**IRISH ASSOCIATION OF COMMUNITY TRAINING ORGANISATIONS (IACTO)**

**STRATEGIC PLANNING PROJECT IN RELATION TO FUTURE OF IACTO AND TO ROLES BEING UNDERTAKEN BY IACTO**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

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# INTRODUCTION

The Irish Association of Community Training Organisations Ltd. (IACTO) is the employer’s representative body for the boards of 36 Community Training Centres (CTCs). IACTO provides human resources, collective employer/employee relations and management support services to its membership. Under a National Agreement established in 1999, IACTO was recognised by partners to that Agreement (i.e. Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment; Department of Finance; FÁS; and SIPTU) as the representative organisation for CTC Boards of Directors in relation to consultations with FÁS on policy and funding matters as they affect CTCs and in relation to collective negotiations with SIPTU concerning terms and conditions of employment for CTC employees. The 1999 National Agreement also included arrangements for FÁS to provide funding to IACTO to enable it to fulfil its role as the collective employer’s body for CTCs.

Whilst acknowledging that the 1999 National Agreement for CTCs is still intact, it is also appreciated that the Agreement is under a certain level of threat or pressure. Part of the reason for the 1999 National Agreement being under some strain relates to organisational changes which have taken place in relation to relevant statutory agencies in recent years. As mentioned earlier, FÁS were the funders of all the CTCs in Ireland and were the point of contact for IACTO as the employer’s body for CTCs. With the demise of FÁS, the establishment of SOLAS and responsibility for funding of CTCs passing to the Education and Training Boards (ETBs), the organisational landscape for CTCs has changed considerably in the last couple of years and there is some uncertainty in relation to the relative roles of SOLAS and ETBs concerning their collective relationships with CTCs and with IACTO (as the representative employers body for CTCs).

In this type of evolving policy and operational environment for the CTC sector, IACTO considered it useful to engage in some consultative and strategic planning work using the services of an experienced independent consultant. Stephen Rourke was contracted to carry out this consultative and strategic planning project for IACTO. The aim of this work was to consider the main challenges for CTC Boards and IACTO, to identify the main issues which needed to be addressed and to set out future potential strategies and options in relation to key challenges and issues. This work sought to be informed by the views, opinions and suggestions of IACTO Board members, of CTC Board members, of CTC managers and of people involved in key organisations such as the DES, SOLAS, ETBs and SIPTU.

# CTCs IN IRELAND

## NUMBER OF CTCs

At present, there are 36 CTCs in Ireland all of which are affiliated to IACTO and are part of the national network of CTCs in Ireland. Just less than half of the CTCs are located in Dublin with 14 in the geographical area covered by Dublin City ETB and 3 in the geographical area covered by Dublin and Dun Laoghaire ETB. The remaining 20 CTCs are spread across 12 other ETB areas

In 2014, a total of 3,246 young people participated in the courses and programmes organised and delivered by the 36 CTCs within the national CTC network. Work with these young learners totalled 492,758 days. Within the 36 CTCs there was a certification rate of 80%, a completion rate of 80% and a progression rate of 54% onto further training/education and employment. The total budget for the 36 CTCs in 2014 was €39,597,391 and this works out at a cost-per-learner/beneficiary of €11,891 during 2014.

## FUNCTIONS AND ACTIVITIES OF CTCs

CTCs provide training and educational support, services and programmes for young people between the ages of 16 and 21 who have only minimal educational qualifications which are not sufficient for them to progress onto further education, training or employment which requires a certain minimum level of educational attainment. The focus on young people who have left school early and/or with limited educational qualifications is reflected in the fact that at least 60% of the intake for CTCs should be young people who have received less than 5 Ds in their Junior Certificate examination. Over the years, CTCs have developed and modified the training programmes and courses being provided to the young learners and have aimed to strike the right balance between the individual and personal needs and circumstances of the learner on the one hand and the integration of these learners into accredited nationally recognised training programmes and modules (generally through QQI/FETAC) on the other hand.

CTCs offer a flexible and tailor-made programme of integrated general education, vocational training and work experience. CTC training programmes are designed so as to enable the young learners with the following:

* To return to learning and help them prepare for employment and adult life
* To continue their personal and social development
* To focus on areas and activities where he or she can experience and build on success
* To promote a positive attitude to his or her lifelong learning, personal independence and responsibilities, active citizenship and social inclusion
* To provide them with the skills, knowledge and competencies required whereby he or she can to get a secure foothold in the active labour market and compete for work

## IMPACT AND ACHIEVEMENTS OF CTCs

It is clear that CTCs have provided a very significant and important service for unemployed young people with few educational achievements. In considering the work and the achievements of CTCs over the last 25 years it is evident that there have also been a number of other significant outcomes and benefits. These include the following:

* CTCs are firmly rooted in the local areas within which they are located. The Board and staff of CTCs generally have a strong affinity with their own community, are networked locally and have a good understanding of the needs/circumstances of individual learners and families and of the labour market situation within their area/community.
* CTCs strive to strike the right balance between focusing on the individual and personal needs of each young learner on the one hand and organising courses and accreditation which have national recognition and transferability on the other hand. Whilst the CTCs will work at a pace and in such a way which is relevant to each young learner they will also aim to challenge young learners to achieve outcomes and results which will place them in a much stronger position to access decent employment, training and further education.
* CTCs tended to be practical and vocationally focused. There is a recognition that many young people who are enrolled with CTCs do not want to return to education, but rather, wish to be equipped with the skills and knowledge required to secure employment. In this context CTCs do not try to re-create a classroom type environment but provide a bridge between the formal education system from which the young learners have just emerged and the world of work which they hope to enter.
* CTCs have made important contributions to community activities and community services within the areas in which they are located. As part of the training and work experience process CTCs often link up with local groups and organisations who often benefit from goods and services which are produced and provided through the CTWs. This has led to mutually beneficial situations within which the young people learn new skills and acquire new knowledge whilst the local community avails of the work which takes place within CTCs.
* CTCs combine their focus on vocational skills development with a significant concentration on the personal growth of young learners. Many of these young people are involved in difficult life situations (e.g. at home, within the community, with peers) and have complex and multifarious needs. Within CTCs it is clear that they adopt a more holistic approach and aim to assist the young learners to address various difficulties they may be having in their lives (e.g. through Key Workers, Mentors, counsellors etc.).
* When benchmarked against other similar forms of provision (i.e. Youthreach Centres), the CTCs clearly represent reasonably good value for money. Whilst the number of young people participating in CTCs and Youthreach Centres is broadly similar (i.e. 3,700 in Youthreach Centres and 3,600 in CTCs according to the FET Programmes Service Plans for 2013) the spending is significantly different. The spend on Youthreach Centres is €70.0 million each year of which State funding is €50.7 or €13,703 per participant. The spend on CTCs is €40.4 million of which State funding is €26.0 (or €7,222 per participant).
* CTCs have been innovative and. CTCs know that many of their learners do not want a repeat of their school experience, they may not recognise the importance of certification and progression routes, they want to do things which are practical and not academic. Yet, at the same time, young people need to secure accreditation and certification to give them a good chance of competing well in the employment market. In this context many CTCs have been developing innovative ways in which to engage with learners in a manner which is person-centred, non-academic and practical whilst also enabling the learners to secure recognised accreditation and certification.
* CTCs represent an effective model of collaboration between the State and local communities in Ireland. Both the State and local communities are concerned about the minority of young people who leave school each year without any effective educational qualifications and who are most distanced from the labour market. CTCs provide opportunities for these people to acquire skills, knowledge and self-confidence which brings them closer to the labour market. The uniqueness of the CTC model of youth development is that whilst the State provides the funding to CTCs it is the CTCs at the local level which identify the strategies, the courses and the supports which are most appropriate for young people within their CTC catchment area.

This section of the document has highlighted some of the key benefits and outcomes which have emerged from the work of CTCs in Ireland over the last 25-30 years. There is a view however that more work could take place on promoting and celebrating the achievements of CTCs and making people more aware of the CTC model of youth development. This promotional and awareness work could involve testimonials from learners, case studies of individual CTCs, a review of quantitative and qualitative outcomes from the work and activities of CTCs in Ireland from the 1980s up until the present day. This issue of public information and awareness about CTCs will be considered again later in this Discussion Paper.

# IACTO

## BACKGROUND

IACTO is the national employer’s representative body for the voluntary Boards of CTCs in Ireland. IACTO represents the employers (i.e. CTC Boards) collectively in matters relating to pay and to terms and conditions of employment. IACTO also provides human resources, industrial relations, management and governance supports across the national network of CTCs on a shared services basis. IACTO was established in the 1990s by the Boards and managers of CTCs as a discussion forum and as a network to consider issues of mutual interest and concern to CTCs in Ireland. Its role, its structure and its relevance changed quite significantly with the 1999 National Agreement for the CTC sector which identified clear roles and functions for IACTO, roles and functions which required State funding if they were to be fulfilled and carried out effectively.

Given its importance to the CTC sector in general, and to the roles and functions of IACTO in particular, it is considered useful to highlight those aspects of the 1999 National Agreement which are particularly relevant to IACTO. These aspects, and the subsequent ways in which they have been implemented, include the following:

* IACTO is the recognised employer’s representative body for CTCs and represents the collective interests of CTC Boards.
* The function of IACTO in the matter of industrial/staff relations is to represent the employers collectively in matters relating to policy, funding issues as they affect staff and to respond to such issues when they are raised by CTCs and/or staff and/or Trade Unions.
* FÁS/SOLAS/ETBs, as the funding agencies, recognise IACTO as being the legitimate employer’s representative authority and empower IACTO to process matters and to respond directly to issues raised as appropriate.
* FÁS/SOLAS/ETBs, with the approval of relevant Government Departments, provide core financial support to enable IACTO to fulfil its role as the employer’s representative body and to liaise and negotiate with funders and with Trade Unions.
* IACTO represents the CTC Boards collectively in discussions with FÁS/SOLAS/ETBs on policy and funding matters as they affect the CTCs.
* IACTO represents the CTC Boards in collective negotiations with SIPTU.

On the basis of these functions set out for IACTO in the 1999 National Agreement and in the FÁS-IACTO Operational Guidelines, it is evident that IACTO has a central role to play in a number of key areas affecting CTCs in Ireland. It also represents quite a unique role given its positioning between the funders (from whom it must receive approval/mandate for any offers to be conveyed to CTC staff); the policy makers within relevant statutory agencies (who need to approve policies being implemented within CTCs); SIPTU (who represent workers within CTCs collectively); and the individual CTCs themselves (with whom IACTO are in regular and ongoing contact). IACTO acts at the hub of governance and management issues within the CTC sector and plays a vital co-ordination and liaison role between the funders, the policy makers, SIPTU and CTCs in relation to national policy and its implementation, collective bargaining, employee relations, human resources development and improvements in standards and good corporate governance.

## INDIVIDUAL FUNCTIONS AND ACTIVITIES OF IACTO, 2000-2015

### Collective Bargaining and National Industrial Relations

In its role as the employers representative body IACTO negotiates with FÁS/SOLAS/ETBs (the funders) and with SIPTU (the staff representative) on matters of pay and of terms and conditions of employment. Any agreements reached at the national level between IACTO, FÁS/SOLAS/ETBs apply equally to the Boards and staff of all CTCs. In order to carry out this role, IACTO prepares submissions and proposals on behalf of the CTC Boards of Directors and strives to meet on a regular basis with the funders (FÁS/SOLAS/ETBs) and with SIPTU. In relation to the stages which are involved in the negotiating process, IACTO and FÁS/SOLAS/ETBs would initially meet to agree positions on particular matters and IACTO would then negotiate these positions with SIPTU and support implementation of decisions at the local level. Since the State is the ultimate paymaster for CTCs, relevant State agencies (FÁS/SOLAS/ETBs) have to give a mandate or instruction to IACTO in relation to what is acceptable or what is being approved concerning expenditure of public money.

### Development of Policies for CTCs

In addition to work carried out on employee relations and industrial relations policies and procedures, IACTO under the 1999 Agreement is consulted on policy matters as they affect the CTCs and has also made significant contributions to the development of policies which aim to improve and enhance the quality and effectiveness of the work which takes place within the CTCs. For example, IACTO has played a significant role in relation to Operational Standards, the strategic and business plans and national training initiatives (sometimes leading out on these initiatives). In other situations IACTO acts as a strategic advisor to the funder and provides feedback on the views of Boards and managers. There is a strong view that IACTO, on behalf of the Boards of CTCs, has played a substantial role in influencing and enabling the transformational change that has taken place in CTCs since 2000 and has positively contributed to the quality of service which CTCs provide to their learners.

### Human Resources Management Support to Local CTCs

In addition to its national role concerning industrial relations and human resources management IACTO also provides assistance around these matters to individual CTCs. This service is provided when requested by CTCs and IACTO has worked closely with individual CTC Boards, FÁS/SOLAS/ETB regional teams and local trade union officials to resolve issues as close to source as possible. Through its Helpline and shared human resources advisory and consultancy services IACTO works with individual CTCs to determine the complexity of the issue, the legal requirements and the level of risk to the employer, the potential to impact upon national agreements and the level of resources required to effectively support the CTC Board to progress and conclude matters compliantly. IACTO has also developed the capacity of CTCs to professionalise the full employee lifecycle, from recruitment, contracts and job descriptions to support with training and development, performance management, conflict resolution, terminations and closures.

### Corporate Governance and Management Supports

In the period from 2000 to 2015 IACTO has provided a range of supports and services to the Boards and managers of CTCs. IACTO has worked with CTCs in order to increase the competencies, skills and knowledge of people involved in CTCs (Board, managers, other staff). Over the last 15 years IACTO, in consultation and in co-operation with CTCs, has produced a range of guidelines and handbooks for people involved in CTCs and has also organised training courses and programmes on issues of interest and relevance to CTC Boards and staff. Whilst some of these governance, management and training activities were carried out by core members of IACTO’s staff, other activities and initiatives involved the provision of additional programme money from FÁS which enabled IACTO to put together handbooks and to deliver training courses and programmes.

## KEY ACHIEVEMENTS OF IACTO, 2000 – 2015

* IACTO has helped to bring about a positive industrial relations environment within CTCs in Ireland. The arrangements established through the 1999 National Agreement (involving FÁS, IACTO and SIPTU) have worked extremely well over the last 15 years and have helped to ensure that issues and problems got resolved at an early stage in the process before they got too acrimonious or bitter and perhaps needed to be referred to a third party. The industrial peace and harmony within the CTC sector between 1999 and 2015 compares favourably to the situation which existed prior to 1999.
* IACTO has played an important role, together with other organisations, in improving standards and performance within CTCs in Ireland. There is now a stronger focus on matters relating to certification, qualifications and accreditation within CTCs and this is a positive development on account of the greater emphasis which employers are placing on their employees having a certain minimum level of recognised accreditation (such as the National Framework of Qualifications which are now utilised by CTCs). The work which has taken place around quality assurance and operating standards within CTCs has been good for the CTC sector and IACTO has played its role in contributing to these developments over the last 15 years.
* IACTO has provided a whole range of options and opportunities for CTC Boards, managers and other staff to enhance their skills, competencies and knowledge. Prior to the emergence of IACTO there were few opportunities for CTC Board members to be supported/trained in their role as Company Directors or for managers/staff to engage in continuous professional development. In the last number of years IACTO, with financial support provided through FÁS, have put in place a range of Development Initiatives (e.g. training courses, resource materials, handbooks) which have enhanced the competencies of CTC Boards and CTC managers/staff.
* The existence of IACTO has helped to maintain and sustain the Boards which have a governance and oversight function in relation to CTCs. In the opinion of many observers, some of these Boards would have disintegrated and collapsed if they had to deal with the complex and difficult industrial relations situations which have been handled on a collective or shared services basis by IACTO. With IACTO providing professional assistance to Boards in these situations, it meant that Boards did not have to get too embroiled in these matters and could focus on the core business of CTCs

*‘CTC Boards would collapse without IACTO and get into all sorts of trouble around corporate governance and IR/HR matters. Board members would resign and new people would not join if they had to take on all of the messy and complex and sensitive stuff which is handled by IACTO. I believe that in many cases Boards would decide it is not worth all the hassle and would hand the keys of the CTC back to the State’*

* Chairperson of CTC
* IACTO has provided a collective voice for the Boards/employers of the 36 CTCs within the CTC network in Ireland. From the perspective of the funders of CTCs (FÁS/SOLAS/ETBs) and the staff representatives of CTC employees (SIPTU) the existence of IACTO means that they can work through one collective employer’s organisation rather than 36 individual CTC Boards. This type of collective arrangement has significant benefits from a time management and cost benefit viewpoint (i.e. meetings with 1 organisation rather than 36 organisations) and from the perspective of maintaining consistency and common standards across the CTC network.
* IACTO has helped to ensure that the change management processes that have taken place within CTCs over the last 15 years have been well handled and have caused the minimum amount of disruption or industrial unrest. Some of these changes have been quite significant for the CTCs (e.g. around business planning, targets and outcomes, accreditation and certification, pathways and progression, module/course design) and it is testimony to the process which has been put in place through the 1999 National Agreement that these changes were introduced through discussion, dialogue, negotiation and consensus. Key parties in this positive change management process were FÁS, IACTO and SIPTU.

# KEY ISSUES/CHALLENGES FOR CTC SECTOR

## STATUS OF 1999 NATIONAL AGREEMENT AND NATIONAL POLICIES FOR CTCs

Earlier references have been made in this document to both the 1999 National Agreement for CTCs and to the organisational changes which have taken place in recent years within the further education and training sector in Ireland. These changes have raised a number of concerns about the standing and status of the National Agreement and national policies for CTCs in Ireland. Particular concerns have been identified as follows:

* Until the dissolution of FÁS, collective bargaining on pay scales, terms and conditions, policies and procedures within CTCs would be agreed between FÁS, IACTO and SIPTU. Since the dissolution of FÁS and the establishment of SOLAS and the ETBs there is uncertainty about which State agency or agencies are now responsible for participating in collective bargaining structures with IACTO and FÁS.
* The agreed terms and conditions, policies and procedures have been designed and developed specifically for use within the organisational context and structure of a CTC. All parties to the collective bargaining process (i.e. parties to the 1999 National Agreement) are bound by the terms agreed. However since the roles previously held by FÁS have now been split, which State body has responsibility for operational/policy matters as they apply to CTCs and which State agency has responsibility for funding issues relating to CTCs?
* ETBs now fund the CTCs within their geographical areas. In this context what central mechanisms are in place for ensuring that there is continuity of approach and application across the ETBs in relation to funding arrangements for CTCs? In more particular terms how do the 14 ETBs with CTCs within their areas propose to deal collectively with IACTO and SIPTU (this was a core element in the National Agreement and subsequent Operational Guidelines)?
* The 1999 National Agreement made references to the funder (FÁS) being obliged to attend third party hearings when industrial relations issues cannot be resolved directly between IACTO (as the employer’s representative body) and SIPTU (as the staff representatives). Since the dissolution of FÁS in 2013 this clause of the National Agreement has not been implemented.

The 1999 National Agreement and related FÁS/IACTO Operational Guidelines provide the basis for the entire industrial relations and human resources management framework for CTCs. They provide the mechanism through which policies, procedures and disputes are negotiated. However it is evident that important clauses within the Agreement are not being honoured or are under significant threat (e.g. collective bargaining and discussions about pay and redundancies, non-appearance of the State funder at third party hearings, issues about the ongoing State funding of IACTO). It is apparent that one of the main reasons for these recent difficulties concerns the fact that some of the roles traditionally taken by FÁS in relation to the CTC sector (e.g. national policy, collective standards, attendance at third party hearings, funding of IACTO) are not being implemented. There is currently a clear void and a clear vacuum within the CTC infrastructure in Ireland and this situation needs to be addressed and resolved both in order to comply with the provisions of the National Agreement and to provide the clarity, the industrial relations mechanisms and the human resources services and supports which are required by CTCs across Ireland.

## NEED FOR BETTER COMMUNICATIONS AND CLARITY OF INFORMATION

CTCs are concerned about the relative absence of clear information and communications about what is happening at the national, collective level within the CTC sector in Ireland. Heretofore the 1999 Agreement provided that if there were issues or problems within individual CTCs that could not be resolved at a local level, CTCs referred these to IACTO, and IACTO would then have discussed them with the funder (FÁS) and with SIPTU as appropriate. However, this system is no longer functional since there is not any single State funder who is dealing collectively with IACTO and since many of the ETBs seem to be unwilling to recognise IACTO.

There are a range of issues at the local CTC level upon which clarification would have previously been sought from FÁS/ IACTO/ SIPTU. These issues include pay levels, terms and conditions of employment, Operational Standards, Training Standards Systems, and clarification of national policy. Whilst these matters from CTCs are being brought to the attention of IACTO as the employers representative body there is some confusion about what happens next. There is no single point of contact within the State apparatus which can make collective determinations and issue directions and instructions in relation to the CTC sector. At this stage the number of collective and individual issues concerning CTCs is building up and there is some frustration from the CTCs, from SIPTU and from IACTO that there is no clear mechanism within the State further education and training sector for issues to be addressed and resolved.

It is recognised, however, that it is a period of transition and change within the further education and training sector in Ireland following the dissolution of FÁS. Whilst it will initially take time for the changes to be effectively implemented (e.g. ETBs now having funding and oversight responsibilities for CTCs) there is also a view that there should be a bit more clarity about what the overall landscape and infrastructure for CTCs will look like over the next few years e.g. will it still be a collective process for the CTC sector involving the funder/State, IACTO and SIPTU? What types of decisions will be made at the local level by ETBs and which decisions will require a collective, national determination using mechanisms set out in the 1999 National Agreement? Is it proposed to replace the CTC policy unit within FÁS and, if so, which agency will the policy unit be attached to? If the CTC policy unit is not to be replaced how does the State propose to develop and review policies as they relate to CTCs in Ireland? These are basic and fundamental questions and issues which need to be resolved in the next 12 months in order to support the positive development of the CTC sector in Ireland and the individual CTCs therein.

## PROMOTION OF THE WORK AND ACHIEVEMENTS OF CTCs

There is a view amongst many people involved in the CTC sector that CTCs should be more assertive and more forthright about their achievements and their accomplishments. CTCs are often working with young people whose lives are very troubled and very complicated, and it is testimony to the commitment of CTCs that young people stay with the CTC for two years and generally achieve positive results and outcomes. This represents a strong affirmation of the skills and commitment of the staff and Board members of CTCs. However, the full story of the work and achievements of CTCs in Ireland has not been properly recorded or shared with a wider audience of educators and policy makers. Whilst individual CTCs organise their own graduation and celebration events within their own areas, there has been no national reflection, evaluation or review of the collective work and achievements of all of the CTCs within the CTC network in Ireland.

CTCs should consider developing strategies which would help to tell the story of CTCs in Ireland over the last 30 years – their genesis and background, their target groups, their activities, their achievements, their impact on young learners and on the wider community in which they operate. This collective review of the work of CTCs in Ireland might involve testimonials from young people who have progressed through CTCs, case studies of individual CTCs and an overall analysis of the ways in which young people have benefited through their participation in the 36 CTCs within the CTC network in Ireland. At a time when a major review is going to take place of the Youthreach programme (including the CTCs and the Youthreach Centres) it makes sense for the CTCs to celebrate and share their achievements and to inform others in agencies such as SOLAS and the ETBs of the range of benefits which their work brings to the lives of young people and to the communities in which the CTCs are located.

## OPERATIONAL ISSUES

There have been significant developments over the last 10 years for CTCs in relation to issues concerning accreditation, certification, progression and pathways. CTCs are now clearly aligned to the National Qualifications Framework administered through QQI and the young learners within CTCs are encouraged to secure qualifications which will enhance the likelihood of their securing employment and further education and training when they have completed their time at CTCs. Whilst the focus on accreditation and certification with CTCs is vital and is to be welcomed, it is also important to balance this aspect of the CTCs work with the broader growth and development of young people who join CTCs. In addition to assessing young people on the basis of accreditation gained, it is also important that mechanisms exist for determining improvements in self-confidence, self-belief, personality, character, attitude and communications with others.

It is recognised that work is taking place around mechanisms or tools through which ‘softer’ skills relating to personal growth and development might be assessed in addition to the existing modules and courses which are available through QQI and the National Framework of Qualifications. People from CTCs have asked questions about what is the core business of CTCs – is it to prepare young people for the world of work through equipping them with effective accreditation or is it to work in a holistic and overall way with young people who have left school with no/few effective educational qualifications and who are at a vulnerable and/or uncertain stage in their young lives? Are CTCs about vocational training, personal development or social inclusion (or perhaps a combination of all three)? These will be key ongoing issues for all providers of services to educationally disadvantaged young people and it is considered that structures or strategies should be put in place through which CTCs and IACTO can contribute to discussions around issues concerning the function and purpose of services such as CTCs.

# KEY ROLES/CHALLENGES FOR IACTO

## ROLES AND FUNCTIONS OF IACTO

In considering the roles and functions of IACTO over the next five-year period, it is reasonable to assume that the functions/roles set out in Section 3 of this document will still need to be carried out – there will be an ongoing need for an employer’s representative body to engage in national collective bargaining in relation to CTCs, there will be a need for this body to contribute to national policies on behalf of CTC Boards; there will be a need for some mechanism to handle industrial relations and human resources management at the local CTC level; and there will be a need for CTC Boards and managers to be supported and provided with the appropriate types of training and education. At present all of these roles are performed by IACTO as the employer’s representative organisation for CTCs and it seems to make sense for IACTO to continue to fulfil these roles and functions.

There are also other useful roles which could be undertaken by IACTO over the next number of years. One relates to the area of curriculum development, programme design and operating standards for the training, vocational and educational activities which take place within CTCs. It is the CTC Boards and CTC staff who are clearly and directly aware of the learning potential and the learning limitations of those young people who are engaging with CTCs in Ireland. As such they are well positioned to contribute to the design and development of courses, programmes and other initiatives within CTCs and to ensure that the right balance is struck between hard skills and soft skills and between academic and non-academic work. IACTO could be a mechanism for CTCs to contribute to curriculum development and programme design within CTCs. The other role which IACTO could successfully play in the future concerns the area of promoting, celebrating and sharing the outcomes and achievements from the work of CTCs in Ireland. Earlier references have been made in this document to the need for CTCs to be stronger and more assertive in informing people and organisations about their work and their achievements. This collective sharing of the work of CTCs across Ireland is a role which could be undertaken by IACTO.

## STATUS OF 1999 NATIONAL AGREEMENT FOR CTC SECTOR

It is considered that the future development of IACTO is directly connected to the status of the 1999 National Agreement for the CTC sector in Ireland. If this Agreement still stands and if it is still a valid and legitimate document there is a clearly prescribed role for IACTO as the employers representative body and a recognition that IACTO needs to be funded by the State so as to enable it to fulfil the functions set out for IACTO in the National Agreement and the subsequent FÁS-IACTO Operating Guidelines. On the basis of the determination by the Labour Court in July 2014 the 1999 National Agreement is still a binding arrangement and all relevant parties are obliged to honour the terms of the Agreement. It seems that a key issue for IACTO in relation to the status of the 1999 National Agreement concerns the impact of the changes in responsibility for CTCs within the State sector (and the new roles for the DES, SOLAS and ETBs). In basic terms are these entities obliged to follow through on commitments made by their predecessors and/or other State bodies in 1999 or does the emergence of these new players mean that the 1999 National Agreement is null and void?

IACTO should continue to seek clarification and further information about the status of the 1999 National Agreement. The status of the Agreement will be of fundamental importance to the future roles/functions of IACTO and to future funding streams of IACTO. It is hoped that relevant State agencies might recognise the merits and benefits of having a collective employer’s body which represents the interests of 36 CTCs – benefits include dealing with IACTO rather than 36 CTCs and of developing consistency and common standards across the CTC sector.

## SUSTAINABILITY AND FUNDING OF IACTO

Since 2000 IACTO has received the bulk of its funding from FÁS under the terms of the 1999 National Agreement. Without the State money, the role of IACTO as a professional industrial relations, human resources and governance support organisation for the CTC sector in Ireland would not have been viable. IACTO needs to employ professional staff on a decent salary and cover other overheads and administrative costs. All of these outgoings, so as to enable IACTO to provide a high quality service to 37 CTCs across Ireland, costs in the region of €250,000 per year. If CTCs had to directly fund the cost of IACTO this would mean an average annual subscription of around €6,750 per CTC. This type of money is simply not available within existing CTC budgets. In overall terms the best option would be for an agreed State organisation to continue to provide funding to IACTO along the lines of the annual grant allocations previously received through FÁS (and in compliance with the terms of the 1999 National Agreement).

In identifying the State agency through which money would be paid to IACTO the more obvious candidates would be either SOLAS or ETBs. The challenge for IACTO is to go back again to these agencies and to the DES in order to persuade and convince them of the significant merits of providing financial support to IACTO. Relevant extracts from this document might be used to inform other stakeholders about the ways in which IACTO has contributed to industrial peace, to consistency of approach across CTCs, to conflict resolution at the local level, to improvements in corporate governance and to the development of new operating standards across CTCs during the course of the last 15 years. Through this articulation of the work and achievements of IACTO individuals within relevant State agencies might be informed about the value of IACTO to all of the key stakeholders.

## VALUE FOR MONEY AND ECONOMIC/EFFECTIVENESS BENEFITS

It is important that IACTO demonstrate the economic, effectiveness and efficiency benefits of the roles and functions which it performs within the CTC sector. It is evident that the 1999 National Agreement (and the prescribed roles therein for FÁS, IACTO and SIPTU in relation to collective bargaining) has led to industrial peace within the CTC sector. Compared to the situation prior to the 1999 Agreement, very few cases have been referred to third party bodies such as the Labour Court, Labour Relations Commission or the Rights Commissioner. Most industrial relations difficulties and problems have been sorted out by IACTO and SIPTU at the local level. This positive outcome has meant that individual CTCs have not had to incur significant legal costs and that the time of third party bodies has not been taken up by loads of cases emanating from CTCs. The resolution of disputes and differences at the local level, with the active participation of IACTO and SIPTU, has had a positive effect on employee relations within CTCs.

It also needs to be accepted that IACTO has the policy knowledge and are the experts or market leaders in relation to industrial relations and human resources management for CTC Boards within the CTC sector in Ireland. IACTO has a unique set of relationships with the funders and with the staff representatives and, as such, is in a good position to determine within conflict situations what would be acceptable to all parties involved in particular disputes. IACTO knows the sector and how to make things work within the sector and is passionate about the roles and functions of CTCs in relation to learners. It is considered that CTC Boards receive a better service from IACTO than from other potential service providers for reasons relating to cost, understanding of the CTC sector, access to funders and staff representatives.

# STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

## RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE BOARD OF IACTO

* IACTO should remain in existence as the employer’s representative body for CTCs in Ireland.
* IACTO should continue to implement the 1999 National Agreement for CTCs in partnership with SIPTU, the Department of Finance, the lead Government Department (DES) and the lead State funding agency (SOLAS/ETBs).
* IACTO should continue to receive core State funding as agreed in the 1999 National Agreement and the FÁS-IACTO Operating Guidelines.
* IACTO should produce a three year Strategic Plan (2015-2018) which would set out its strategies and main work areas for the future (which may include current activities and more work around programme design, policy development and promotion of the CTC sector).
* IACTO should develop its relationship with the National Association of Training Centre Managers (NATCM) to create a stronger force for positive change within the CTC sector.
* IACTO should produce public Annual Reports and these reports should be circulated to all CTCs and to all ETBs so as to inform them of the activities and achievements of IACTO in a number of different work areas.
* IACTO should be involved in the review of the Youthreach programme, a review which will explore the relationships between the CTC component and the Youthreach Centres component of the Youthreach programme.

## PROGRESSION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS

### FUTURE DEVELOPMENT OF IACTO

* The membership of IACTO (i.e. the Boards of the 36 CTCs in Ireland) need to decide whether it is important and necessary for IACTO to stay in business and to continue to represent the interests of CTC Boards.
* Letters of support in favour of the retention of IACTO and ongoing State funding for IACTO should be produced by the 36 CTCs (so as to demonstrate that there is widespread support, and a clear need, for the work being carried out by IACTO).
* The Board and members of IACTO should give consideration to new services and supports which could be provided by IACTO in order to enhance the impact and effectiveness of CTCs across the CTC network in Ireland.
* The Board of IACTO needs to keep putting forward strong and compelling reasons for IACTO to continue to provide the services it has provided over the last 15 years (these reasons and the positive outcomes for IACTO’s work are clearly set out in this Discussion Paper).
* IACTO needs to continue to build relationships and understandings, and to build up awareness of the key role of IACTO within the CTC sector, with key people in the DES, SOLAS, ETBI and the 14 ETBs which have funding relationships with CTCs.

### IMPLEMENTATION OF 1999 NATIONAL AGREEMENT FOR CTCs

* Definitive clarification should be sought from the DES and SOLAS about whether the 1999 National Agreement still stands and the various provisions within it and whether the related FÁS-IACTO Operational Guidelines still apply.
* If it is decided that the 1999 National Agreement is still in operation which organisations take the place of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment and of FÁS who were partners in the 1999 Agreement – perhaps the DES and either SOLAS or ETBs/ETBI?
* Does a commitment to the concept and practice of collective bargaining for all 36 CTCs still exist within the State sector or would the State through its various agencies prefer to deal individually and directly with each CTC?
* If the 1999 National Agreement (and the provisions therein) are to be retained there will be a need for new Operational Guidelines to be drawn up between IACTO and whichever State body is nominated to liaise with IACTO on matters concerning pay, terms and conditions, implementation of national policy.

### FUNDING OF IACTO

* The State should continue to fund IACTO in accordance with the 1999 National Agreement and in recognition of the significant benefits which are likely to be maintained through the work of an employer’s representative body for CTCs (IACTO) which can act collectively on behalf of the 36 CTCs within the CTC network.
* Financial support from the State to IACTO should be paid in the form of a multi-annual block grant for three year periods from one identified State agency (e.g. DES, SOLAS, ETBI or one nominated ETB on behalf of other ETBs). This would be paid in the same way as FÁS provided funding to IACTO between 2000 and 2013.
* State funding for IACTO should be at a minimum level of €250,000 per year so as to enable IACTO to employ staff, to carry out significant work around industrial relations, human resources management and corporate governance, and to provide a professional and efficient service to the 36 CTCs in the CTC network.
* Individual CTCs should continue to pay affiliation fees to IACTO (current affiliation fee is €400 per year). The affiliation fee to IACTO should be considered an allowable expenditure item by ETBs when considering annual budgets being submitted by CTCs.
* IACTO should utilise the assessment of its work contained in this document as a mechanism for persuading State bodies of the value of its activities and the ways in which these activities are resulting in a number of benefits for the State (e.g. in relation to industrial relations peace within the CTC sector, improvements in governance and management, better standards and certification).

### PRODUCTION OF STRATEGIC PLAN

* IACTO should produce a three year Strategic Plan to cover the period from 2015 to 2018. This Strategic Plan would contain an analysis of the CTC sector and an assessment of the particular roles which IACTO is going to play in continuing to contribute to key issues relating to the ongoing well-being of the CTC sector.
* The 2015-2018 Strategic Plan should be produced between April 2015 and June 2015 on account of the urgency which currently exists concerning IACTO’s own funding situation (with existing funds due to be depleted by the end of July 2015).
* The Strategic Plan will be informed by clarification about the status of the 1999 National Agreement. If this Agreement still holds there is a vital and prescribed role for IACTO as the employer’s representative body and this role will be an important component within the 2015-2018 Strategic Plan.
* Consultations concerning the production of the Strategic Plan with CTC Boards/staff and representatives of key State agencies, should aim to identify additional services which IACTO could provide in order to contribute to the development and growth of the CTC sector.

### PROMOTION AND PROFILING OF THE CTC SECTOR

* IACTO should work with the 36 CTCs in the CTC sector to produce publicity and promotional materials which would demonstrate the quality of the work and the innovation which is taking place within CTCs all around Ireland.
* Publicity and promotional materials might include profiles and case studies of individual CTCs, testimonials from learners who have benefited and progressed well through the CTCs and brochures or information notes which set out the particular attributes and characteristics of CTCs in Ireland.
* IACTO together with the CTCs within its membership should consider compiling a publication which would tell the story of the CTCs from the time of the establishment of the first Community Training Workshops in the 1980s.
* IACTO should co-ordinate the production and publication of public Annual Reports on behalf of CTCs in Ireland. Whilst individual CTCs submit regular reports to their funders, there is no collective CTC Annual Report which sets out the quantitative and qualitative work and achievements of CTCs in Ireland.

### CONTRIBUTION TO NATIONAL POLICY AND PLANNING PROCESSES

* IACTO should ensure that it is significantly involved in the review of the Youthreach programme which is being carried out and co-ordinated by the DES and SOLAS. As the employers representative body for CTCs it is considered that the views of IACTO would be an important component of the review process.
* IACTO should continue to make contributions and policy submissions in relation to the further education and training sector in Ireland. IACTO has a particularly useful insight from the perspective of learners from disadvantaged areas/groups and it is important that this perspective should be included in various policy reviews.
* IACTO needs to be resourced so as to enable it to make effective and meaningful contributions to various review and planning processes concerning young people in Ireland. It is anticipated that the core funding provided through the State will enable it to work in this policy development area (although additional resources might be required for very detailed policy work around key issues of interest to CTCs).

# CONCLUSIONS

Since the formation of IACTO in the 1990s and its establishment as a legal entity in 2000 (with a clear and prescribed role within the 1999 National Agreement for CTCs) IACTO has achieved a significant amount. Together with its State partners, its trade union partners, its membership of CTCs across Ireland and the people who work in these CTCs IACTO has helped to bring about a sea-change in the CTC sector in Ireland. There is now a collective approach to CTCs and this has resulted in a situation where there are agreed strategies for dealing with industrial relations and human resources issues and where there are mechanisms in place for bringing about positive changes within the overall sector (e.g. through Operating Guidelines and Operational Standards). IACTO has played a full and pivotal role in the collective processes which have been put in place over the last 15 years and has been the key intermediary between the State (as the funder and the ultimate arbiter of policy for CTCs) and SIPTU as representatives of staff employed within CTCs.

There have been references in this document to some difficulties and concerns which have emerged in recent years. It is anticipated that these organisational and structural issues will be resolved shortly and that IACTO will continue to be funded to provide the vital services and supports which it has provided within the CTC sector since 1999. It is difficult to imagine a situation where there is no employers body representing the collective interests of CTC Boards. If this situation did pertain and CTC Boards had to sort out a whole range of industrial relations, human resources management and corporate governance issues by themselves (without any support or advice from IACTO) there is a real fear and concern that many CTC Boards would dissolve because too much is expected of them and they are not being provided with access to critical specialist supports and services.

It is hoped that an appropriate mechanism will be identified and agreed for core funding to be provided through the State to IACTO and that this mechanism will be in place by May-June 2015. It is always important to remember that the ultimate beneficiaries of matters working well at the organisational, structural, governance and industrial relations levels within the CTC network and within individual CTCs will be the young learners involved in CTCs. The more that organisations such as IACTO, SIPTU and State bodies can sort out issues and difficulties at the collective level (which subsequently become operational in individual CTCs), the more time CTC Boards and staff can focus on their core business of providing vocational training, education and personal support to young people from disadvantaged areas and disadvantaged groups.

The roles which IACTO and other partner organisations have played over the last 15 years have resulted in improvements in industrial relations and in the morale and general sense of well-being within CTCs. This has also had a positive impact on learners and their relationships with staff. The 1999 National Agreement for CTCs is a unique configuration of organisations and approaches and it has stood the test of time for 15 years and produced many notable results and outcomes for the CTC sector in Ireland. There is no reason why the 1999 National Agreement should be dismantled and it is hoped that the full Agreement and its various provisions (including State funding for IACTO) will be re-instated in the best interests of CTCs and of the young learners who attend these CTCs.