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TRENDS IN QUALITY ASSURANCE OF FURTHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN IRELAND: FROM LEGISLATIVE REFORMS TO STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

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Abstract

Relevance of the article lies in the need for a systematic analysis of the evolution of the multi-level structure of Further Education and Training (hereinafter – FET) in Ireland and the leading trends in its quality assurance. This system is complex, as it combines centralized strategic planning and funding with independent external quality control and standard compliance, and decentralized provision of educational services. Such an architecture, formed as a result of large-scale reforms in 2012-2013, is of significant interest to researchers and educational policy developers in Ukraine.

The purpose of the article is to identify and characterize the leading trends in FET quality assurance in Ireland, and to ascertain the possibilities of considering them in improving the quality assurance system of vocational education in Ukraine.

Methods: study of legislative, regulatory, and legal documents, empirical data – to determine the leading trends in FET quality assurance in Ireland; analysis and synthesis, generalization of views on the problem under study – to ascertain the possibilities of considering these trends in improving the quality assurance system of vocational education in Ukraine.

Results: the leading trends in FET quality assurance in Ireland have been identified and characterized (institutionalization of partnership between FET institutions and stakeholders, strengthening the role of Quality and Qualifications Ireland in external FET quality assessment, orientation towards learning outcomes and professional competencies, digitalization of FET quality management processes); a number of recommendations for improving the Ukrainian vocational education quality assurance system have been formulated.

Conclusions. Legislative reforms in the FET system initiated a strategic restructuring of its architecture and quality improvement. The establishment of institutions for centralized coordination of FET quality assurance and the implementation of the National Framework of Qualifications made it possible to form a unified system for recognizing qualifications, monitoring, and accrediting educational programs and FET institutions. Thanks to this, Ireland remains competitive in the global educational and professional environment, and graduates of FET institutions gain opportunities for career growth and international mobility. Ireland's experience is relevant for implementation in Ukraine: an integrated quality management model for vocational education; a results-oriented approach to vocational training of specialists; institutionalization of partnerships between vocational education institutions and stakeholders; digital tools for monitoring and evaluating the quality of vocational education, etc.

Keywords: *further education; vocational training; Ireland; leading trends; quality management system; SOLAS; Quality and Qualifications Ireland; ETBs.*

Introduction. Modern approaches to ensuring the quality of FET in Ireland are driven by unprecedented labor market demands for workforce skills and the adaptability of education systems in the era of the "twin transformation" – digital and green. Within the framework of European educational policy and, in particular, in Ireland, FET is interpreted as "Further Education and Training"

(Further Education and Training Act, 2013). This term covers educational programs implemented after the completion of compulsory secondary education and aimed at developing the professional skills of individuals with various levels of prior education, including programs for youth, adults, the unemployed, as well as for those seeking to change their profession or return to active learning (SOLAS, 2020). Under these conditions, FET in Ireland ceases to be a peripheral link in education and transforms into a strategic tool for enhancing the competitiveness of the national economy, social cohesion, and the implementation of the lifelong learning concept. In recent decades, Ireland has become one of the leaders in the European market and is a unique example of a country that has systematically focused on the development and quality of FET. At the same time, global trends such as automation, digitalization, and the transition to a sustainable economy have actualized its further development with a focus on forming flexible skills in specialists, which the traditional formal FET system cannot always provide in a timely manner. This has led to a "skills gap" in the workforce, which has become a serious challenge for the country's economic growth. To overcome this gap, the Irish FET system has introduced mechanisms for rapid retraining and upskilling of the employed population, and especially the unemployed. Ensuring the quality of FET has become not just an educational task, but a critically important element of Ireland's national economic and social policy, which explains the significant investment in FET reform. This is reflected in strategic documents such as the "National Education and Training Strategy to 2030" (Department of Education, 2020) and "Innovation 2020" (Government of Ireland, 2013; 2015). These documents emphasize the need to ensure high-quality FET, adapted to the needs of a knowledge-based economy and contemporary social challenges.

FET in Ireland has a long history, associated with the founding of technical schools in the 19th century. The modern FET system has been significantly transformed by reforms initiated in 2013, during which the Further Education and Training Authority (SOLAS) and Quality and Qualifications Ireland (hereinafter – QQI) were established. The newly created institutions, SOLAS and QQI, have facilitated centralized coordination of the FET system's development by establishing clear quality standards for FET, and by developing and implementing educational and training programs for vocational training, retraining, and upskilling of specialists, taking into account international requirements, which is critically important for the competitiveness of Irish specialists in the global labor market (Government of Ireland, 2012; SOLAS, 2020). SOLAS and QQI actively collaborate with employers and other stakeholders to adapt FET programs to market needs. Furthermore, QQI develops and maintains the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ), which is the basis for harmonizing all levels of qualifications: from primary education to doctoral degrees, and ensures a clear definition and classification of qualifications, including those obtained in the formal FET system at levels 4-6 of the NFQ (Quality and Qualifications Ireland, n.d.; 2021). Each level is defined based on the knowledge, skills, and competencies that a graduate must demonstrate, namely: level 4 corresponds to basic vocational certificates, which reflect the acquisition of fundamental skills for starting a career; level 5 involves more advanced certificates, the possession of which allows FET graduates to find employment in specific sectors of the economy or be admitted to further education; level 6 leads to a diploma, which allows graduates to enter universities or occupy positions requiring a higher level of qualification. For example, a person with a level 6 vocational diploma can enroll in bachelor's degree programs. It is important that the framework provides a link between educational programs of different educational institutions, allowing students to transfer from one program to another, provided their content meets the requirements of the corresponding NFQ level. In addition, the NFQ is harmonized with the European Qualifications Framework (hereinafter-EQF) to facilitate the recognition of Irish qualifications abroad (The European Qualifications Framework Europass, 2017).

Changes in the economy, particularly the widespread use of digital technologies, biotechnologies, and green energy, necessitate the rapid adaptation of FET to these changes. Significant attention is paid to the inclusivity of FET, which involves ensuring access to education

for various population groups, including persons with special needs and migrants. This reflects the social orientation of the Irish FET system, which aims to reduce inequality and promote social mobility. Another important aspect is the collaboration between FET institutions, the government, and the private sector. Ireland actively involves employers in the development of educational and training programs, which allows for the synchronization of the educational process with the real needs of the economy. This is facilitated by apprenticeship programs that combine students' theoretical learning with practical experience in the workplace. For example, in 2016, new apprenticeship programs were introduced in sectors such as information technology and finance, which helped attract a significant number of young people to high-tech sectors of the economy (Department of Education, 2016). This approach not only improves the quality of vocational training but also has a positive impact on the employment of graduates. Despite these achievements, the FET system in Ireland faces a number of challenges. In particular, the growth of automation and artificial intelligence necessitates the constant updating of the content of educational and training programs, which can be a difficult task for FET institutions with limited resources. Furthermore, ensuring equal access for individuals to FET programs in rural regions remains a problem, as most institutions are concentrated in urban centers such as Dublin and Cork. To overcome these challenges, the Irish government is investing in the digitalization of education and the expansion of the network of regional FET centers, which is part of the "Innovation 2020" strategy (Government of Ireland, 2015). Free or partially state-funded programs are being introduced to create learning opportunities for a wide range of the population. This indicates that the FET quality assurance system in Ireland is developing in a complex context, trying to balance economic and social imperatives, responding to global trends, and overcoming deep-rooted structural problems.

Sources. The FET quality assurance system in Ireland is a subject of attention for scholars who research mechanisms for improving educational standards and their correspondence to labor market needs. For instance, in the article "Further Education and Training in Ireland: Past, Present and Future," the authors analyze the evolution of FET in Ireland, paying attention to the role of QQI in establishing national quality standards and their harmonization with European qualification frameworks, which contributes to the international recognition of Irish diplomas. The authors note that regular evaluation of educational programs and accreditation of FET institutions contribute to improving its quality and relevance to the needs of the economy (McGuinness et al., 2014). Researchers Smyth, E., & McCoy, S. (2009) in their work "Investing in Education: Combating Educational Disadvantage" substantiate the impact of quality education, particularly FET, on reducing educational inequality. They emphasize that QQI standards, which include monitoring learning outcomes, allow for the assessment of the effectiveness of educational programs from the perspective of their practical value. The research highlights the importance of collecting feedback from employers to improve educational programs and prepare graduates for professional activity. The impact of QQI recommendations on FET is discussed in the article "Quality Assurance in the Irish Further Education and Training System: A Review of the Impact of Adverse Factors in the Context of QQI's Activities." The authors note that the implementation of internal quality management systems, as provided for by QQI recommendations, contributes to increasing the transparency and accountability of FET institutions. The study also indicates the existence of challenges related to the limited resources of small FET institutions and emphasizes that QQI standards contribute to increasing the competitiveness of graduates in the labor market (Quality in Irish Further Education and Training, 2019).

Of scientific interest are the results of research presented in the book "Key Milestones in the Evolution of Skills Policy in Ireland." The authors, Rory O'Sullivan & Justin Rami (2022), view Irish FET as a political and structural project that has gone through several phases of reform. They emphasize that initial state restrictions, church control, and a lack of coordination in the initial phase have transformed into a modern model where FET has a clear strategic role in a three-tiered education system. The development of the sector is determined by integration with EU policies, the

participation of professional bodies, and institutional reforms that have enabled the formation of a competent workforce. At the same time, the results of analytical studies over the last decade indicate that participants in the educational services market perceive the FET sector in Ireland as less prestigious than university education. In particular, a survey of employers and FET providers conducted by the Economic and Social Research Institute of Ireland showed a persistent hierarchy in which higher education dominates FET in terms of symbolic capital (Smyth & Lydon, 2019). The results of a comparative assessment reflect a similar trend, noting that the public often assigns FET a "second-choice" status, despite its market significance (OECD, 2020). The data obtained prove that the existing socially constructed hierarchy is based not so much on the quality of educational programs as on established perceptions of the value of academic education. This hierarchy is interconnected with the diversity of FET profiles, which creates difficulty in forming a unified brand for the education sector.

In the scientific discourse of Ukraine, there is also an interest among researchers in analyzing the experience of ensuring FET quality in EU countries, including Ireland. In particular, Yu. H. Zaporozhchenko (2007) systematized the stages of formation of the national educational model of Ireland in the context of European integration. The author characterizes the legal framework for management and financing, the structure of school and post-secondary education, the National Framework of Qualifications, and quality assurance mechanisms, and also details the role of the state and social partners in modernizing the educational process and identifies key challenges for further development. The retrospectives of the development of secondary and higher education in Ireland, the driving factors of transformational processes, and the influence of socio-economic conditions on educational policy are revealed in the dissertation research of Yu. A. Kucher (2008). The work emphasizes the organizational and pedagogical principles of reforms, the role of confessional and state structures, as well as financing mechanisms that have made it possible to improve the quality and accessibility of the educational process at all levels. The issue of the European context of forming a policy for ensuring the quality of FET in EU countries, and in particular in Ireland, was researched by L. P. Pukhovska (2017). She analyzed the strategic initiatives of the EU that stimulate innovation in FET and highlighted examples of the implementation of dual programs, digital technologies, and partnerships between employers and training centers, which allows for the adaptation of personnel training to the needs of the labor market.

A comparative pedagogical analysis of the Irish model of adult education quality is reflected in the works of Ukrainian researchers, who define the role of state policy, national agencies, and partnerships with stakeholders in this process, as well as the autonomy of FET institutions. For example, an article by O. I. Sytnyk (2013) analyzes the regulatory framework, institutional network, and financial mechanisms of adult education in Ireland, which includes programs for professional development, continuing education, and lifelong learning. Of scientific interest is the research by Yu. H. Zaporozhchenko (2011) "Distance Education in Ireland in a Qualitative Aspect," in which the author identifies a trend towards the development of flexible learning trajectories, active participation of employers, and the use of digital platforms, which allows adults to improve their competencies without interrupting their work. The researcher proves that the integration of ICT into formal and non-formal education allows for expanding adults' access to professional and academic growth. The publications of M.I. Bohodyst (2023) highlight the system of supplementary education in Ireland, namely short-term courses, training sessions, and online platforms aimed at increasing the professional mobility of the adult population. The author emphasizes the potential of non-formal education as a tool for the continuous development of competencies throughout life, as well as the importance of partnerships between educational institutions, industry associations, and employers, which ensure the relevance of content and allow for prompt consideration of changes in the labor market. Thus, the scientific works of foreign and Ukrainian researchers form a conceptual basis for understanding Ireland's experience in the field of FET quality assurance. They emphasize the importance of national strategies, cross-sectoral

partnership, institutional autonomy, and external monitoring as key factors of effectiveness. These provisions allow for the adaptation of elements of the Irish FET quality system to the Ukrainian context, increasing the effectiveness of measures to ensure the quality of the national system of vocational education.

Results and Discussion. The key legal and regulatory document that laid the institutional foundation for the transformation of FET in Ireland in accordance with new quality requirements is the Further Education and Training Act, 2013. It initiated a large-scale institutional modernization of the FET system, aimed at overcoming fragmentation, centralizing management functions, and strengthening accountability. One of the key decisions of this Act was the creation of new structures that provided a unified infrastructure for delivering FET services in line with the national strategy. First and foremost, the Act established the Further Education and Training Authority (SOLAS), which received a mandate for the strategic management and coordination of the entire FET system in Ireland. SOLAS took on the functions of planning, funding, monitoring, and evaluating the effectiveness of FET programs implemented by various providers at the regional level (SOLAS, 2014). An important mission of this service became the implementation of national FET strategies, particularly the "Future of Further Education and Training: Transforming Learning (2020–2024)" strategy, which defines the priorities for modernizing the FET system in accordance with the requirements of the digital, green, and inclusive transformation of society (SOLAS, 2020). The implementation of the provisions of this act was important as it provided the conditions for creating a flexible, transparent, and accountable architecture for FET quality management. The Act enabled the implementation of strategic initiatives aimed at strengthening the role of FET in solving socio-economic problems, contributing to an increase in the employment rate of graduates, a reduction in educational losses, and the integration of marginalized groups into the FET system. That is, on the one hand, it defined the structural prerequisite for introducing a systematic approach to ensuring FET quality at the national level and creating a unified policy for the development of qualifications and educational programs aligned with the NFQ, and on the other hand, it played a key role in reorienting the FET system from an administrative platform to a service based on quality, innovation, and effectiveness (Department of Education and Skills, 2013; O'Connor & Courtney, 2017).

In accordance with the Further Education and Training Act, a reorganization of the Vocational Education Committees (VECs), which acted as regional bodies responsible for FET management, took place. Based on these committees, in accordance with the Education and Training Boards Act, 2013, 16 regional Education and Training Boards (ETBs) were created (Education and Training Boards Act, 2013), which became key providers of educational services in the regions, taking on the responsibility for implementing educational programs, managing FET institutions, engaging stakeholders, and developing educational capacities. According to the provisions of the Act, ETBs also received expanded powers regarding cooperation with employers, support for inclusive education, development of digital skills, and implementation of lifelong learning programs. This allowed for a better response to labor market needs, orienting the FET system towards results, and ensuring more effective coordination of educational services in the regions (Coolahan et al., 2017). ETBs are also responsible for organizing and coordinating adult education programs in their respective regions. ETBs work in close cooperation with the Irish Department of Education, as well as the Department of Employment Affairs. The quality assurance system in ETBs includes annual external reviews aimed at verifying the providers' ability to maintain the quality of FET through independent assessment. It includes all processes, mechanisms, principles, and structures that guarantee the proper level of quality of educational programs, services, and learning outcomes in the FET sphere. The Act enshrined the provision on the mandatory compliance of educational programs with the requirements of national quality standards, which became the basis for the development and implementation of internal quality assurance systems at the level of educational service providers (O'Connor & Courtney, 2017). In addition, the document records the obligation of cooperation with employers and social partners to ensure the practical

orientation of the training content and its relevance to the needs of the labor market. This significantly influenced the content of education, which became more adaptive, competence-oriented, and connected to the real conditions of production activities (SOLAS, 2020). Each ETB is responsible for organizing and providing educational programs in its region, including vocational courses, internship programs, on-the-job training, and professional development courses. Together, these two institutions—SOLAS and the ETBs—formed a two-tiered management structure, where SOLAS formulates policy, develops strategies, and provides funding, while the ETBs ensure policy implementation on the ground. In this way, Ireland moved closer to implementing European approaches to FET management, particularly the idea of lifelong learning and cross-sectoral interaction.

In the context of ensuring FET quality, the Further Education and Training Act provided for a gradual transition from fragmented management to a single integrated system, where SOLAS collaborates with other key partners, especially with Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) – an independent state body established in 2012 as a result of the adoption of the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act (Government of Ireland, 2012). The agency acts as a national regulator responsible for the accreditation of educational programs and the external evaluation of FET institutions. Within its powers, QQI ensures the transparency of the qualifications award system, its coordination, updating, and monitoring, as well as maintaining a state register. In the external evaluation of the quality of educational services, QQI uses a system of cyclical reviews and accreditation based on the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG). An important component of this activity is the verification of internal quality assurance systems in FET institutions. QQI is listed on the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR), which indicates its compliance with international standards of transparency, independence, and professionalism. QQI also functions as a national center for the recognition of academic qualifications and a coordinator for Europass, facilitating the recognition of foreign diplomas and certificates in Ireland and abroad.

In 2016, QQI approved the Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines, which became mandatory for all FET providers, including ETBs (Quality and Qualifications Ireland, 2016). In 2017, sector-specific guidelines for ETBs were published, detailing the requirements for each stage: from structuring educational programs to their review and improvement (Quality and Qualifications Ireland, 2017). In this regard, ETBs are obliged to have a QQI-approved quality assurance system that covers the following components: assessment policy, protection of student rights, structural governance, involvement of external experts, feedback, and continuous program updating. QQI provides external monitoring and re-validations to maintain compliance with standards (Quality and Qualifications Ireland, 2021). The recommendations for ensuring FET quality became an important step in raising standards in the FET sphere. These recommendations establish clear requirements for FET institutions regarding the development and implementation of internal quality management systems, regular evaluation of teachers, and collection of feedback from students and employers. The recommendations emphasize the importance of adapting educational and training programs to rapid changes in technology and labor market needs, which is key to preparing competitive specialists (Quality and Qualifications Ireland, 2023). The implementation of the updated QQI recommendations has a significant impact on the functioning of FET institutions: firstly, they received a clear benchmark for how to organize internal quality assurance processes, which, in turn, increases trust in them from students, employers, and society as a whole; secondly, the emphasis on teacher evaluation and their professional development contributes to improving the quality of teaching. Teachers who continuously improve their skills are able to more effectively transfer knowledge to students and prepare them for real challenges in the workplace; thirdly, taking into account feedback from students and employers allows FET institutions to better adapt their programs to labor market needs. For example, if employers indicate that graduates lack certain skills, such as working with new production technologies, FET institutions can promptly make changes to their programs.

The described approaches to ensuring FET quality allow for the identification of the leading trends in this process and the characterization of their impact on the professional training of future specialists for the modern labor market of Ireland and the European Union countries. One of the trends that characterizes the development of interaction between educational providers, state institutions, employers, and public organizations is the institutionalization of partnership between FET institutions and stakeholders. An important condition for effective partnership is clearly regulated mechanisms of interaction, which in Ireland are defined at the level of legislation and strategic documents. In particular, the "Future of Further Education and Training: Transforming Learning (2020–2024)" strategy defines the importance of cross-sectoral coordination as a prerequisite for effective FET quality management (SOLAS, 2020). Stakeholders are involved in advisory bodies, committees, and policy development groups at the national and regional levels. This allows for the consideration of the positions of employers, educators, students, and analytical centers. Interaction is also ensured through consultation platforms, surveys, and public discussions of strategies and reforms. This approach enhances the democratic nature of FET quality assurance processes. Representatives of the labor market are actively involved in the process of developing quality standards, evaluating learning outcomes, and improving educational programs, which increases the level of responsibility of all system participants for the legitimacy of decisions, trust in the quality system, and ensuring the adaptability of educational programs to the challenges of the modern labor market.

The establishment of partnership is carried out through institutionally formalized digital platforms called Regional Skills Fora (RSF). They function as intermediaries between FET institutions and representatives of: business and employers (from small and medium-sized businesses to large corporations); state bodies (Ministry of Education, Ministry of Labour, local administrations); public organizations and trade unions, etc., with the aim of systematically collecting data and analyzing labor market needs; developing and adapting FET programs; organizing joint initiatives; forecasting future needs for qualifications; and raising public awareness about the labor market and ensuring communication. The participation of stakeholders in the activities of such forums contributes to the alignment of strategic and operational decisions. Through mechanisms of bilateral dialogue, a long-term vision for the development of FET is formed. RSF create conditions for the formation of local FET and employment clusters. This allows for the implementation of quality policy at the level of regional needs (Department of Education, 2020).

The institutionalization of partnership is accompanied by the creation of permanent advisory structures based at FET providers. Through such structures, employers participate in the verification of learning outcomes, the updating of program content, and external evaluation. Students, in turn, have representation on supervisory boards and academic committees, which ensures their experience is taken into account. This approach creates conditions for building a partnership culture of quality, as well as a new ethic of educational governance – an ethic of participation and co-responsibility (Quality and Qualifications Ireland, 2024). Recognizing stakeholders as full partners contributes to the transformation of FET quality management from an administrative procedure into a collaborative process. As a result, institutionalized partnership becomes a driver of innovation in the FET sphere, which corresponds to the modern understanding of FET quality as a multidimensional social phenomenon. The involvement of stakeholders in FET quality assurance processes is also supported by state policy and financial instruments. Programs to stimulate employer participation, grants for public organizations, support for consulting activities – all this forms an infrastructure for sustainable participation and strengthens the institutional capacity of FET institutions to attract external partners. The Irish experience demonstrates that the institutionalization of partnership is a strategic resource for the development of the FET system.

A leading trend in ensuring the quality of FET in Ireland is also the strengthening of the role of the Quality and Qualifications Ireland in the external evaluation of FET quality. Such a centralized quality management system for FET allows for: the regular conduct of external

evaluations of the activities of FET institutions and their educational programs. For this, FET institutions are obliged to periodically review their programs to ensure they meet the modern requirements of the labor market and the needs of students, and are recognized at the national and international levels. In particular, the evaluation of the content of educational programs is aimed at ensuring their relevance, correspondence to new technologies and industry trends, and established quality standards. Teaching methods are analyzed from the perspective of their effectiveness and ability to facilitate students' assimilation of knowledge and formation of practical skills. Learning outcomes are assessed by analyzing student performance, readiness for professional activity, and the correspondence of their competencies to employers' expectations. This approach allows FET institutions to make timely changes to program content. The evaluation of FET institutions' activities is conducted by independent experts to confirm their ability to provide quality FET. The accreditation procedure involves assessing the resources of the FET institution, the qualifications of the teaching staff, and the effectiveness of management systems. In particular, QQI checks for the necessary infrastructure: modern classrooms, laboratories, and technical equipment that contribute to quality learning. The qualification of teachers is assessed based on their professional experience, pedagogical skills, and ability to adapt the educational process to the needs of students. Management systems, such as internal quality assurance procedures, are also subject to careful review. QQI accreditation is not only a confirmation of FET quality but also an incentive for FET institutions to constantly improve their activities to meet high standards.

The centralized FET quality management system also allows for: monitoring learning outcomes to assess how effectively students are acquiring the knowledge and skills provided for in educational and training programs. QQI requires FET institutions to systematically track student progress, analyze their academic achievements, and assess the correspondence of the acquired competencies to employers' expectations. This process involves the use of various assessment methods, such as tests, practical assignments, projects, and feedback from employers who hire graduates. Monitoring also includes analyzing the career paths of graduates to determine how the acquired FET contributes to their successful integration into the labor market. This approach allows not only to assess the quality of FET but also to identify potential shortcomings in educational and training programs that require correction; developing and implementing quality standards, recommendations, and guidelines for FET institutions concerning various aspects of FET quality assurance; collaborating with international organizations and agencies for FET quality assurance to exchange experience and best practices. The advantages of this management system for ensuring FET quality in Ireland include: a standardized approach to the formation of FET content. This means that regardless of where a student receives education, whether in a large university in Dublin or in a smaller college in a rural area, the quality of education meets nationwide standards; guaranteeing the quality of FET, ensuring the relevance, effectiveness, and correspondence of educational programs to labor market needs; efficiency and resource savings based on the rationalization of resources, avoidance of duplication, and implementation of a single, proven methodology; transparency and accountability for stakeholders to obtain full information about program accreditation, results of external evaluations, and FET quality standards; recognition of foreign qualifications by providing advice and official statements on the equivalence of foreign diplomas and certificates to Irish qualifications. This facilitates the integration of immigrants into the labor market and the FET system of Ireland.

An important trend in ensuring FET quality in Ireland is the focus on learning outcomes and the professional competencies of learners, rather than on what teachers teach. This means that curricula, teaching methods, and assessment systems are developed with the ultimate goal of achieving clearly defined learning outcomes. These outcomes, in turn, are closely linked to the professional competencies necessary for a successful career for specialists in a particular field. Key aspects of this trend include: orientation towards labor market requirements: FET programs are developed and evaluated taking into account feedback from

employers. This allows for the identification of current skills and knowledge that are critically important for specific professions. This approach ensures that graduates possess not only theoretical knowledge but also practical skills that enable them to effectively integrate into the production process. An example can be the introduction of transversal skills into curricula: critical thinking, problem-solving, teamwork, digital literacy, which are universal and in demand in any field; measuring the achievement of specific outcomes: instead of assessing the volume of educational material taught, the emphasis is on assessing the level of student achievement. This involves developing clear assessment criteria that allow for the objective measurement of acquired knowledge, abilities, and skills; using a variety of assessment methods, such as project work, case studies, simulations, portfolios, and not just traditional exams, for the purpose of a comprehensive assessment of competence; for example, instead of assessing the results of memorizing theory, a student may be asked to develop a real project that demonstrates their ability to apply knowledge in practice.

The idea of focusing on learning outcomes and professional competencies is actively promoted by organizations responsible for ensuring the quality of FET, for example, CEDEFOP and ETF (2016). They develop standards and recommendations that help FET institutions implement this approach. External and internal quality assurance systems evaluate educational programs not only by their structure but also by their effectiveness in achieving the stated learning outcomes and their relevance to labor market needs. This contributes to the continuous improvement of educational programs based on the analysis of achieved results and feedback from stakeholders. The modern labor market requires specialists to have not only specialized knowledge but also flexibility, adaptability, and the ability to learn throughout life. The results-oriented approach stimulates the development of soft skills, which are critically important for success in any professional field. After all, the educational process becomes more interactive, problem-oriented, where students are actively involved in solving real tasks, thereby developing both professional and personal qualities. In this context, great importance is attached to the development of students' innovative competence. The Irish government actively supports research projects that allow students to participate in the creation of innovative solutions. For example, within the framework of an initiative by Enterprise Ireland, FET institutions in Ireland receive funding for research in areas such as biotechnology, artificial intelligence, and green energy (Enterprise Ireland, 2024). Students have the opportunity to work on research projects, which are often implemented in collaboration with universities and industrial partners. For example, in the technology sector, students can participate in developing new algorithms for data processing or testing innovative materials for production. Such projects contribute to deepening knowledge, develop critical thinking, and the ability to independently solve complex problems. Innovative activity is also supported through the creation of specialized laboratories and innovation centers in FET institutions. These centers are equipped with modern equipment that allows students to experiment and create innovations. In particular, the Dublin Institute of Technology has created a center for cybersecurity research, where students can work on real cases related to data protection (Dublin Institute of Technology, 2024; Expert Group on Future Skills Needs, 2014), and create simulations of production situations that help them develop practical skills. For example, in the field of information technology, students can participate in virtual projects for software development, and in the field of mechanical engineering – work with digital models of equipment. Such approaches enhance both the quality of FET and the competitiveness of graduates in the labor market. The advantages of FET oriented towards learning outcomes and professional competencies include: increased relevance of educational programs; growth in employment levels; transparency and accountability; motivation of students for continuous improvement. This trend is not just a fashionable trend, but a fundamental paradigm shift that makes FET more effective, flexible, and responsive to the challenges of modernity.

The trend towards the digitalization of FET quality management processes demonstrates the gradual transition of Irish FET institutions from traditional control methods to innovative digital

procedures that align with European standards, particularly EQAVET (n.d.). This transition is driven by the need for more effective monitoring and evaluation of the quality of the educational process in the context of rapid technological changes and globalization trends in the FET sphere (ETF, 2018). The digital quality assurance strategy for FET in Ireland is integrated with the quality assurance model, where external control by QQI is aligned with the internal quality systems of FET institutions. The system requires the mandatory presence of internal quality procedures for each provider, as well as regular cycles of external FET reviews (OECD, 2023; 2025). This approach unifies standards and enables the integration of digital parameters into general quality criteria. This integration helps to avoid fragmentation of the system and ensure a single quality ecosystem for all learning formats. The OECD and other international organizations emphasize the positive impact of digitalization on the relevance of FET and the learning outcomes of graduates. QQI plays a central role in this, defining digital tools as the basis for building transparent and secure systems of internal and external quality assurance. For example, the Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Online and Blended Learning (QQI, 2023) serve as the legal and regulatory foundation for creating FET quality standards.

The integration of digital tools into internal quality assurance systems occurs through the annual reporting of FET institutions, which demonstrate compliance with standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European educational area, and digital platforms allow for improved data manageability. The use of digital aggregation systems (processing large arrays of information by creating statistical indicators), particularly PLSS, allows for the analysis of key performance indicators (KPIs) for each ETB, implemented by SOLAS taking into account the data presented on the portal (Quality Assurance of Further Education and Training in the ETB Sector, 2023). The PLSS digital tool is aimed at collecting personal data of students, managing their educational trajectory, administering the educational process in the FET sphere, and analyzing learning outcomes. PLSS also determines the possibilities for rapid reporting to state bodies, particularly SOLAS and ETBI. This helps to increase the level of transparency, accountability, and efficiency of the FET system. In addition, the system helps to reduce the administrative burden on the students themselves, as their personal data is stored centrally in compliance with strict security and confidentiality standards and is reused. A special place in PLSS is given to the ability to account for various indicators: course enrollment, attendance, successful completion, certificates obtained, employment, etc. This data allows FET management bodies to assess the quality of educational services and make decisions regarding the financing and development of FET educational and training programs. The use of aggregated statistics contributes to the analysis of social, economic, and educational effects. As a result, managerial coordination and support for public-private partnership in the field of FET quality assurance are ensured.

Conclusions. The legislative reforms of 2012–2013 were not a simple administrative reorganization of the FET quality assurance system. They were a systematic attempt to overcome the fragmentation and lack of accountability that characterized the previous model. As a result, a logical and transparent three-tiered structure was created, where QQI sets national quality standards, SOLAS defines the national strategy and allocates funding, and ETBs ensure the provision of educational services at the regional level. This new architecture laid the foundation for building a more integrated, accountable, and flexible FET system, capable of responding more effectively to the complex economic and social needs of Ireland in the 21st century. The FET quality assurance system in Ireland operates within the framework of the QQI agency, which is the main regulator in matters of accreditation, recognition of qualifications, as well as supervision of internal and external quality assurance mechanisms. The system defines mandatory standards for FET providers, such as requirements for software, teaching activities, monitoring of learning outcomes, and the implementation of feedback mechanisms from students, employers, and the public. That is, it is aimed not only at formal control but also at the continuous improvement of educational practices, adaptation to changes in the labor market, stimulation of innovation, and building trust in FET

among all interested parties. Therefore, the FET quality assurance system in Ireland is a quality management tool that covers all stages: from the development of educational content to the analysis of graduate employment, and ensures transparency, accountability, and efficiency of the entire educational process.

In the context of the modern development of FET in Ireland, several leading trends in ensuring its quality are identified. Firstly, the role of the national agency QQI is strengthening, which coordinates the external evaluation of FET quality, the accreditation of educational programs and FET institutions, as well as the development of the qualifications framework. Such a centralized management system for quality assurance allows for the maintenance of a standardized approach to FET content, regardless of the region or type of institution (Quality and Qualifications Ireland, 2022; Education and Training Monitor: Ireland, 2024). Strengthening the role of QQI in ensuring the quality of FET and its compliance with European standards allows Ireland to maintain its competitiveness in the global educational space and provide students with high-quality qualifications recognized by employers. Secondly, the focus is shifting to learning outcomes and professional competencies, and not just on the teaching process. Programs are evaluated based on the criterion of achieving specific results that meet the requirements of the labor market. This orients FET towards the development of skills demanded in the modern economy and integrates the concept of a results-oriented approach to quality assurance. Thirdly, the institutionalization of partnership with stakeholders, implemented through the activities of regional skills fora, allows for the adaptation of educational programs to the specific needs of the local labor market, taking into account changes in the demand for qualifications and ensuring the relevance of FET content to the labor market. This approach contributes to increasing the employment rate of graduates and trust in the FET system (Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, 2019). This trend is extremely promising. It allows for the creation of a flexible and adaptive FET system, increases the competitiveness of the workforce, and contributes to the sustainable economic development of the country. Fourthly, the digitalization of FET quality assurance processes, particularly in the context of implementing the "Future of Further Education and Training: Transforming Learning (2020–2024)" strategy, is based on increasing investment in digital infrastructure, electronic assessment, and online monitoring of learning outcomes, which ensures the transparency and accuracy of data collection on the effectiveness of educational programs (SOLAS, 2020). Thus, the FET quality assurance system in Ireland is oriented towards the unification of requirements, the flexibility of educational programs, social partnership, and digital tools. It functions within the framework of integration into the European Qualifications Area, adhering to the requirements of ESG and EQAVET, which ensures mutual recognition and mobility within the EU (European Commission, 2019).

Based on the results of studying the experience of ensuring FET quality in Ireland and the peculiarities of the functioning of Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI), it is advisable for Ukraine to implement: an integrated model of quality management for vocational education. The central element of such a system should be a National Agency for the Quality of Vocational Education, responsible for developing and implementing quality standards, accrediting educational programs and vocational education institutions, professional expertise, and acting in accordance with European requirements. At the strategic level, an organization should be envisaged that defines policy and allocates resources, and at the executive level – a network of regional vocational education providers responsible for providing quality educational services; a results-oriented approach to the professional training of specialists, according to which attention is focused not on the teaching process, but on the achieved learning outcomes of vocational education seekers. The standard of vocational education should define specific learning outcomes in terms of knowledge, skills, and attitudes that meet the needs of the labor market. Educational programs should be aimed at forming and developing competencies demanded by the modern economy, including critical thinking, digital literacy, entrepreneurship, and the ability to learn throughout life. Such a transformation requires updating assessment methods, which should include project activities, portfolios, case studies, and

simulations; the institutionalization of partnership between vocational education institutions and stakeholders to increase the relevance of vocational education to labor market requirements. Similar to the Irish regional skills fora, it is advisable to create regional digital platforms in Ukraine that would unite employers, educators, representatives of authorities, and civil society to ensure the quality of vocational education. Such platforms would enable a link between the regional vocational education system and the labor market, particularly based on joint forecasting of demand for professional qualifications, adaptation of educational and training programs, and organization of internships and mentoring programs. The participation of business in the development and evaluation of educational programs will contribute to increasing trust in the vocational education system and the quality of specialist training; digital tools for monitoring and evaluating the quality of vocational education as a basis for building transparent and secure systems of internal and external quality assurance, creating a single digital platform for data collection, monitoring, self-assessment, and accreditation. The introduction of electronic portfolios for vocational education seekers, electronic assessment systems, and analytical dashboards will allow for the objective tracking of progress and the effectiveness of learning for vocational education seekers. Such digital tools should be integrated with state and industry databases to obtain more complete information about the results of educational activities. It is also necessary to ensure the digital literacy of pedagogical workers in the vocational education system and support for IT infrastructure. The development of digital tools will contribute to ensuring the quality of vocational education even in conditions of blended learning. This will open up new opportunities for personalized learning as well. No less important is the alignment of the National Qualifications Framework with the European one to ensure transparency, mobility, and recognition of Ukrainian qualifications in EU countries. It is advisable to introduce micro-credentials as a mechanism for rapid response to changes in technology and the economy, which allows for the confirmation of individual competencies and the integration of the results of non-formal and informal learning. A harmonized qualifications framework should have clearly defined level descriptors, award procedures, and updating mechanisms. To ensure the sustainable quality of vocational education, it is necessary to provide for the continuous professional development of pedagogical workers. Professional development programs should cover topics of digital transformation, a results-oriented approach, assessment methodology, and the implementation of innovations. It is worth promoting the academic mobility of teachers, their participation in international projects, internships, and exchanges. This will allow the pedagogical community to take an active part in shaping a culture of quality in vocational education and disseminating best practices through national cooperation platforms.

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ТЕНДЕНЦІЇ ЗАБЕЗПЕЧЕННЯ ЯКОСТІ ПІСЛЯСЕРЕДНЬОЇ ОСВІТИ І ПРОФЕСІЙНОЇ ПІДГОТОВКИ В ІРЛАНДІЇ: ВІД ЗАКОНОДАВЧИХ РЕФОРМ ДО СТРАТЕГІЧНИХ ПРІОРИТЕТІВ

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Реферат:

Актуальність статті полягає в необхідності системного аналізу еволюції багаторівневої структури післясередньої освіти і професійної підготовки (далі – ПОП) в Ірландії та провідних тенденцій забезпечення її якості. Ця система є складною, оскільки поєднує централізоване стратегічне планування та фінансування із незалежним зовнішнім контролем якості освіти й дотримання стандартів та децентралізованим наданням освітніх послуг. Така архітектура, що сформувалася внаслідок масштабних реформ 2012-2013 рр., представляє значний інтерес для дослідників і розробників освітньої політики в Україні.

Метою статті є визначення та характеристика провідних тенденцій забезпечення якості ПОП в Ірландії, з'ясування можливостей їх урахування у вдосконаленні системи забезпечення якості професійної освіти в Україні.

Методи: вивчення законодавчих, нормативно-правових документів, емпіричних даних – для визначення провідних тенденцій забезпечення якості ПОП в Ірландії; аналіз і синтез, узагальнення поглядів щодо досліджуваної проблеми – для з'ясування можливостей урахування означених тенденцій у вдосконаленні системи забезпечення якості професійної освіти в Україні.

Результати: визначено та схарактеризовано провідні тенденції забезпечення якості ПОП в Ірландії (інституціоналізація партнерства закладів ПОП зі стейкхолдерами, посилення ролі Національного агентства якості та кваліфікацій у зовнішньому оцінюванні якості ПОП, орієнтація на результати навчання та професійні компетентності, цифровізація процесів управління якістю ПОП); сформульовано низку рекомендацій для вдосконалення української системи забезпечення якості професійної освіти.

Висновки. Законодавчі реформи у системі ПОП започаткували стратегічну перебудову її архітектури та вдосконалення якості. Створення інституцій для централізованої координації забезпечення якості ПОП й упровадження Національної рамки кваліфікацій дало змогу сформувати єдину систему визнання кваліфікацій, моніторингу та акредитації освітніх програм і закладів ПОП. Завдяки цьому Ірландія залишається конкурентоспроможною в глобальному освітньому та професійному середовищі, а випускники закладів ПОП отримують можливості для кар'єрного зростання та міжнародної мобільності. Досвід Ірландії є актуальним для запровадження в Україні: інтегрованої моделі управління якістю професійної освіти, результатоорієнтованого підходу до професійної підготовки фахівців; інституціоналізації партнерства закладів професійної освіти зі стейкхолдерами; цифрових інструментів моніторингу та оцінювання якості професійної освіти тощо.

Ключові слова: *післясередня освіта; професійна підготовка; Ірландія; провідні тенденції; система управління якістю; SOLAS; Quality and Qualifications Ireland; ETBs.*

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