will participate in a panel discussion and will articulate how they believe the ETBs can meet the needs of adult learners. Key staff within the services will respond to the issues raised during that discussion.

Smaller breakout sessions will then provide you, as a member of AONTAS to:

- Feed in your experience of the impact of the reforms on the services and your own work;
- Provide your views on how the services can be developed to meet the needs of adult learners;
- Communicate your views to the IVEA/ETBI;
- Inform how AONTAS should respond to these developments.

This year's AGM takes place as our latest strategic plan (2011-2013) draws to a close. The AGM is an important event during a key period of change in the services and your participation is valuable in assisting AONTAS to prepare for the next planning phase.