

NATIONAL FET LEARNER FORUM ANNUAL SYNTHESIS REPORT 2018

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ABBREVIATIONS

BTEI	Back to Education Training Initiative
CDETB	City of Dublin Education and Training Board
CETB	Cork Education and Training Board
CMETB	Cavan and Monaghan Education and Training Board
DDLETB	Dublin and Dún Laoghaire Education and Training Board
DEASP	Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection
DES	Department of Education and Skills
DETB	Donegal Education and Training Board
ESOL	English for Speakers of Other Languages
ETB	Education and Training Board
ETBI	Education and Training Boards Ireland
FET	Further Education and Training
GRETB	Galway and Roscommon Education and Training Board
HEA	Higher Education Authority
KCETB	Kilkenny and Carlow Education and Training Board
KETB	Kerry Education and Training Board
KWETB	Kildare and Wicklow Education and Training Board
LCETB	Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board
LMETB	Louth and Meath Education and Training Board
LOETB	Laois and Offaly Education and Training Board
LTI	Local Training Initiative
LWETB	Longford and Westmeath Education and Training Board
MSLETB	Mayo, Sligo and Leitrim Education and Training Board
NALA	National Adult Literacy Agency
NFLF	National Further Education and Training Learner Forum
PLC	Post Leaving Certificate
QQI	Quality and Qualifications Ireland
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
TETB	Tipperary Education and Training Board
UCC	University College Cork
VTOS	Vocation Training Opportunities Scheme
WWETB	Waterford and Wexford Education and Training Board



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ORGANISATIONS

AONTAS

AONTAS is the Irish National Adult Learning Organisation. As an umbrella body committed to advocating and lobbying for the development of a quality service for adult learners and promoting the value and benefits of lifelong learning, AONTAS works on behalf of its 400+ strong membership, regarding the membership as a key resource which provides the organisation with a grassroots, authentic understanding of adult and community education practice and learner perspective. The membership profile comprises a rich mix of statutory, voluntary and community organisations involved in the provision of further education and training, as well as individuals who are deeply involved in and committed to the concept and practice of lifelong learning.

SOLAS

Established in 2013, SOLAS (The Further Education and Training Authority, An tSeirbhís Oideachais Leanúnaigh agus Scileanna), is the State Organisation responsible for funding, planning and coordinating Further Education and Training (FET) in Ireland. Its mission is to fund, co-ordinate and monitor a range of FET provision to ensure economic and social wellbeing and to play its part in progressing, influencing and supporting the development of a FET sector that is more responsive to the needs of learners and employers, is innovative, flexible and demand-led. Its vision is to achieve a well-recognised

FET sector, valued for its quality and for delivery of education, training and skills that enables learners to succeed in the labour market and thrive in society. The core principals of SOLAS are to:

- ensure there is robust intelligence to inform the planning, funding and design of new and existing FET provision;
- focus on adding value by fostering collaboration across the FET sector, sharing learning and empowering delivery organisations;
- promote innovation and fund provision that meets identified need;
- be open to new ideas, proactive in seeking out evidence of 'what works' in FET and ensure that the learner experience is at the centre of decision-making; and
- maintain a central focus on standards and quality in FET, including excellence in programme development and the on-going professional development of the FET workforce.

Education and Training Boards

Education and Training Boards (ETBs) are statutory authorities which have responsibility for education and training, youth work and a range of other statutory functions. ETBs manage and operate second-level schools, further education colleges, multi-faith community national schools and a range of adult and further education centres delivering education and training programmes.

ETBs are active in local communities through the direct provision of training and education programmes delivered in training centres, colleges and other training and educational settings. In this way, ETBs seek to make a real difference to the lives of the people they serve. Such responsiveness continues to be the hallmark of the education and training boards in the FET sector, looking outward nationally and internationally, while servicing education and training locally and individually.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Learners

We would like to start by thanking all the learners who participated in National FET Learner Forum events. It is their voice that serves as the foundation of this project. Each participant volunteered their time and shared their voice to help build a more democratic, inclusive, responsive, and improved FET system. For this, we thank each of your efforts.

SOLAS and the European Social Fund

The National FET Learner Forum is a partnership project between AONTAS, SOLAS and ETBs across the country. SOLAS, in collaboration with AONTAS, initiated the project as a key action of the 2014–2019 Further Education and Training Strategy and, since 2016, has

funded AONTAS to host Learner Forum events and develop reports after events take place. The project is co-funded by the European Social Fund (ESF), as part of the ESF Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning 2014–2020. The ESF is the European Union’s main financial instrument for supporting employment and promoting economic and social cohesion in EU member states. This project could not occur without the support of the Government of Ireland, via SOLAS, and the European Social Fund.

Education and Training Boards

ETBs nominate the learners who participate at these events and it is ETBs that consider these learners’ feedback when planning and improving

their programmes. ETBs therefore are placing learner voice at the core of their work. Each ETB nominated a Key Contact person(s) who helped to deliver these events. Without their support and coordination these events would not be possible. We would like to thank you for taking on additional responsibilities to help deliver these events and for your continued support of this project.

The National FET Learner Forum Advisory Group

We would like to thank the National FET Learner Forum Advisory Group. This group consists of two learner representatives, a FET Director and representatives from SOLAS, Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI), the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (DEASP), the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA), Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI), and the Department of Education and Skills (DES). Their guidance

and recommendations along the way helped the National FET Learner Forum expand in a meaningful way. This research is largely possible through their continued support.

The National FET Learner Forum Academic Expert Group

We would also like to extend our appreciation to the Academic Expert Group. This group is made up of European and national learner voice experts. Their input provides an intellectual framework to the project. We would like to thank the Academic Expert Group for their guidance and commitment to this project. They have helped to ensure this work is robust and developed in a meaningful way.



Join the



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is a summary of all Forum events that took place in 2018. It was developed from nine regional events and one national event held in 2018. Collectively, these events brought together a total of 595 learners from all 16 ETBs. Learners came from 17 different FET programmes (49% from full-time programmes, 49% in part-time programmes, and 2% unknown).

Regional events were held in nine of the sixteen Education and Training Boards: Kilkenny and Carlow ETB, City of Dublin ETB, Dublin and Dún Laoghaire ETB, Donegal ETB, Longford and Westmeath ETB, Mayo, Sligo, and Leitrim ETB, Galway and Roscommon ETB, Waterford and Wexford ETB and Kerry ETB. Learners from 17 of the 27 FET programmes participated at these regional events: Adult Literacy Groups, Post-Leaving Certificate (PLC), Community Education, Back to Education Initiative (BTEI), Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS), Traineeship Training, Youthreach, Apprenticeships, Specific Skills Training, Community Training Centres, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), Local Training Initiatives, Specialist Training Providers, Refugee Resettlement, Skills for Work, Intensive Tuition in Adult Basic Education (ITABE), and Voluntary Literacy Tuition. (Please see Figure 2 and Figure 3 on page 16 for the number of learners who participated at the 2018 regional events by ETB and FET Programme.)

The national event was held in Dublin on 13th April 2018, with 14 out of 16 ETBs represented: Kilkenny and Carlow ETB, Cork ETB, Mayo, Sligo and Leitrim ETB, Donegal ETB, Louth and Meath ETB, Limerick and Clare ETB, Tipperary ETB, City of Dublin ETB, Cavan Monaghan

ETB, Kildare and Wicklow ETB, Dublin and Dún Laoghaire ETB, Laois and Offaly ETB, Longford and Westmeath ETB, and Waterford and Wexford ETB. Learners from 11 of the 27 FET programmes participated at the national event: Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS), Back to Education Initiative (BTEI), Youthreach, Specific Skills Training, Post-Leaving Certificate (PLC), Community Education, Adult Literacy Groups, Local Training Initiatives, Intensive Tuition in Adult Basic Education (ITABE), Community Training Centres, and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). (Please see Figure 5 and Figure 6 on page 16 for the number of learners who participated at the 2018 national event by ETB and FET Programme.)

At each of these events, learners discussed **areas working well** and **areas for improvement** in FET. The following table provides a high-level summary of the findings gathered from learner discussions (please note that survey findings are not included in this table of high-level results but, rather, are presented separately in a later section). These findings are presented in order, based on the frequency with which they were raised across the 10 Learner Forum events implemented in 2018 (9 regional events and 1 national event). The maximum possible frequency for any recommendation is 10 (as a total of 10 events occurred in 2018). Findings that came up with equal frequency across events are listed in alphabetical order. It should be noted that these figures do not represent the level of importance assigned to the topic by the learners who raised it, rather, they are a reflection of the scope of the finding – i.e. the level to which it was raised by learners across multiple events, around the country.

It is important to note that some of the issues raised by learners are outside of the control and remit of individual ETBs. This includes grievances related to job seekers' payments, Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection policies and travel and accommodation allowances. Despite being beyond the remit of ETBs, SOLAS and the Department of Education and Skills, these findings have been included in this report to remain true to the voices of the learners who raised them.

AREAS WORKING WELL		
TOPIC	FREQUENCY	STATEMENT
FET Tutors	10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Learners feel FET tutors and ETB staff promote a culture of respect, equality and fairness that helps make ETBs an open and welcoming space for learners – Learners believe FET tutors go above and beyond in supporting individual learner development
Transformative Learning	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Learners feel that their courses have increased their confidence, expanded their everyday skill set, and improved their overall wellbeing
Employability	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Learners believe FET courses increase employability and earning potential
Guidance	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Learners who used guidance services found these supports very helpful
Peer Learning	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Learners believe that peer learning is a positive and well-received aspect of FET learning as it plays a valuable role in fostering a positive learning community
Social Integration	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Learners feel that FET plays an active role in combating isolation and promotes equality, making it an important vehicle of social integration
Individualised Learning	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Learners argued that the smaller class sizes and individualised instruction provided by FET tutors promote learner success
IT Skills	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Learners believe FET courses improve IT skills, which improves overall life experiences
Word-of-Mouth Referrals	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – A number of learners found their course through a referral from a family member or friend and current FET learners would recommend their course to a friend

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT*

TOPIC	FREQUENCY	STATEMENT
Work Placements	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ETBs should provide learners with a list of local employers willing to take on work placement learners - Where applicable and possible to do so, ETBs should support learners on a work placement by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • developing a work placement agreement between the learner, employer and ETB that clearly outlines the responsibilities of each party • ensuring learners are filling roles on their work placements in order to gain necessary skills • ensuring work placement supervisors are trained in, and uphold, the values of FET
FET Facilities and Environment	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ensure facilities in ETBs are functional and accessible - Provide the most up to date software and equipment to relevant courses in each ETB - Address any disparities in facilities and physical environment between FET centres
National Framework of Qualifications Awareness	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Learners would like ETBs to promote awareness of the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) and its connection to learner pathways in FET
Progression	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide learners with information on all progression routes available after completion of a course (eg employment options, access to higher education, higher level courses available in FET, etc) and provide guidance supports to learners seeking these pathways - Increase funding and pathways for FET learners into higher education
Recognition of Prior Learning	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Broaden Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) processes that allow learners to receive formal validation of their previous skill set, which in turn, allows them to access courses more relevant to their individual needs
Additional Course Cost	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide learners with an estimate of all costs required for course materials (eg iPad insurance, uniforms, etc) at the start of a course
Course Scheduling and Types of Courses	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ensure courses are assigned as early as possible - Increase the amount of flexible courses made available to learners (eg non-accredited, part-time daytime, part-time evening, etc)

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT* (CONT.)

TOPIC	FREQUENCY	STATEMENT
DEASP	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ETBs should work collaboratively with the DEASP to promote: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning Pathways: provide clear access routes and timelines for course enrolment • Informed-learner choice: refer to a FET course that meets their individual needs • Retention: clear on information required to complete a FET course
Travel and Accommodation Allowances	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop a new system for travel and accommodation allowances so that 100% of learners' travel and accommodation costs are covered while they are studying on a FET course
Advertisement	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Diversify and increase forms of advertisement, while ensuring all information is linked and up to date (examples of further advertisement include delivering a public taster course, increasing local newspaper and radio advertisements, adding information into parish newsletters, and implementing a learner ambassador programme)
Attendance	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Learners would like a more flexible attendance policy that does not result in cuts to their social welfare payments for uncertified absences beyond their control
English Language Supports	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increase the amount of time allocated to English language support
Technology	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increase the use of non-digital classroom resources and ensure learners who need support using required digital resources receive it before assignments begin - Ensure learners are well supported during virtual learning
Childcare	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reduce barriers for parents entering FET by increasing childcare supports and increasing more flexible course options

Report Contents and Structure

This synthesis report reflects a summary of all the results gathered from NFLF events throughout 2018. The report is made up of six key sections. They are as follows:

- Project Overview
- Methodology
- Detailed Results
 - Discussion Findings
 - Questionnaire Results
- Conclusion

In addition to this core report, the appendix features complete reporting on all participant and survey data. These include:

- **Appendix 1**
Learner Totals by ETB
- **Appendix 2**
Members of the NFLF Advisory Group
- **Appendix 3**
Members of the NFLF Academic Expert Group
- **Appendix 4**
NFLF Introduction Sheet
- **Appendix 5**
NFLF Learner Information Sheet
- **Appendix 6**
NFLF Questionnaire
- **Appendix 7**
NFLF Questionnaire Results
- **Appendix 8**
NFLF Evaluation
- **Appendix 9**
NFLF Evaluation Results
- **Appendix 10**
Communications and Promotion Reporting
- **Appendix 11**
Learner Reactions to the Event



A YEAR IN NUMBERS



595

Learners



291

Full-Time



294

Part-Time



76

Hours of Discussions



9

Regional Reports



17

Programmes



16

ETBs



4

Advisory
Group Meetings



4

Academic Expert
Group Meetings



10

NFLF Events

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Throughout the development of the FET Strategy 2014–2019, SOLAS, the National FET Authority, committed to hearing the voice of learners. The National FET Learner Forum (NFLF) is a clear example of that commitment. The NFLF brings together learners from across the FET sector to ask their views on FET services in Ireland. The project, which is funded by SOLAS and the European Social Fund, is delivered by AONTAS. It is developed directly from FET Strategy 2014–2019, Goal 3, Objective 3.1, Action 3.1.2 which sets out to “systematically benchmark learner’s views and satisfaction with their FET programme on an on-going basis through the establishment of a Learner Forum and appropriate Learner Surveys.” (SOLAS, 2014) Due to its experience in learner advocacy within the Irish FET sector, SOLAS commissioned AONTAS to deliver the NFLF in 2016 and every year thereafter for the duration of the current FET Strategy (2014–2019).

When it launched in 2016, the NFLF brought together 70 learners from across Ireland in a one-day national event (AONTAS, 2016). Since this time, the NFLF has become a series of regional events and one national event that takes place every year. This change has resulted in significant growth for the project (please see Figure 1). In 2018, the NFLF reached 595 learners across the country, bringing the total number of learners involved in this project since inception to 919.

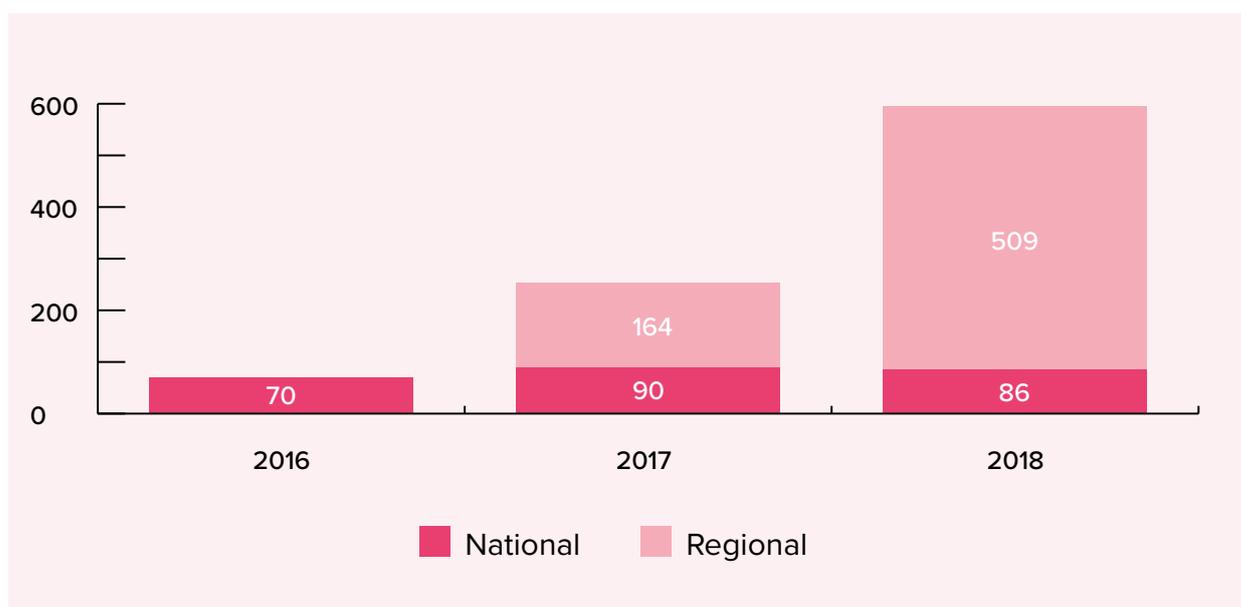


Figure 1 – National FET Learner Forum Participation

This work is guided and supported by a project advisory group and an academic expert group. Each group meets a minimum of four times a year. Members consist of relevant stakeholders and experts working in the area of learner voice. You can see a complete list of members for each of these groups in Appendix 5 and Appendix 6 respectively.

AONTAS continues to work collaboratively with SOLAS to support the high-level project planning. SOLAS also monitors and supports the funding of this project. The delivery of the project is supported by ETBs who promote the event, support the recruitment of learners, and open each regional event. All reporting at the regional level is done by AONTAS and sent directly to relevant ETBs after a regional event has taken place. This annual synthesis report is developed by AONTAS, with the input and support of SOLAS.



METHODOLOGY

Phase 1: Planning

Before an event takes place, AONTAS works directly with ETBs across Ireland to deliver this project. AONTAS reaches out to an ETB and asks if they would like to host a regional event. Once an ETB has confirmed their interest, AONTAS will work with the ETB to identify a suitable date, time, and location; promote the event across ETB programmes; identify speakers for the event; and promote the NFLF in local media outlets. AONTAS handles all the financial administration associated with the event, event delivery and ultimate reporting, while ETBs recruit learners to participate in each event.

The purpose of this project is to capture a broad and diverse range of learner voices and ensure these voices are incorporated into policy planning. In an effort to ensure each ETB was represented, regional events were held with ETBs who were unable to send representative learners to the national event.

Ahead of each event, the key contact person(s) in each ETB are provided with an introduction sheet (Appendix 7), for their reference, and a learner preparation pack (Appendix 8) to be distributed to all participating learners prior to the event. Each ETB is asked to invite learners from across a range of programmes, from both full-time and part-time provision.

Phase 2: Execution

Each invited learner receives a preparation pack detailing what to expect at the event before participating (Appendix 8). Upon arrival, learners are asked to give consent to learner discussions that are audio recorded and consent to optional photography that is taken. Learners are then assigned a number at random to identify their discussion group. A representative from the ETB welcomes learners and introduces AONTAS, who provide context for the day by giving a short presentation to introduce the NFLF and explain the role learner voice plays in FET policy at the national and regional level. Learners are then divided into groups of roughly ten learners per group. Each group is assigned a trained facilitator who poses the following questions:

Question 1: What was your experience entering Further Education and Training?

Question 2: How has your Further Education and Training programme met your needs as a learner?

Facilitated discussions last for one hour. All conversations are audio recorded and transcribed for reporting purposes. At the conclusion of these discussions learners are allocated ten minutes to respond to a brief questionnaire collaboratively designed by SOLAS and AONTAS. A summary of the findings from these questionnaires can be found in the 'Questionnaire Finding' section of this report, featured on pp 29–34.

Phase 3: Reporting

The focus of the project is on capturing and documenting learner voice. While the project shares both qualitative and quantitative data, emphasis is placed on capturing and documenting learner voice through discussions first and foremost. The surveys, which are given to learners at the end of the event, are a secondary data source and discussion results are used as the primary data source for the conclusions generated in this report.

2018 Regional Events

AONTAS administered nine regional events in 2018 with nine of the sixteen Education and Training Boards. These events ranged in size from 30 to 85

learners and reached a total of 509 learners over the course of the year. A complete breakdown of learner participation at these events, by ETB and FET programme, is provided in Figure 2 and Figure 3 featured below. Figure 5 shows the breakdown between part-time and full-time programme enrolment. Each regional event resulted in a publication summarising findings that are shared with the participating ETB, as well as other relevant bodies who may request it (e.g. SOLAS, DES, QQI).

2018 National Event

The national event was held on 13th April 2018 at Croke Park, Dublin, and brought together 86 learners from 14 different ETBs from across the country.

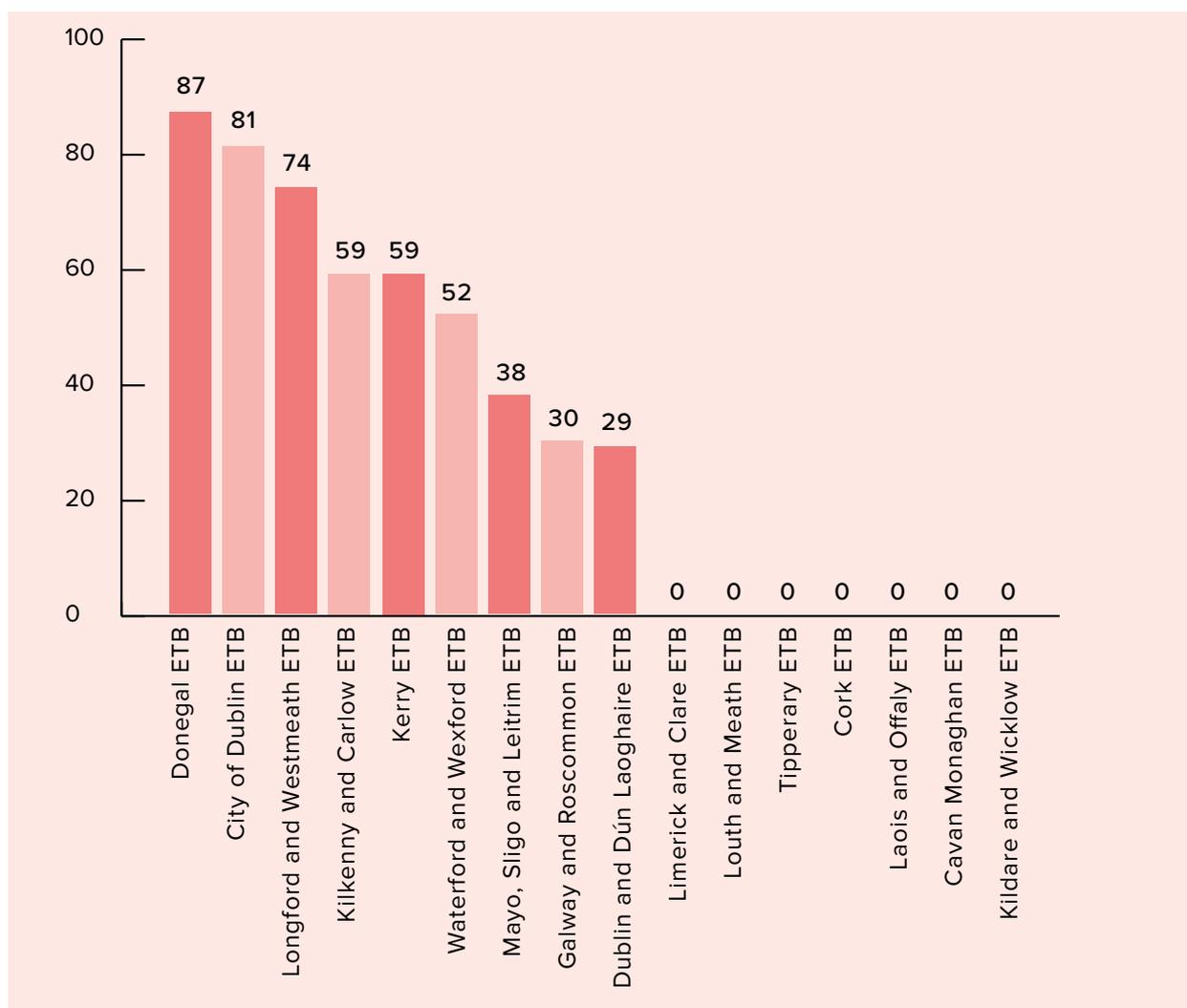


Figure 2 – Number of Learners who Participated at the 2018 Regional Events by ETB

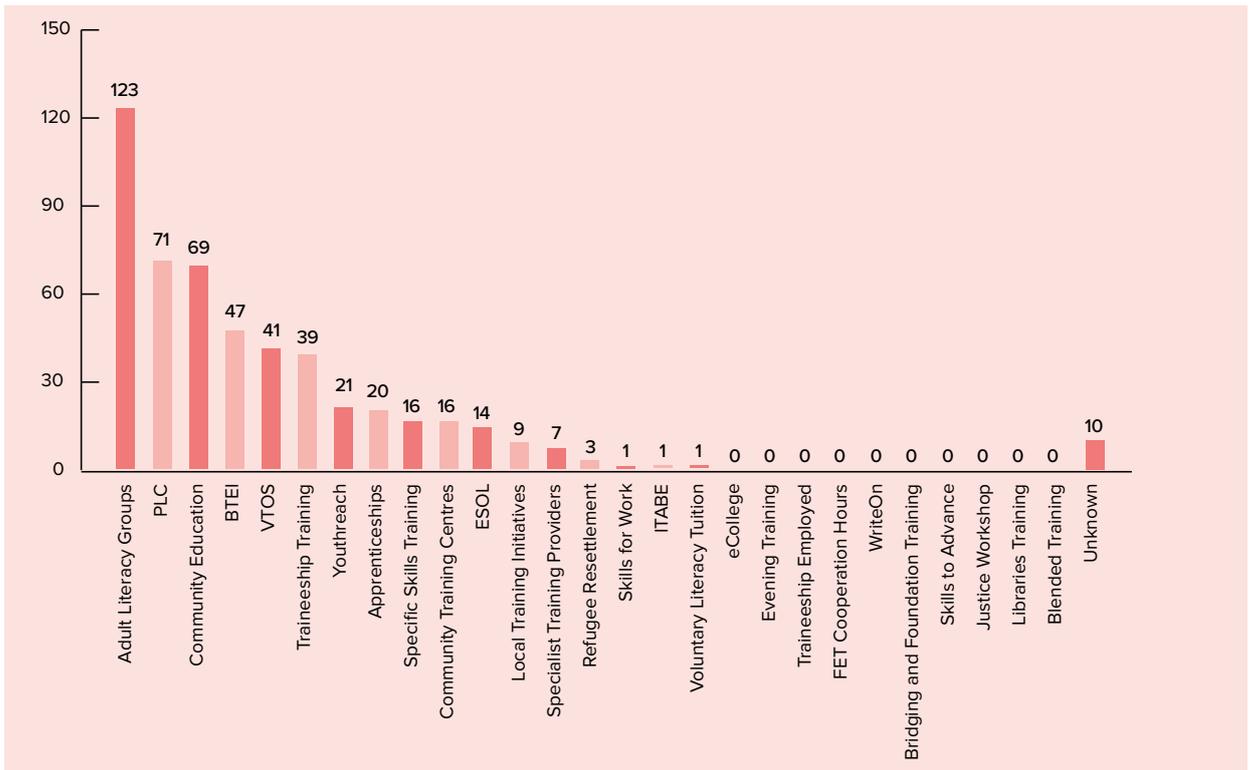


Figure 3 – Number of Learners who Participated at the 2018 Regional Events by FET Programme

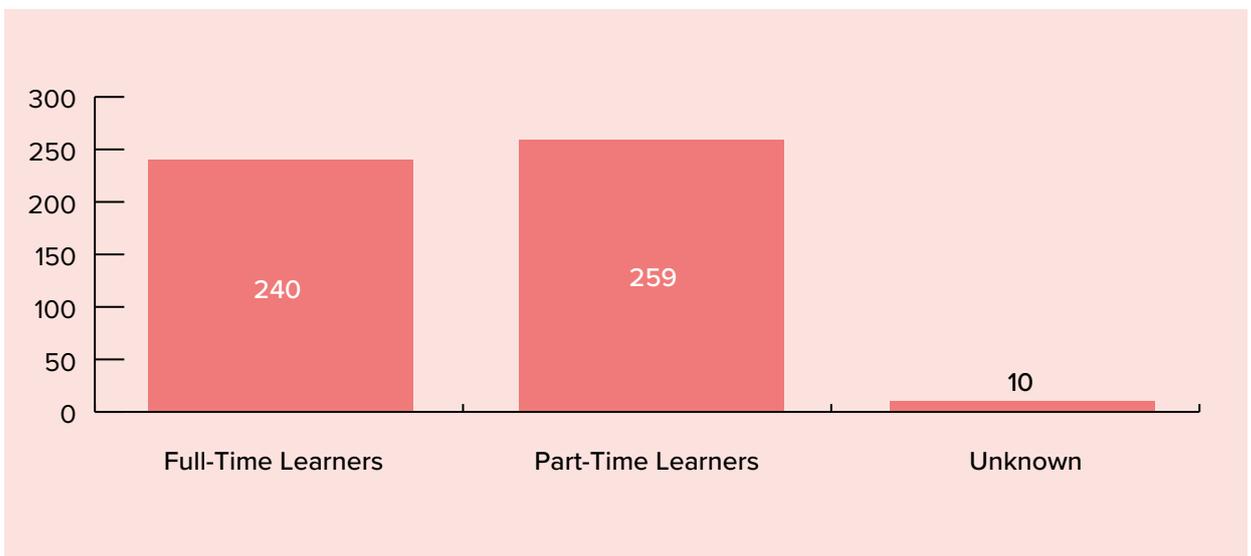


Figure 4 – Number of Learners who Participated at the 2018 Regional Events by Full-Time and Part-Time Programme

A complete breakdown of learner participation at the national event, by ETB and FET programme, is provided in Figure 5 and Figure 6 below. Figure 7 shows the breakdown between part-time and full-time programme enrolment. As well as learner participants, another 50 invited guests participated in the national event, including

FET staff and key stakeholders. Over the course of the day, learners took part in two learner-only one hour discussions. Learners also heard from a number of speakers and performers that included Richard Bruton (Minister of Education and Skills), Paul O’Toole (CEO, SOLAS), Imani Tutu (FET Learner), Fiona Maloney (Director

of FET Support Services, ETBI), Dr. Stephen O’Brien (University College Cork), John Lonergan (motivational speaker) and musician Jamie O’Reilly (FET learner). Parallel to learner discussions, two policy discussions also took place between academic expert group members and policy makers from SOLAS, Department of Education and Skills (DES), Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI), Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI), and the Higher Education Authority (HEA). The first policy discussion addressed learner voice in FET and the second discussion addressed access from FET to higher education. Findings from this event were reported internally to SOLAS’s Strategy and Evaluation Unit in May 2018.

Research limitations

The National FET Learner Forum is a project designed to allow learners who are actively engaged in FET courses to have the opportunity to share their views on how FET can be improved. The 595 FET learners participating over the year constitute a large-scale and mixed demographic qualitative sample. Since participation is voluntary, not all programmes or ETBs are represented. The findings presented in this report should, therefore, only be considered reflective of the views of the cohort of learners who participated in the ten 2018 learner forum events and not of the FET learner voice as a whole. This is not unusual in learner voice work. As researcher Paula Flynn (2017) explained, “there is no representative student voice.”

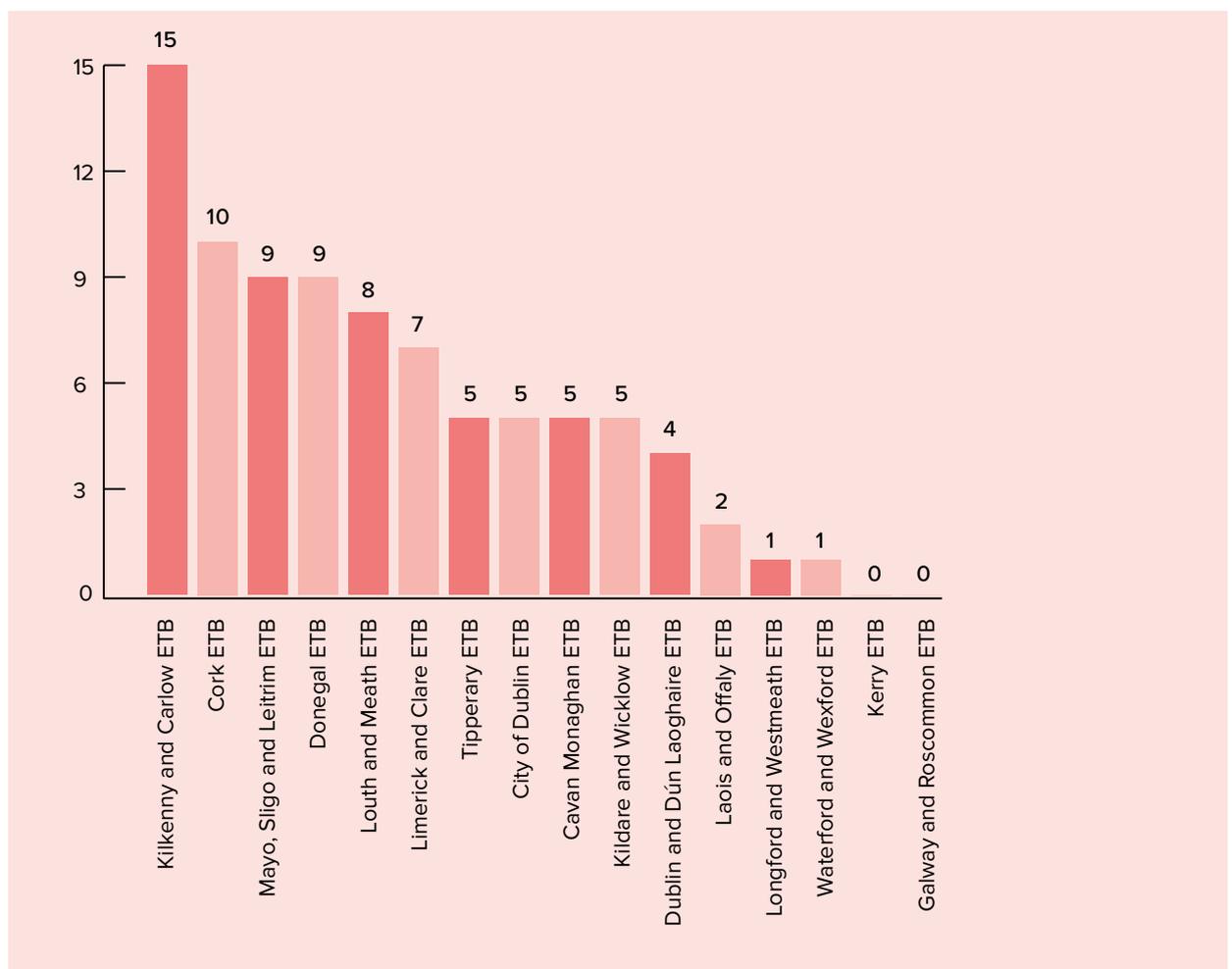


Figure 5 – Number of Learners who Participated at the 2018 National Event by ETB

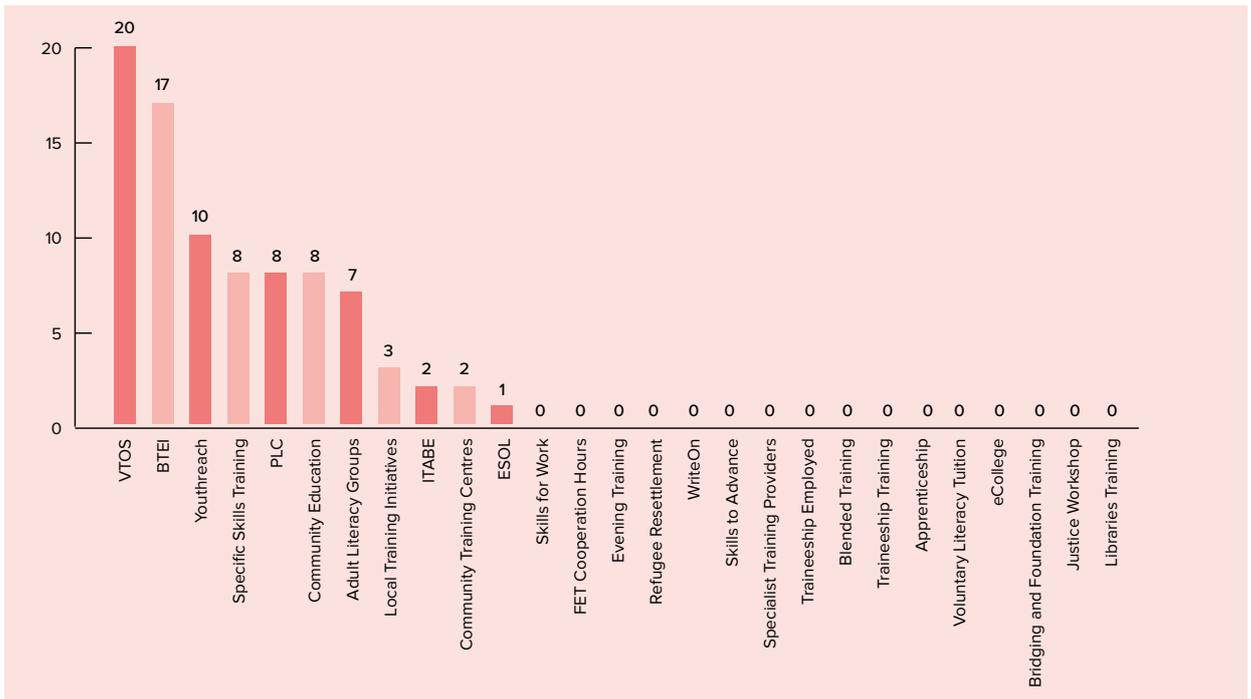


Figure 6 – Number of Learners who Participated at the 2018 National Event by FET Programme

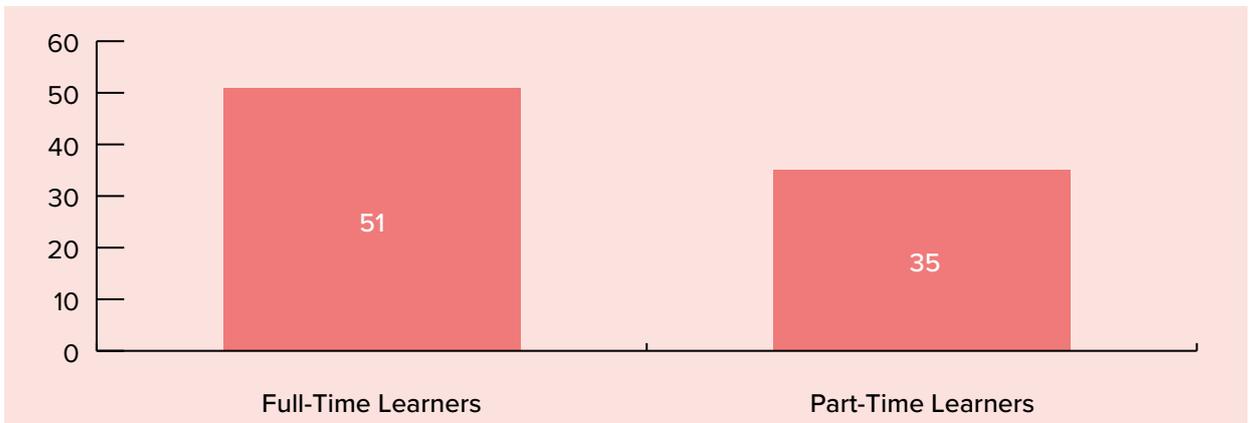


Figure 7 – Number of Learners who Participated at the 2018 National Event by Full-Time and Part-Time Programme

In Flynn’s study, learners who participated argued, ‘it shouldn’t matter if there isn’t a lot of us involved, it’s more important that we **are** involved.’” (p. 5). In a similar spirit, this project is about providing a safe and welcoming space to all learners who would like to share their voice.

AONTAS identifies learners to participate by reaching out to the ETB, who then advertise the event and recruit learners. Programme participation was monitored throughout the year and adjustments

were made to increase the representation of groups who were underrepresented (PLC learners and apprentices). Overall programme representation was left in the hands of ETBs who identified learners to participate. Learners from the following programmes participated: Apprenticeships, Adult Literacy, Back to Education Initiative (BTEI), Community Education, Community Training Centres, English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), ITABE, Local Training Initiatives, Post Leaving Certificate (PLC), Refugee

Resettlement, Skills for Work, Specific Skills, Specialist Skills, Traineeship Training, Voluntary Literacy Tuition, Vocational Training Opportunities' Scheme, Youthreach. For example, there were a number of FET programmes that were not represented at any 2018 Forum events. Example of these programmes include: Blended Training, Bridging and Foundation Training, Justice Workshops, Evening Training, FET Co-Operation Hours, Write On, Traineeships Employed and eCollege. Also, compared to their representation across FET, some FET programmes and ETBs were over or underrepresented. For example, learners from Adult Literacy, VTOS, Youthreach and Traineeships Trainings were overrepresented, as the proportion of learner participants from these programmes across 2018 Forum events was larger than the proportion of learners taking these programmes across FET. Conversely, learners from PLCs, Apprenticeship, ESOL, and Specific Skills Training were similarly underrepresented. To provide a better context for the relationship between Forum participation and FET enrolment, please see Figures 9–12 (p. 24–25).

To recruit further PLC learners and apprentices, AONTAS held Forum events at FET facilities that worked directly with these learners (ie one Forum event was held at a training centre in Sligo and one Forum event at a PLC college in Kerry). The result was that learners from these programmes came largely from the same ETB area (ie 82% of all 2018 apprentice participants attended the same Forum event held in a Sligo training centre and 75% of all 2018 PLC participants attended the same Forum event held in a PLC college in Kerry). The distribution of learners across full-time and part-time programmes remained fairly even, with only three more learners coming from part-time programmes. It should be noted,

however, that this breakdown does not reflect the actual number of part-time and full-time learners in FET, where part-time learners make up a much larger portion of the FET population. This is similarly so for learner representation by ETB and FET programme, where some ETBs and some FET programmes were over or underrepresented at learner forum events when compared to their overall representation in FET. Please see Figures 9 and Figures 10 below for a comparison of Forum representation at regional events compared to representation across FET by ETB and by FET programme, and Figure 11 and Figure 12 for a comparison of Forum representation at regional events compared to representation across FET by programme and by ETB. In these graphs, where the orange line goes above the blue bar, the ETB/Programme was overrepresented at Forum events and where the orange line goes below the blue bar, the ETB/Programme was underrepresented.

To participate in the Forum, learners also had to be actively enrolled on a SOLAS funded course. While learners were asked to reflect on barriers they faced in accessing their course, it should be noted that by nature of being actively engaged, these learners would have seemingly found a way to overcome these challenges.

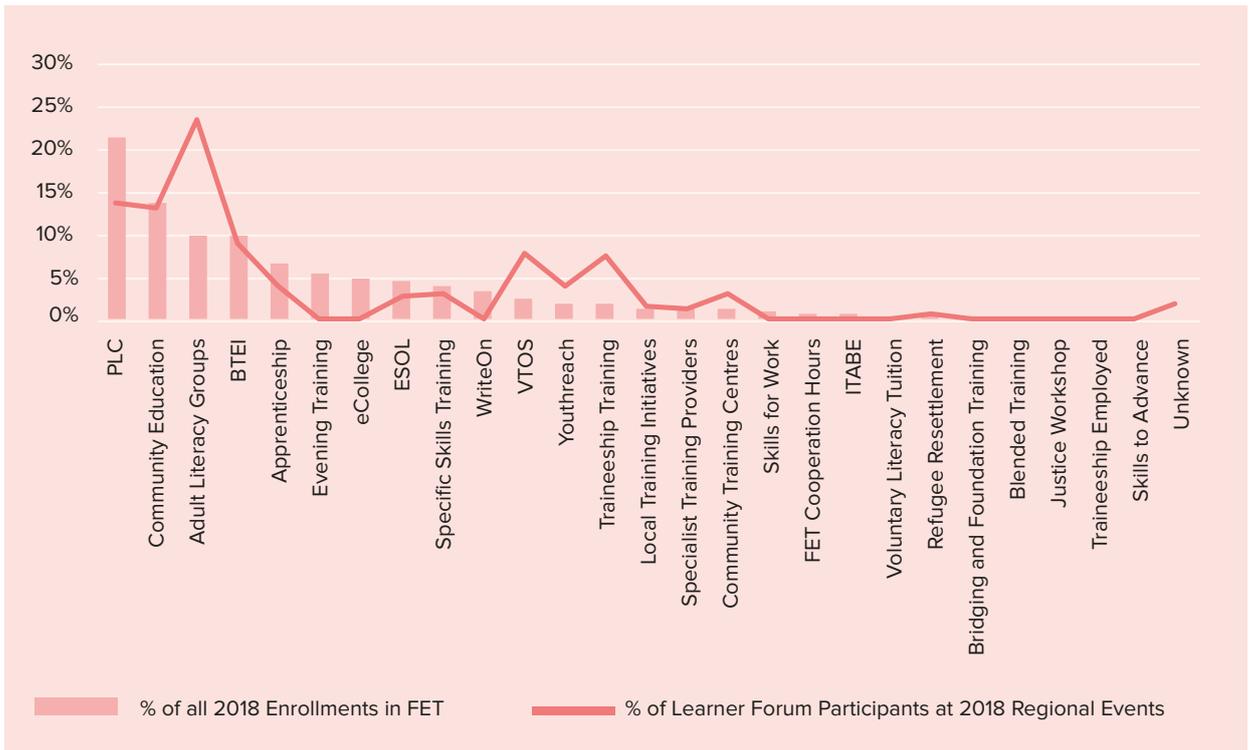


Figure 9 – Proportional Learner Representation at 2018 Regional Events compared to Representation across FET by Programme

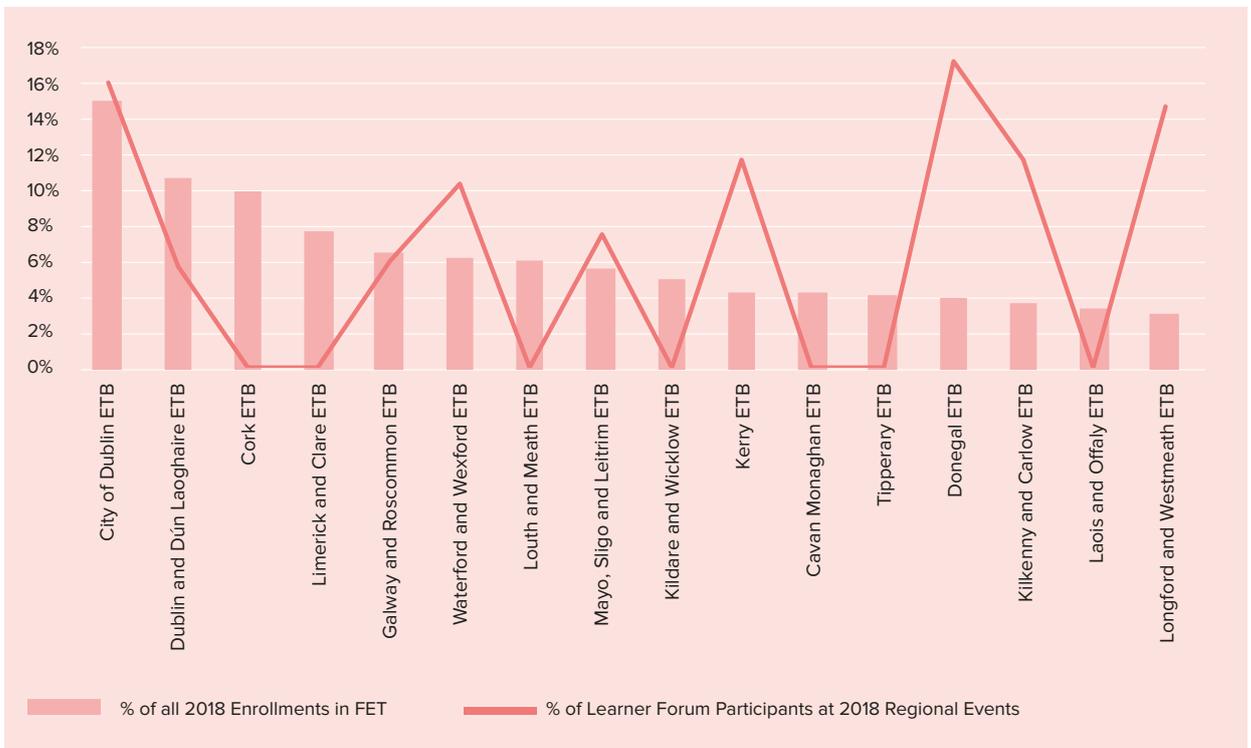


Figure 10 – Proportional Learner Representation at 2018 Regional Events Compared to their Representation across FET by ETB

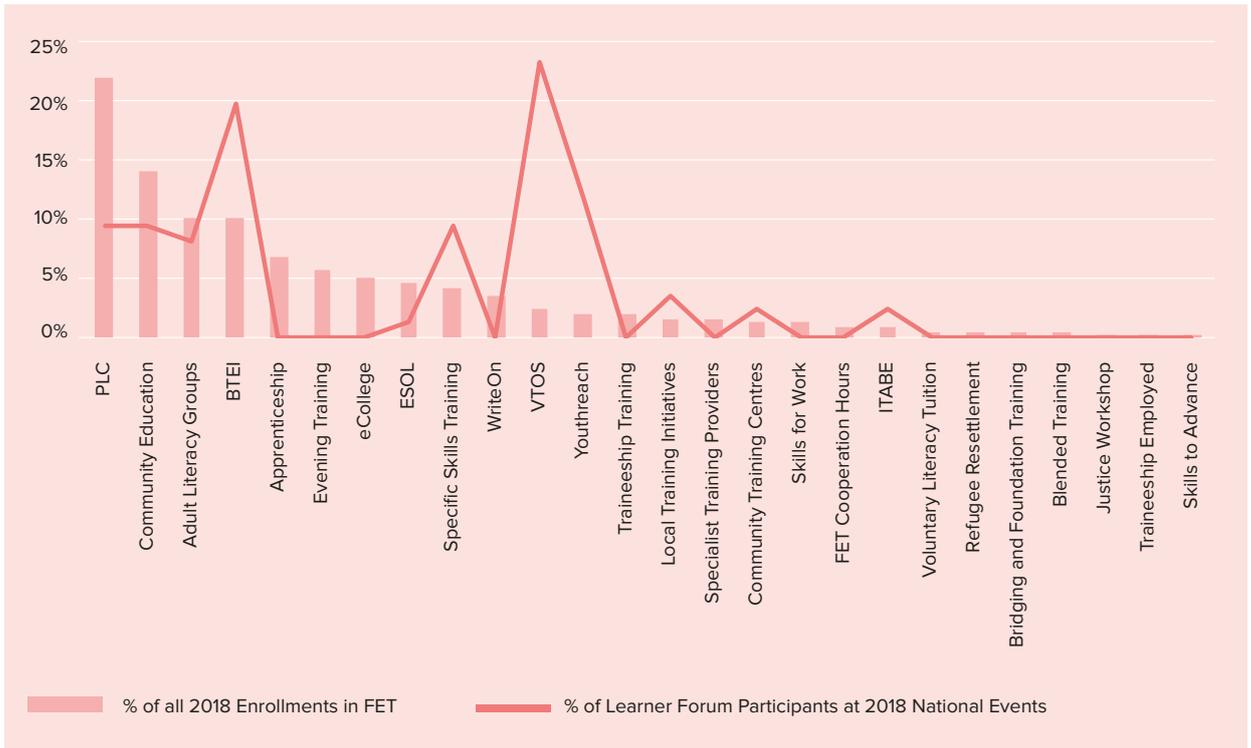


Figure 11 – Proportional Learner Representation at the 2018 National Event Compared to their Representation across FET, by Programme



Figure 12 – Proportional Learner Representation at the 2018 National Event Compared to their Representation across FET, by ETB

DETAILED RESULTS

Discussion Findings

This section has been divided into two parts: **areas working well** and **areas for improvement**. These sections have been developed directly from learner discussions. Learner statements have been integrated throughout to provide context for the feedback given.

Areas Working Well

When asked how learners first heard about their course, most learners stated they heard about their course through **word-of-mouth referrals** from a friend or family member who had completed a similar course. This was supported further by questionnaire responses in which 48% of learners selected word of mouth as the way they first discovered their course. The dominance of word of mouth referrals speaks to the positive experience previous learners had while in FET. Learners were happy to promote the ETB for all the positive work it is doing in the community and wanted to see more learners take part in courses.

Some of the learners who participated in the NFLF stated they used **guidance** services to help select a course that matched their needs. Individuals who used this service, described this process as incredibly helpful. One learner detailed, “it helped just sitting down and asking what you did and how it benefited you. They asked if there were any obstacles that were in your way previously, and brainstormed ways to avoid them.” Many learners felt that the scope of guidance services needed to focus more on broader supports that include career counselling and mental/ social wellbeing. In some instances, where guidance counsellors were going

above and beyond in their duties, this was already the case. Although every learner may not have been availing of guidance services, they believed they knew where to go to look for them. As one learner explained, “our career guidance would be able to help us on our course. She is there every Wednesday”. In centres where career guidance was offered, learners found this very beneficial.

Consistently across each ETB the group cited as most responsible for this welcoming and supportive atmosphere was **FET tutors** (tutors is the term most commonly used by learners, however, it broadly refers to teachers, practitioners, and instructors). In fact, tutors was the only area that was cited as working well in FET at every Forum event. As one learner stated, “as soon as the tutor comes in, you’re put at ease and you can learn at your own level.” FET tutors were described as “absolutely fantastic”, “very supportive”, “brilliant”, and “always there to help.” Learners felt tutors and FET staff played a critical role in building a positive culture in FET. Learners described FET as a welcoming and comfortable learning environment. As one learner described:

“I think in our centre it was very important that there was a sense of warmth and welcome. You could go out and have a cup of coffee. I think they are very understanding. I really think this is a big change from previous experiences. This is very positive. And I see they care for everybody.”

For many learners this environment was connected directly to their success. It was often described in contrast to their previous learning experiences where this culture was absent.

Learners also praised FET tutors for taking an **individualised approach to teaching**. For learners who had previously faced difficulties in school, this approach was one of the greatest benefits of FET. As one learner stated, “there’s no one leaning in over your shoulder demanding this, expecting that. You’re free to do it at your own pace.” This was deemed to be particularly beneficial to individuals with learning disabilities. One learner described his/her class as having many people who suffered from formally undiagnosed learning disabilities, which prevented them from succeeding in their previous learning environments. While smaller classes and individualised instruction helped alleviate some of these challenges, learners stressed the importance of FET tutors being cognisant of these potential issues and taking an active role in directing learners to the appropriate support services.

Learners also welcomed teaching practices that employed **peer learning**, describing it as another positive feature of FET. One learner praised his/her tutor for encouraging course participants to select a seat next to someone they did not know and introduce themselves, while another explained that his/her tutor encouraged course participants to create a WhatsApp group, which soon became an important social and educational tool for classmates. These peer learning practices were important to learners because they communicated that “everybody is equal.” As one learner described, “the thing about adult education is everybody learns from each other so even the tutors are learning. It’s not like the teacher telling you what to do.”

Learners who were hoping to gain employment after FET believed overall that their FET course provided them with the necessary **employment skills** that will move them closer to this aim. This point was supported by survey responses where 90% of learners stated they felt their course would lead them into employment or higher education (please see Questionnaire Results p. 48).

The importance of **IT skill development** in courses was also a common theme across many learner discussions. Overall learners were satisfied with the digital skills they were learning in FET and felt these skills were of value to the modern world. This was particularly important for learners from an older generation who cited increased confidence with everyday IT tasks, such as using a smartphone and a home computer, as a direct outcome of their FET learning. One learner described being terrified of the computer, but now after being enrolled in his/her course, s/he felt comfortable using the computer at home.

Participants emphasised the **transformative power of FET** throughout the discussions that took place. Numerous learners highlighted personal gains beyond formal learning as being the most important part of their educational journey. As one learner explained:

“It was definitely positive, it’s good for your own personal being I suppose. Makes you more confident. Gives you a good guidance on how to, or maybe information on how to get into different things, you know. The aim for us was to get a job but if not, it’s still good for your CV to say you have completed the course.”

Other learners discussed some of the wider benefits of FET in their everyday lives. One learner particularly enjoyed the routine s/he developed through FET stating, “It’s good, like things to do like, have to be in bed early at night, have to get up early in the morning.” For these learners, participating in the course had a much broader impact on their everyday life.

In line with the transformative power of FET, learners praised the effect taking part in FET had on **social integration**. This applied to both learners suffering from rural isolation and those originally from outside communities. As one learner described, “we are learning and mixing with other people and gaining a bit of confidence.” Another learner explained further, “I will include myself in social integration because, as a foreigner, it was a way for me to practice English and to learn more and to meet people from other countries and start to have a little web of people.” Learners in English language courses explained the importance of making new contacts to practice their English language skills outside of the classroom. These benefits not only helped their learning, but also allowed them to feel more connected to their community.

Areas for Improvement

Learners felt that FET should increase and diversify its advertisement methods. As one learner explained, “I think there’s many, many people that maybe you’re not reaching who never go.” Further investment in diverse forms of **advertisement**, such as flyers in doctors’ offices, radio advertisements, and public taster courses were given as recommended options to increase the profile of FET. Learners also reiterated the importance of each of these options containing the most up-to-date and accurate information in clear and

accessible language. As one learner cautioned “I think it’s a little confusing with all the different branches to the whole system. You have ETBI, FET, SOLAS, AONTAS, so for me when I went online searching for options, there is a little bit of jargon.” Learners wanted to see advertisement focused on promoting clear options for all learners on multiple platforms that appeal to diverse groups.

Younger learners, in particular, believed an investment in further advertisements for FET needed to include promotion of FET in local secondary schools. They wanted to see FET presented as an option when looking for diverse progression pathways after completing secondary school. However, they cautioned that one of the greatest barriers standing in the way of this type of reform was the perceived negative outlook of FET. As one learner explained, “All my friends have gone to a university. They’re kind of like ‘oh why are you in FET?’” Learners wanted to see FET promoted more as an equal option for progression from secondary schools. Participants suggested the implementation of a learner ambassador programme, in which FET learners speak about their courses at secondary schools as a potential option.

Learners who were referred into FET through the **Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (DEASP)** described mixed experiences. While some learners found the DEASP very helpful in directing them to course options in the area, others felt the DEASP did not provide enough information or pressured learners into courses they did not want to take. For example, a learner who felt overwhelmed by finding a course described the DEASP as “very helpful”, stating:

“I found it [finding a course] very complicated to understand. When I went to the job seekers, they explained things to me a bit more clearly and showed me where to go, where to apply, and then how to get stuff I needed.”

In contrast to this, another learner expressed frustration about not being told about FET by his/her DEASP case worker sooner. As s/he stated, “last year was the first time I ever received any information about it. So I didn’t even know any of these courses existed. I wasn’t informed that an alternative location might have been a better option for me.” Other learners expressed frustration at being pushed into courses they were not ready to take or did not suit their individual needs, stating “you feel you have to take one. Whether you’re ready for it or not.” Learners felt education was not valued as an option for unemployed workers looking to advance their skill set. As one learner concluded:

“I think they should recognise the invaluable contribution to the wider environment, because it’s so good for people’s mental health, physical health, and general wellbeing. Plus, if you think of a child looking at their parents as role models, learning becomes a path for life not just academic levels that the Department of Education brings out. There is learning across all areas of life. It’s self-financing is basically what I’m saying, because it most definitely benefits the whole community.”

A number of learners described how they entered FET to reskill after having a long-term professional career. Many of these learners felt they had many transferable skills built up that went unrecognised by the ETB. In an effort to validate these skills, learners called for an increase in **Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)** processes, with one learner stating, “if you could be recognised for your prior skills to progress on or into another job that would be important.” Learners believe they could use these opportunities to showcase their strengths and more accurately identify their individual educational needs. In addition, some learners expressed interest in having RPL processes extended, particularly in the area of language recognition. One learner explained this desire by stating, “I am a native Irish speaker but you see I don’t have a certificate for it. If I went for a job I would have to prove, you know the basics.” In this instance, the recognition of the learner’s Irish language skills would have increased his/her overall employability. Another learner applied this same argument to non-English speakers and migrants. Furthermore, for learners educated outside of Ireland, there was a general belief that their qualifications did not match the qualification requirements in the Irish system, which forced them to retake courses they felt they did not always need.

Learners asked for **course scheduling** to be completed as early as possible. Learners wanted to receive their course assignments and timetables at least two weeks prior to their course start date. In instances when this did not occur, learners described their start of course experience as frustrating. As one learner stated:

“I had to show them a timetable, but there wasn’t a timetable yet. So for someone with anxiety it was quite hard at that time. And then when we got there on the Monday morning, the timetable was completely different.”

Learners who felt most impacted by last minute scheduling changes were those enrolled on formal courses where there was often a waiting list for open spaces, so they understood the restraints ETBs faced. They, however, felt it was important to highlight how these last minute changes could impact their lives. One learner described receiving notice that his/her course was going to start, sourcing childcare, and then receiving a new notification that the course would be delayed. It was too late to receive these payment for childcare back, so the learner had to pay even though s/he would not be starting the course as planned.

For other learners, more access to non-accredited and part-time learning options were important. Time constraints posed by accredited course curricula was given as a reason for why some learners preferred non-accredited learning, with one learner explaining “you are rushing things in, trying to get it done in the timeframe.” While this learner expressed interest in seeing accredited courses adopt a more flexible approach to learning, similar to the models currently offered in most non-accredited courses, s/he concluded that non-accredited courses allowed for a more flexible course schedule, which fit his/her needs more appropriately. Since a number of learners agreed that non-accredited learning allowed learners

to better navigate the curriculum at their own pace, some learners advocated for more non-accredited courses, alongside a re-evaluation of the current accredited course workload requirements with an open possibility of extending course schedules to meet the content demands of each course.

The extension of part-time and flexible course options was linked to increased equality of access for parents, particularly mothers, and workers. A number of learners felt that increasing part-time course options would allow those with significant home responsibilities the ability to access training without having to sacrifice time with their family. One learner expressed this by stating:

“My first course was nine months so I was literally going to college Monday to Friday, coming home and doing all I could for assignments. I felt guilty because I didn’t see my daughter much Monday to Friday apart from the evenings.”

Another parent expressed frustration at the course s/he needed for his/her module only being offered at night when his/her children were home from school. S/he explained, “I can’t pay someone four hours to look after my daughter.”

For women who had been out of the workforce and caring for children, there was an added challenge posed by the inability to access social welfare funding streams to support their living costs while studying. As one woman described:

“My husband has an income, but it’s not enough to support my training; the children all have needs; and I have to run a household. All the programmes I looked at only have a social welfare payment option. With one income coming into the household, I’m in this no man’s land... I can’t access private training because we can’t afford it, I can’t access government training because I’m not on social welfare.”

Other learners described difficulties accessing courses because they were not offered in their area. Learners who reported having to relocate to complete their course or a phase of their learning felt this was a particular barrier. Learners felt course assignments should take into account individual circumstances.

Learners consistently requested extended course hours for **English language support**. As one learner explained:

“I believe that for the language classes, we need more classes. Because it’s too little, two hours or two hours and a half a week at higher levels. And a variety of other classes maybe. Not a diploma, but a discussion class or an everyday living skills class. Things that would create an interest for other people to come. Because I find that it’s very good, very interesting and very profitable for us that we are there.”

Along with extending course hours for English language courses, learners stated they would like more emphasis on conversational learning as well. Another learner further stated, “We need some chat rooms, we need to be speaking and communicating with other people to use what we learn.” Learners would like to put the skills they learn in class into practice through their course.

Learners reported rigidity in scheduling and what they described as unforgiving **attendance** policies. These factors caused some learners to call for a more flexible approach to attendance. Learners reported having their social welfare payments reduced for non-attendance due to circumstances beyond their control for which they could not obtain certification/verification. Examples provided by learners included being stuck in snow, having to miss class to care for sick relatives, and being delayed by public transport. These instances were seen as unduly harsh and learners asked that more discretion be given to learners facing circumstances beyond their control.

Attendance policies, however, were not the only barrier learners reported facing in their ability to complete a course. Learners also pointed to **unforeseen indirect costs**, usually for the purchase of materials or equipment required for certain courses, as being a significant barrier to course completion. Examples provided by learners of such unforeseen indirect costs included: uniforms, software programmes, parking expenses, and insurance costs for iPads. Learners noted that they did not anticipate these additional indirect course costs at the start of their courses. These learners believed having a complete breakdown of these unforeseen costs at the start would be helpful.

Others believed more funding needed to be allocated to **travel and accommodation allowances** so that they would cover 100%

of the cost of learners' transport and rent while studying on their FET course. One learner depicted this in outlining the challenges s/he faced in covering both his/her travel and accommodation costs:

“70 euro is given to cover accommodation, but I’m paying 125 for a house a week. And because I’m getting accommodation, I don’t get travel. So I have to pay for all this.”

It is important to note that learners also expressed reservations about the extension of bus passes to help alleviate transportation costs, because bus schedules did not always suit the lives of the learners or simply were not available in their local areas. This was particularly the case for rural learners who cited limited access to public transport routes that fit the timetables required for their class. One learner captured this by stating:

“Because I’m on the bus route, I don’t get a travel allowance. But the bus passes at the time that’s earlier than the crèche opens, so I can’t get the bus. And then I can’t get travel allowance either.”

The survey findings show that transport issues do not affect a majority of learners (70% responded that issues with transport never prevented them from attending a class) but the small group which is affected by this issue

find the cost of and limited access to transportation to be a major obstacle. These discussions show the financial burden learners feel they face in order to complete a course. As one learner wrote in the comments section of the survey, “I have to cut down on groceries weekly to attend course.” These statements are important because they reveal some of the potential reasons why others, who are not able to overcome these challenges, may not take a course. Further research on potential FET learners who are not taking a course would, however be needed to further explore this issue.

Once learners were enrolled in FET, many described the experience as very positive. In different areas, a number of learners believed that more could be done to improve **FET facilities**. These learners believed that FET centres should strive to have as much equality between them as possible. Learners who raised this issue requested items such as canteens, microwaves, water fountains and access to parking facilities as items that should be included in each FET centre. Some learners also stressed the importance of increased access to computer rooms and the most up-to-date technology in each course as areas that could be improved. Where learners were displeased with the physical environment of their FET centre, they reported that this environment had broader impacts on their learning as well. As one learner explained, “it just makes you not as excited to learn or go in everyday because there is no atmosphere. There is no personality.” Overall, learners who raised this issue expressed a desire to see disparities in facilities and the physical environment between FET centres addressed.

While digital and IT skill development was a celebrated part of FET and cited

as an example by a number of learners of what is working well in FET, some raised a number of cautionary points about the use of **technology** in FET as well. A number of learners wanted to see more face-to-face support included in blended learning courses to ensure learners remained adequately supported throughout their learning. One learner cautioned against the use of online learning without appropriate support in place. According to this learner, online learning can be “awful...you switch off once the ear phones go in, you can’t speak.” For many who raised this issue, they felt this reduced not only comprehension of course content, but also their enjoyment of the course. Other learners who raised this issue cited screen fatigue, stress associated with computer-based testing, and increased distraction caused by complete internet access as being negative side effects to what they described as an over dependence on technology. To combat this, these learners requested more balanced use of digital and non-digital resources (eg textbooks) in class assignments.

Many learners who had a **work placement** as a component part of their course discussed this topic in great detail. Some were intimidated by the prospect of having to find a work placement. Many learners who raised this issue believed that ETBs and Training Centres could play a more active role in working cooperatively with employers to identify work places willing to take on work placement learners. These learners offered suggestions such as “the centre we think should sort out work experience for us” or “at least have a list of places that took people the previous year.” Some learners who were able to secure work placements described experiencing frustration due to feeling that their placement did not match their learning

needs. For example, a learner described being stationed primarily in a front-of-house position in a hotel, when the learner felt that they really needed further training in the kitchen. Furthermore, many learners who raised this issue felt that industries, such as hotels, were unaware of their FET programme and were therefore reluctant to take on learners. This, they reported, had a significant impact on course morale. As one learner described:

“Everybody was really deflated then because we had no help looking for work experience. You were basically just left to find whatever you could to cover the 70 hours.”

Some of the learners who raised this issue reported that their experiences proved troubling, with one learner even surmising, “you are not learning.” Other learners, however, reported that their work placements were very helpful. They reported appreciating the balance between classroom and practical learning and felt that the connections they made in the workforce would be beneficial to their future career prospects. To help ensure every work experience is positive, learners who reported having a negative experience recommended that ETBs and employers work cooperatively to establish formal expectations and outcomes for work placements.

When asked about the **National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ)**, there appeared to be mixed levels of awareness among participants. Some learners reported being aware of the Framework and could identify how their course fit into the NFQ. Other learners stated they

had seen the NFQ at their FET centre on display and/or had it explained to them by a guidance counsellor. On the other hand, some learners claimed they had never heard of it before. When facilitators took out a picture or drew an image of the graphic used for the NFQ, some learners who said no, then stated they had seen it, but were unclear on what it was. As one learner stated, “I think it has something to do with certs” but s/he was unclear. Overall, these learners felt they could benefit from further explanation about how the NFQ worked and how it related to their learning journey.

Among learners who were using FET to access higher education and/or employment, some expressed mixed feelings on the amount of information available to them. Some of these learners felt they were very clear on **progression pathways**, but wanted to see more spaces in higher education institutions allocated to FET learners. Others stated they were not as informed on their progression options available to them. One such learner recommended, “Maybe there could be some communication on access

say to third-level education. Perhaps link in with an education officer in a University or something like that.” For learners who wanted to progress from their FET course into employment, some questioned the ability of their education to lead to employment in their local area: “all the jobs are in Dublin and the government saying otherwise is a load of rubbish,” as one learner stated. Good training, they felt, did not necessarily mean they would easily find employment. Other learners seeking employment were concerned that employers may be unaware of FET learners. They asked “Are employers on board with these schemes? Are they looking back to FET to see who is looking for work you know? Are they aware that there’s people out there being trained?” Learners felt that this concern could be addressed by ETBs and employers working collaboratively in local communities to ensure each party is working toward similar employment and training objectives. Learners felt that these links could be promoted across the various FET programmes by the ETB.



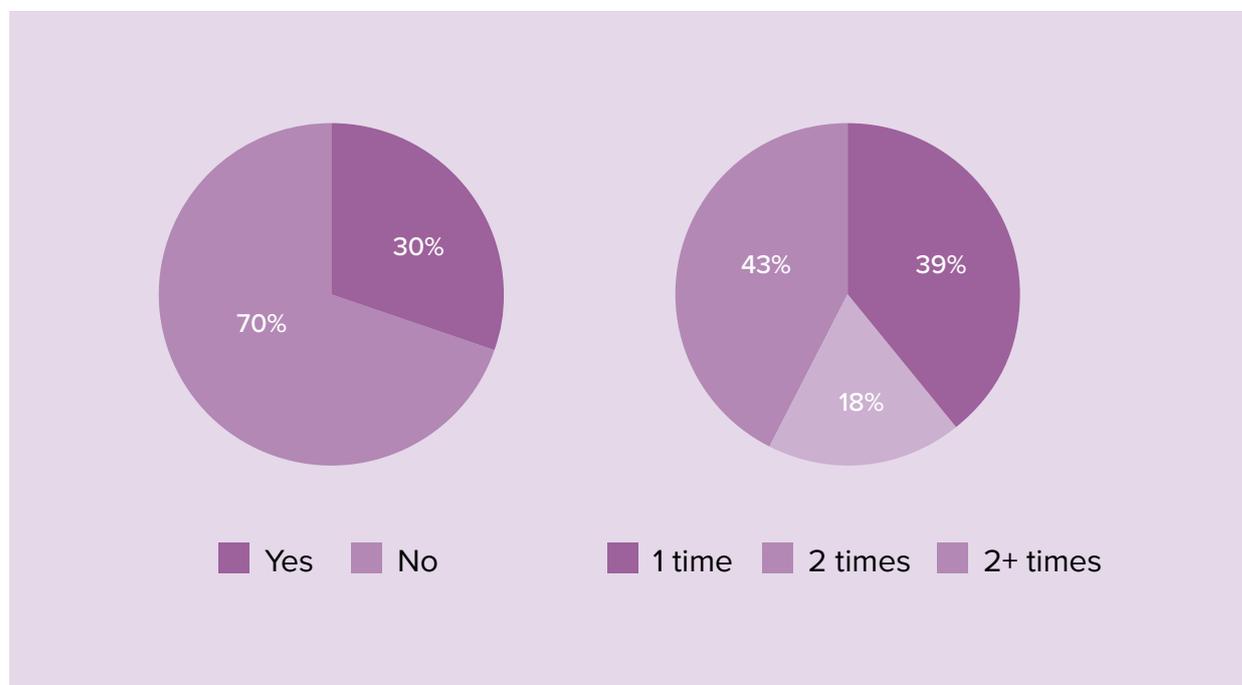
QUESTIONNAIRE FINDINGS

A total of 556 learners from NFLF events completed the optional surveys distributed at the conclusion of discussions. Survey findings revealed that **transportation** was a barrier for some learners. As you can see from figures 5.1 and 5.2, a majority (70% of respondents) indicated that they had never missed a class due to transportation issues. Of the 30% who had missed a class due to transportation issues, 39% indicated that this had only occurred on one occasion (ie 12% of all survey respondents), 18% on two occasions (ie 5% of all survey respondents) and 43% on more than two occasions (ie 13% of all survey respondents). In the comments section learners who reported facing transportation difficulties identified reasons such as parking and petrol related costs, access to available public transport

routes (particularly in rural areas), and distance between childcare supports or schooling and ETB centres as reasons for their perceived challenge. It is important to note, that while not captured in this questionnaire, some learners reported through discussions that their decision on what course to take was impacted by the course's availability in their area.

Question 1: Transportation

1. Have transportation costs (fuel or public transit costs) ever kept you from participating, or made it difficult to participate in your course? (*fig. 5.1*)
2. If transportation costs have prevented you from participating in a course, how frequently did this happen? (*fig. 5.2*)



(L-R) Figure 5.1 – Yes/No and Figure 5.2 – Amount of times

Learners were also asked about **course advertisement**. As you can see from Figure 6 below, responses highlighted that learners heard about their courses largely by word of mouth (48% of respondents). The second most common category selected was 'Other' (22% of respondents). In this category the most common responses provided were through internet sources including Facebook and website advertisement. Others wrote that they heard about their course through a family member or friend. The third most common source for course information was through a government body or agency (16% of respondents). This was followed by signs/posters (9% of respondents), television (3% of respondents), and radio advertisements (2% of respondents).

Learners were then asked to reflect on the **information** they received at the start of their course by answering a series of yes/no questions. As evidenced from figures 7.1 – 7.4, while the majority of learners felt they had received a course schedule (89% of respondents), course objectives (91% of respondents), the number of assessments (71% of respondents) and types of assessments (82% of respondents), there were some minor differences in responses for each category. For instance 18% of respondents indicated that they did not receive information on the types of assessments they would be given with a further 23% indicating that they were unaware of the number of assessments they would have to complete. These 'no' responses should be approached with caution, however, as some learners indicated in the comments section that assessments did not occur in their courses.

Question 2: Advertisement

1. How did you first hear about your course?

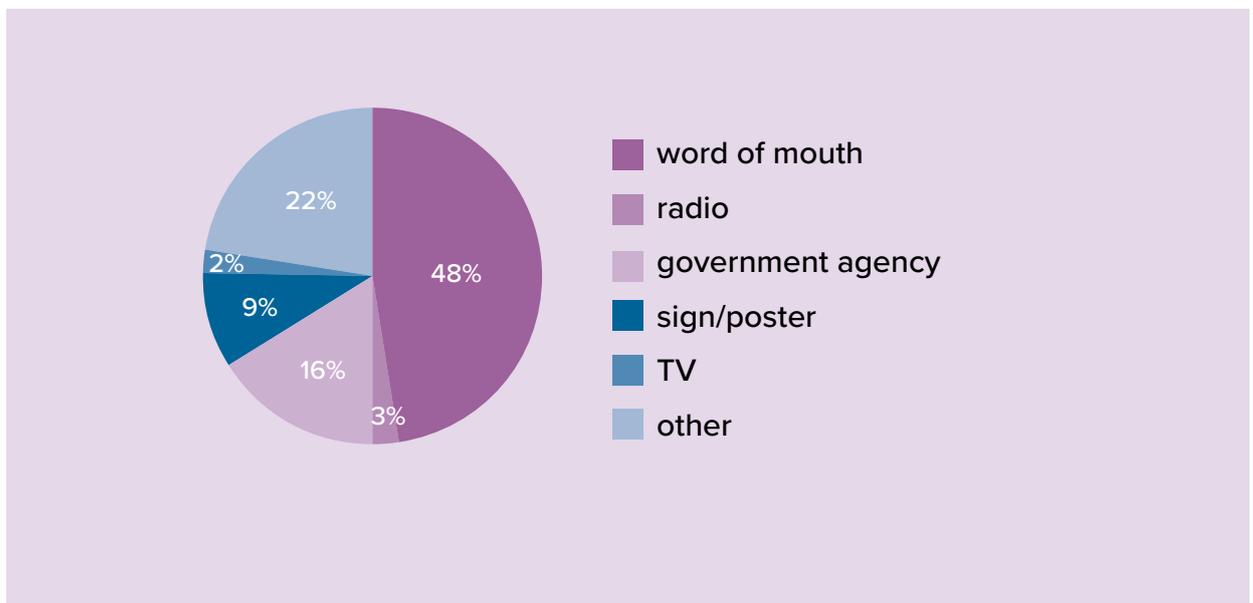


Figure 6 – Forms of Advertisement

The survey then listed a number of recommendations that were raised by learners at previous Forum events in 2016 and 2017 and asked learners to rank these recommendations from the most important to the least important. As Table 1 shows, learners ranked ‘more course options/ more course choices over time’ as the most important recommend action. This was followed by ‘guidance services/career counselling’, ‘mental health supports’ and ‘childcare.’ The lowest ranking went to the ‘other’ category. Learners who selected this category wrote in further comments such as ‘financial supports’, ‘learning supports’, ‘more English classes’ and ‘more remote access to equipment’.

Of the 556 learners who completed the questionnaire, only 438 responded to this question. Responses also decreased through the preference exercise. For instance, while 438 people allocated a preference of 1 for the most important, only 251 allocated a 5 for the least important preference. Learners who

used ticks to select a category remained untallied. Also, survey responses failed to breakdown the profile of the learner completing the survey, an adjustment that has been made to the 2019 events. This might explain why childcare, for instance, which came up frequently in the discussions as the most significant barrier faced by parents in successfully completing a course, ranked the lowest out of the survey. It is also possible that childcare is not an issue for the majority of learner participants, but a very significant issue for those learners who face it as a barrier. This might suggest why it is raised by certain learners with such importance in the discussion groups, but ranked among the least important issues by the overall majority.

Question 3: Course Information

1. At the start of your course, did you receive the following information?

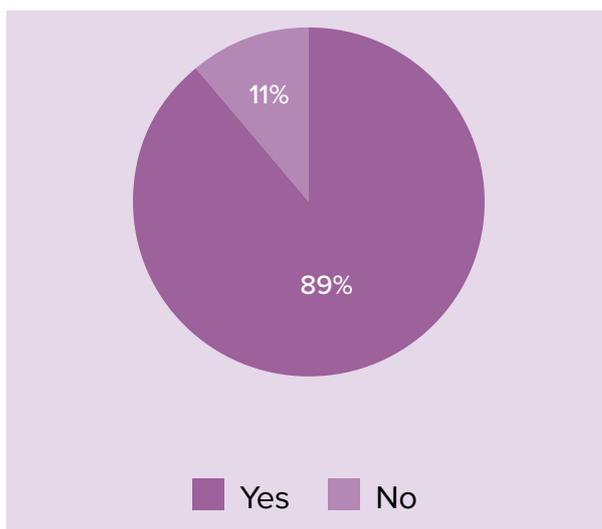


Figure 7.1 – Course Schedule

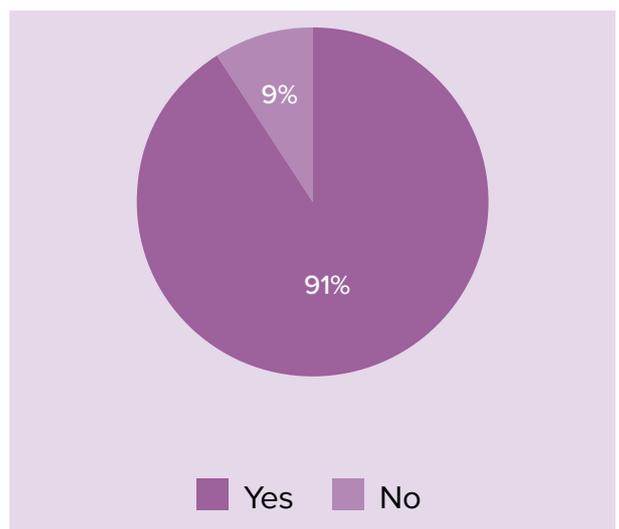


Figure 7.2 – Course Objectives

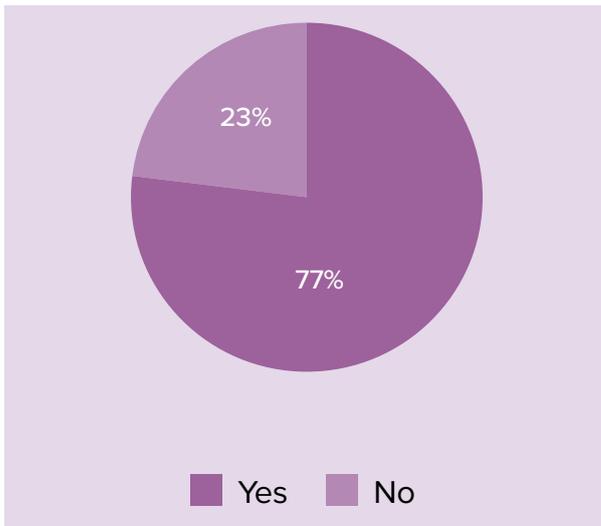


Figure 7.3 – Number of Assessments

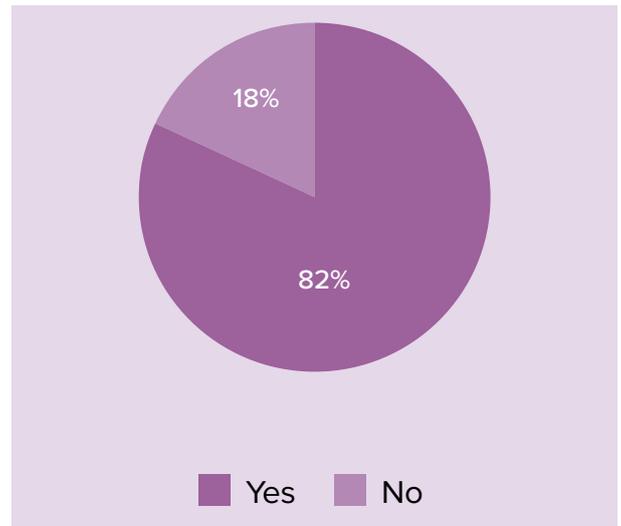


Figure 7.4 – Types of Assessment

Question 4: Learner Recommendations

1. Below you will see a list of **recommendations** learners have given at past learner forum events that they have said would help ensure their success. Please review these recommendations and rank them from 1 to 5 (1 being the MOST important and 5 being the LEAST important for your success in Further Education and Training).

Ranking	
1 (Most Important)	-more course options/ more choice over course times
2	-guidance services/career counselling
3	-mental health supports
4	-Childcare support
5 (Least Important)	-Other

Table 1 – Learner Recommendations

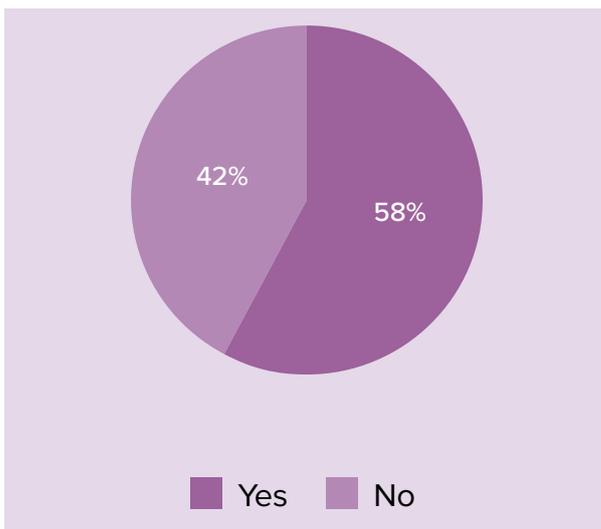
Learners were also asked to answer a yes/no question on whether their ETB had asked them about their learning experience before this event. They were also then asked to rank a series of **learner engagement** mechanisms to identify their most preferred way in which learners would like to be asked about their course experience. As shown in Figure 8, preferences across ETBs varied slightly; overall learners stated that they preferred to provide feedback through surveys. In the discussion groups, some learners stated, however, that they would like to see these surveys distributed after grading is completed, expressing reservation about having to submit surveys to their tutors or course markers before classes were complete. Learners also expressed interest in focus groups as a vehicle for sharing feedback. This was followed by learner representatives, evaluations and student councils. The 'other' category, when selected, contained further suggestions such as teacher/ learner consultations and class meetings.

Similar to the previous ranking question, responses were lower due to the difficulty of the exercise. Of the 556 learners who completed they survey, only 398 of them ranked one of the topics and only 158 awarded a least preferred ranking of 6.

2. What is the best way for ETBs to hear about your educational experience? Please rank the following options from 1 to 6 (1 being the MOST preferred option and 6 LEAST preferred option).

Question 5: Learner Engagement

1. Have you ever been asked by your ETB about your current education experience? Examples of how you may have been asked include, but are not limited to conversation with class representatives, surveys, forums, etc. (Please tick (✓) one)

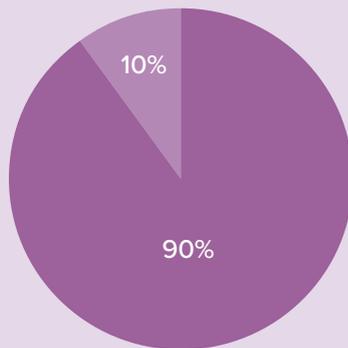


Most Preferred to Least Preferred
-Surveys
-Focus groups
-Learner representatives
-Evaluations
-Student council or learner representative meetings
-Other

Figure 8 – ETB Engagement

The final questionnaire topic addressed **course satisfaction**. Learners were provided with a yes/no option to three questions. As figures 8.1 – 8.3 demonstrate, overall learners were very satisfied with their courses. In relation to progression, 90% of the learners who responded to the survey believed their course would help them progress to employment or higher education. It should be noted that a number of the respondents to this question indicated that employment was not their motivation for taking their course, either because they were not looking for work or their course was not one designed for the purposes of employment. A further 95% of respondents felt their course had met their expectations. When asked if they would recommend their course to a friend, overwhelmingly learners stated that they would, with 98% responding positively to this question.

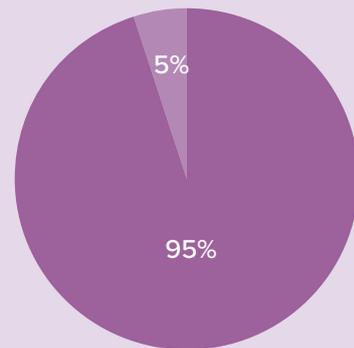
Do you think your course will help you progress to employment or higher education?



■ Yes ■ No

Figure 8.1 – Progression

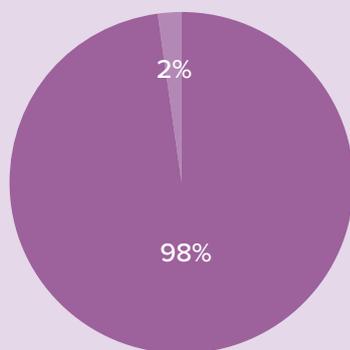
Based on your experience to date, has your course fulfilled your expectations?



■ Yes ■ No

Figure 8.2 – Expectations

Would you recommend your Further Education and Training Course to a friend?



■ Yes ■ No

Figure 8.3 – Recommend

CONCLUSION

Overall learners were satisfied with their experiences in FET. This was evident from learner responses to survey questions on FET satisfaction and through learner discussions in which learners pointed to the transformative power of FET and their willingness to promote FET to their peers. Learners believed their courses increased their confidence, expanded their skill set and expanded their social networks. Learners' success in FET was largely attributed to the role tutors played in supporting learner development. Tutors remained the one area that learners consistently pointed to across all events as an area working well in FET.

In terms of areas for improvement, a number of learners raised issues such as transport, course availability in their local area, unforeseen indirect course costs, and learner referral processes through the DEASP. Learners who were referred through the DEASP felt that the processes in place do not take account of their individual learning needs. A number of learners also requested that transportation and accommodation allowances be increased so that they cover 100% of learners' transportation and accommodation costs while studying on their FET course. They wanted ETBs to provide an estimate of all indirect costs that will be required for materials necessary for course completion (ie iPad insurance costs, uniforms, etc) at the onset.

While learners expressed confidence that the skills they were gaining through their FET course would increase their employability, learners did want to see

more formal recognition awarded to the skillset they already developed before entering FET. For this reason, learners called for an expansion of RPL processes across ETBs. Learners also wanted to see work-based learning enhanced by ETBs and employers working together, as they believed this would help to ensure that learners would be supported throughout their work placement.

For learners who availed of guidance services, these supports were seen as working well. Learners, however, believed guidance should be promoted more and used to better support progression pathways. There was a call for clearer learner progression pathways into higher education, employment, or another FET course. It is important to note, however, while progression is a key objective for many NFLF participants, it is not the only reason learners undertake a FET course. Learner statements on the broader value of learning highlight some of the many benefits of FET beyond progression including social integration, positive mental health promotion, and combatting rural isolation.

The 2018 Learner Forum project has provided evidence of both the value of FET and learner suggestions on how to improve FET moving forward. Learners have a powerful role to play in shaping the future of FET. The recommendations from this report have been shared with key stakeholders working in the field and its findings will be considered by SOLAS for its strategic planning for the FET sector.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Learner Totals for Regional and National Events by ETB

ETB	National	Regionals	Totals
DETB	9	87	96
CDETB	5	81	86
LWETB	1	74	75
KCETB	15	59	74
KETB	0	59	59
WWETB	1	52	53
MSLETB	9	38	47
DDLETB	4	29	33
GRETB	0	30	30
CETB	10	0	10
LMETB	8	0	8
LCETB	7	0	7
TETB	5	0	5
CMETB	5	0	5
KWETB	5	0	5
LOETB	2	0	2
TOTALS	86	509	595

Appendix 2: Members of the National FET Learner Forum Advisory Group

Name	Affiliation
Una Buckley	Adult Learner
Eileen Condon	Further Education and Training (FET) Director, Tipperary Education and Training Board (TETB)
Liz Farrelly	Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (DEASP)
Sinead Hickey	Department of Education and Skills (DES)
Siobhan McEntee	Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI)
Ivica Milicevic	SOLAS
Margaret Murray	National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA)
Jenny O'Connor	SOLAS
Madge Phelan	Department of Education and Skills (DES)
Rowena Watters	Adult Learner
Ross Woods	Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI)

**All names featured in alphabetical order by last name*

Appendix 3: Members of the National FET Learner Forum Academic Expert Group

Name	Affiliation
Prof. Dr. Koen DePryck	Vrije Universiteit Brussel
Dr. Toni Fazaeli	University of Wolverhampton and the Institute for Learning
Prof. Fergal Ferguson	Maynooth University
Prof. John Field	University of Warwick/DCU
Prof. Ted Fleming	Columbia University
Prof. Paula Flynn	Dublin City University
Prof. Peter Lavender	University of Wolverhampton
Dr. Stephen O'Brien	University College Cork

**All names featured in alphabetical order by last name*

Appendix 4: Introduction Sheet

National Further Education and Training Learner Forum 2018 – Introduction Sheet

What is the National FET Learner Forum?

Throughout the development of the Further Education and Training (FET) Strategy 2014–2019, SOLAS, the National FET Authority, committed to hearing the voice of learners. **Objective 3.1 of the FET Strategy states policy will “to respond to the needs of learners”**. It was out of this objective that the National FET Learner Forum was created. When it launched in 2016, the National FET Learner Forum brought together 80 learners from across Ireland. In 2018, we have expanded the Forum in an effort to reach even more learners. To date, we have reached 919 learners across the country. This effort has been achieved through the implementation of **regional events**. In 2019, we plan to host a regional event with all 16 ETBs and reach over 1,000 learners.

Which learners should take part?

It is important for us to hear from a diverse group of learners. The makeup of the event should reflect the population of learners in your ETB. We are, however, particularly interested in hearing from learners participating in full-time courses.

What is the purpose?

The purpose of these events is to gather feedback at the regional level to help inform regional programme planning. These events, along with the feedback we get at the national level, is also used to inform the work of national agencies like SOLAS, QQI, and ETBI.

What are regional events like?

Regional events take place in a local hotel or at an ETB facility. AONTAS will accommodate the option that works best for the ETB. Depending on the time of year, regional events range in size from 50 – 80 learners.

What should the ETB staff do on the day?

On the day, the ETB will only need to provide one staff member. If tutors and/or ETB staff escort learners to an event, we would like them to be aware in advance that they will be kindly asked to leave the room when facilitated learner conversations begin. This is to ensure learners feel free to share their thoughts and recommendations.

What do ETBs receive for participating in this event?

- AONTAS will promote the ETB’s participation in a Forum event on social media and through the local press (a professional photographer will be on site – see our communications reach below)
- Within two weeks of an event, ETBs will receive survey results
- Within a three month period, ETBs will receive a complete copy of the NFLF report (10–15 pages)
- Participation in the NFLF can be used as evidence of learner engagement in line with an ETB’s quality assurance

AONTAS Communications for Your ETB

Last year, **6,508,123** people reached through our extensive communications work which included our online platforms and media coverage. We also had **154 media** opportunities (106 print articles, 39 online articles and 9 radio interviews), across 21 counties with a combined reach of **4,112,120** people.

- 1. National Coverage:** Reach of 2.4 million through 21 national media articles in 12 national media outlets
- 2. Local/Regional Coverage:** Reach of 1.7 million people through 134 articles in 63 local/regional media outlets in 21 counties – specifically promoting 15 ETB areas

We want to support the great work you are doing in your ETB not just during the Forum, but all year round. If there is anything we can do to promote your work, please let us know.

The National FET Learner Forum Regional Meeting

Date:	
Time:	10:00am – 1:00pm
Venue:	
Sample Agenda	
10:00am – 10:15am	Registration/Tea, coffee and refreshments
10:15am – 10:45am	Introduction
	Welcome address – ETB staff member
	Short presentation about the National FET Learner Forum project by AONTAS – AONTAS staff member
10:45am – 11:45am	Group Discussions (8–10 learners per group)
11:45am – 12:00pm	Questionnaires/Evaluations
12:00pm – 1:00pm	Lunch

What are the administrative requirements of an event?

AONTAS	The ETB
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> –Organises the event –Provides all preparation materials –Covers any associated costs –Recruits trained facilitators to deliver learner focus groups –Transcribes all learner discussions and analyses all data –Develops a comprehensive report of all findings after the event 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> –Appoints a key contact (staff member) to liaise with AONTAS leading up to the event –Selects a location for the event –Identifies learners to participate –Sends programme details on learners after an event takes place –Provides a speaker to welcome learners on the day

Appendix 5: Learner Information Sheet

The National FET Learner Forum		
Information for Learners		
PLEASE READ THIS INFORMATION CAREFULLY. IT EXPLAINS YOUR PARTICIPATION AND EXPENSE CLAIM FOR TRAVEL TO THE EVENT.		
ETB	Date	Venue
Contact: Leah Dowdall, email: ldowdall@aontas.com or phone: 087 971 0231		
What is the Forum?		
<p>The National FET Learner Forum (NFLF) is designed to provide a platform for you to share your experience in FET. During the focus group, the facilitators will ask questions to encourage discussions and share ideas, so we can help improve the FET service. It is really important to note that there are no right or wrong answers. We want to hear about your own experiences with the FET service and get your honest feedback.</p> <p>You Discuss > AONTAS Reports > SOLAS and your ETB receive information to make changes</p>		
Learner Discussions		
At the focus groups there will be two questions asked:		
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What was your experience of entering Further Education and Training? 2. How has your Further Education and Training programme met your needs as a learner? 		
What You Need to Know		
Questions	Answers	
Do I have to participate?	No. Your participation is voluntary.	
Are my opinions anonymous?	Yes. All data collected will be anonymised before reporting. All personal details will be held on to for one year by AONTAS and then destroyed. It will not be shared with any outside bodies.	
Will the focus groups be recorded?	Yes. They will be audio recorded for reporting purposes.	
Will be photos taken at the event?	Yes. We will have you sign a release for photos. If you do not want your photo taken, you do not have to sign a release. Just let a member of staff know.	
How much information do I have to share if I take part in a focus group?	This is entirely up to you. You can share as much as you feel comfortable.	
Travel Grant for NFLF Regional Meetings		
If you drive or take public transport to an event, you can receive a travel grant. The grant will be paid on the day in cash. Grants are calculated based on the distance travelled to an event. You can see these calculations in the table below.		

Grant	Distance	Amount
Grant 1	0 – 60km roundtrip	€10
Grant 2	60 – 120km roundtrip	€20
Grant 3	+120km round trip	€50

Please note the following:

- Each eligible nominated learner is assigned a grant based on distance travelled
- The above grant will be paid on the day at the event once the learner provides receipts
- Proof of travel/receipts is a necessary requirement to receive the grant (grant amounts will be paid based on distance and not on the amount shown on travel receipts)
- Pictures of receipts/tickets can be taken if the learner requires it for further use (i.e. return tickets)
- These grants cover travel only – no subsistence or accommodation is covered
- Learners who travel on a bus organised by an ETB or who walk to an event will not receive a travel grant

If you have any further questions please contact: Leah Dowdall, AONTAS, Head of Research;
Email: ldowdall@aontas.com Phone: 01 406 8220 or 087 971 0231

AONTAS – The National Adult Learning Organisation

AONTAS is a voluntary membership organisation and we believe that all adults in Ireland have a right to quality learning throughout their lives. We also promote the value and benefits of adult learning. Learners are at the centre of our work and we know that your experiences provide important information which should be used to help change the services and policies which affect your learning. AONTAS consults learners to find out about the learners' experiences of these services.

SOLAS

SOLAS is the Further Education and Training Authority in Ireland. They work with Education and Training Boards (ETBs) to support the development of appropriate further education and training programmes across Ireland.

The National FET Learner Forum Regional Meeting	
Date:	
Time:	10:00am – 12:00pm
Venue:	
Agenda	
10:00am – 10:15am	Registration/Tea, coffee and refreshments
10:15am – 10:45am	Introduction
	Welcome address – Representative from ETB
	Short presentation about the National FET Learner Forum – Leah Dowdall, AONTAS
	Housekeeping
10:45am – 12:00am	Group Discussions (10 learners per group)
12:00pm – 1:00pm	Lunch (Tea, Coffee, Sandwiches)

Appendix 6: Questionnaire

The following questions are being asked in order to understand issues previously discussed with learners.		
Transportation		
Have transportation costs (fuel or public transit costs) ever kept you from participating, or made it difficult to participate in your course? (Please tick (✓) one)		
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	
If transportation costs have prevented you from participating in a course, how frequently did this happen? (Please tick (✓) one)		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1 time	<input type="checkbox"/> 2 times	<input type="checkbox"/> More than 2 times
Comments:		
FET Advertisement		
How did you first hear about your course? (Please tick (✓) one)		
<input type="checkbox"/> Word of mouth	<input type="checkbox"/> Radio Advertisement	<input type="checkbox"/> Government service (Intreo)
<input type="checkbox"/> Sign or poster advertisement	<input type="checkbox"/> TV Advertisement	
<input type="checkbox"/> Other (please identify):		
Comments:		
Information		
At the start of your course, did you receive the following information? (Please tick (✓) one)		
The course schedule or timetable	<input type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO
The course objectives	<input type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO
The number of assessments during the course	<input type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO
The types of assessments (example: portfolio, test, essay)	<input type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO
Comments:		

Learner Recommendations	
Below you will see a list of recommendations learners have given at past learner forum events that they have said would help ensure their success. Please review these recommendations and rank them from 1 to 5 (1 being the MOST important and 5 being the LEAST important for your success in Further Education and Training).	
	Childcare support
	Guidance Services/career counselling
	More course options and more choice over course times
	Mental health support
	Other (Please identify):
Learner Engagement	
Have you ever been asked by your ETB about your current educational experience? Examples of how you may have been asked include, but are not limited to, conversation with class representatives, surveys, forums, etc. (Please tick (✓) one)	
<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO	
What is the best way for ETBs to hear about your educational experience? Please rank the following options from 1 to 6 (1 being the MOST preferred option and 6 LEAST preferred option)	
	Surveys
	Evaluation forms
	Class representatives
	Student council or learner representative meetings
	Focus groups concerning specific issues
	Other (Please identify):
Course Assessment	
Do you think your course will help you progress to employment or higher education? (Please tick (✓) one)	
<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO	
Based on your experience to date, has your course fulfilled your expectations? (Please tick (✓) one)	
<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO	
Would you recommend your Further Education and Training course to a friend? (Please tick (✓) one)	
<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO	
Comments:	

Appendix 7: Questionnaire Results

Table 5. Total Survey Responses

ETB	TOTAL RESPONSES
KCETB	59
CDETB	75
National Event	80
DETB	82
DDLETB	28
GRETB	28
MSLETB	35
LWETB	64
WWETB	52
KETB	53
TOTAL	556

Table 6. Question 1: Transportation

Have transportation costs (fuel or public transit costs) ever kept you from participating, or made it difficult to participate in your course? (Please tick (✓) one)

Yes No

If transportation costs have prevented you from participating in a course, how frequently did this happen? (Please tick (✓) one)

1 time 2 times More than 2 times

ETB	Yes	No	1 time	2 times	more than 2
KCETB	20	32	9	3	9
CDETB	17	57	4	1	9
National Event	11	69	5	3	5
DETB	30	49	13	3	12

DDLETB	13	15	2	5	0
GRETb	10	17	9	0	4
MSLETB	15	19	5	3	8
LWETB	14	51	9	6	7
WWETB	13	36	4	3	6
KETB	22	31	5	3	10
TOTAL	165	376	65	30	70

Table 7. Question 2: FET Advertisement

How did you first hear about your course? (Please tick (✓) one)

Word of mouth Radio Advertisement Government service (Intreo)

Sign or poster advertisement TV Advertisement

Other (please identify):

ETB	Word Of Mouth	Radio Ad	Government Service	Sign Or Poster	TV	Other
KCETB	23	1	12	1	0	11
CDETb	30	1	13	13	3	7
National Event	25	3	10	11	2	2
DETb	43	0	8	9	0	11
DDLETB	9	0	8	1	0	7
GRETb	10	2	5	3	2	9
MSLETB	14	0	4	0	0	17
LWETB	26	2	16	4	3	21
WWETB	31	1	4	2	1	8
KETB	31	3	1	3	0	21
TOTAL	242	13	81	47	11	114

Table 8. Question 3: Information

At the start of your course, did you receive the following information? (Please tick (✓) one)

The course schedule or timetable	<input type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO
The course objectives	<input type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO
The number of assessments during the course	<input type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO
The types of assessments (example: portfolio, test, essay)	<input type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO

	Course Schedule		Objectives		Number Of Assessments		Type Of Assessments	
	yes	no	yes	no	yes	no	yes	no
KCETB	44	7	44	5	40	10	42	7
CDETB	70	5	56	9	46	14	47	13
National Event	72	8	66	12	62	16	64	15
DETB	76	3	69	4	56	12	55	11
DDLETB	24	4	27	1	25	3	26	2
GRETB	20	7	25	1	22	5	18	7
MSLETB	30	4	31	1	27	7	30	4
LWETB	55	3	52	3	42	13	43	10
WWETB	47	1	42	5	39	9	39	8
KETB	36	16	46	6	27	25	40	12
TOTAL	474	58	458	47	386	114	404	89

Table 9. Question 4: Learner Recommendations

Below you will see a list of recommendations learners have given at past learner forum events that they have said would help ensure their success. Please review these recommendations and rank them from 1 to 5 (**1 being the MOST important and 5 being the LEAST important for your success in Further Education and Training**).

Total times each was ranked 1 – 5						
Ranking	Total Responses	Childcare support	guidance services/ career counselling	more course options/ more choice over course times	mental health supports	other
1 Most Important	438	67	113	129	105	24
2	318	50	104	86	65	13
3	306	45	81	73	94	13
4	275	74	48	53	66	34
5 Least Important	251	102	20	22	33	74

Results of the Ranking	
Ranking	
1 Most Important	more course options/more choice over course times
2	guidance services/career counselling
3	mental health supports
4	childcare support
5 Least Important	other

Table 10. Question 5: Learner Engagement

Have you ever been asked by your ETB about your current educational experience? Examples of how you may have been asked include, but are not limited to, conversation with class representatives, surveys, forums, etc. (Please tick (✓) one)

YES NO

What is the best way for ETBs to hear about your educational experience? Please rank the following options from 1 to 6 (1 being the MOST preferred option and 6 LEAST preferred option)

ETB	Yes	No
KCETB	29	22
CDETb	26	17
National Event	53	20
DETb	48	23
DDLETb	15	8
GRETB	14	8
MSLETb	16	12
LWETb	16	21
WWETb	18	22
KETb	12	29
TOTAL	247	182

Total times each was ranked 1 – 6							
Ranking	Total Responses	Surveys	Evaluation Forms	Class Representatives	Student Council	Focus Groups	Other
1	398	89	72	82	56	86	13
2	323	63	71	66	70	52	1
3	299	46	54	81	65	53	1
4	275	42	80	42	63	45	3
5	259	65	34	39	44	68	9
6	158	22	12	19	15	14	76

Results of the Ranking	
Ranking	
1 Most Important	Surveys
2	Focus Groups
3	Class Representatives
4	Evaluations
5	Student Council Or Learner Representative Meetings
6 Least Important	Other

Question 6
Part A: Do you think your course will help you progress to employment or higher education?
Part B: Based on your experience to date, has your course fulfilled your expectations?
Part C: Would you recommend your Further Education and Training course to a friend?

ETB	Part A: Progression		Part B: Expectations		Part C: Recommendations	
	yes	no	yes	no	yes	no
KCETB	54	0	54	1	53	2
CDETБ	39	15	59	0	59	0
National Event	70	5	73	1	75	0
DETB	60	12	64	10	69	5
DDLETB	26	0	27	0	27	0
GRETB	23	1	23	1	24	0
MSLETB	27	2	30	0	30	0
LWETB	38	3	40	4	43	0
WWETB	37	5	39	4	44	0
KETB	43	2	41	3	44	1
TOTAL	417	45	450	24	468	8

Appendix 8: Evaluation Form

The National FET Learner Forum – Regional Focus Groups – Evaluation Form	
Did you receive enough information before the event? (Please tick (✓) one)	
<input type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO
Facilitator Name (s): _____	
Please rate your discussion: (Please tick (✓) one)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> Very good
<input type="checkbox"/> Good	<input type="checkbox"/> Fair
<input type="checkbox"/> Poor	
Comments:	

Question 3: Please rate the following aspects of the event: (Tick the relevant box)					
	Excellent	Very good	Good	Fair	Poor
Resource Pack					
Venue					
Event					
Presentation					
Overall Organisation					

Question 4: What did you enjoy most about the event? Please provide written comments	
Comments:	
Any further comments:	

Get Involved with AONTAS!	
<p>If you would like to receive our Learner Newsletter, take part in future AONTAS events, or share your story with us, fill in your details below. AONTAS includes learners in the following activities/promotional work:</p>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Focus Groups 2. Promotional Campaigns 3. Videos 4. Learner Stories 5. Events 6. Media interviews 	
<p>** By completing this section you are opting to provide this information to AONTAS for the purposes of the above stated information. AONTAS will not share any personal data with any third parties.</p>	
Name:	
Education Training Board (ETB):	
Email:	
Address: (only if email is not an option)	

Appendix 9: Evaluation Form Results

ETB	TOTAL RESPONSES
KCETB	56
CDETБ	75
National Event	43
DETБ	80
DDLETБ	28
GRETБ	28
MSLETБ	34
LWETБ	67
WWETБ	52
KETБ	54
TOTAL	517

Question 1: Did you receive enough information before the event? Please tick the box:		
ETB	Yes	No
KCETБ	46	10
CDETБ	68	6
National Event	41	2
DETБ	67	12
DDLETБ	21	7
GRETБ	21	6
MSLETБ	22	12
LWETБ	54	13
WWETБ	44	7
KETБ	34	20
TOTAL	418	95

Question 2: Facilitator Name (s): _____ Please rate your discussion: (tick the relevant box)					
ETB	Excellent	Very Good	Good	Fair	Poor
KCETB	29	27	0	0	0
CDETB	47	14	6	3	0
National Event	29	14	0	0	0
DETB	55	23	0	0	0
DDLETB	16	11	0	0	0
GRETB	14	6	2	0	0
MSLETB	18	12	2	1	0
LWETB	47	13	5	0	0
WWETB	27	21	2	0	1
KETB	31	22	1	0	0
TOTAL	313	163	18	4	1

Question 3: Please rate the following aspects of the event: (Tick the relevant box)					
Resource Pack					
ETB	Excellent	Very Good	Good	Fair	Poor
KCETB	17	35	1	1	0
CDETB	36	38	1	0	0
National Event	27	10	5	1	0
DETB	38	36	4	1	0
DDLETB	12	12	3	0	0
GRETB	8	11	3	0	0
MSLETB	15	11	7	0	1
LWETB	32	24	7	0	0
WWETB	29	13	8	0	0
KETB	18	21	12	1	0
TOTAL	232	211	51	4	1

Venue					
ETB	Excellent	Very Good	Good	Fair	Poor
KCETB	26	24	6	0	0
CDETB	47	23	3	0	0
National Event	35	8	0	0	0
DETB	53	21	5	0	0
DDLETB	11	12	6	0	0
GRETB	11	8	3	0	0
MSLETB	18	13	3	0	0
LWETB	35	18	6	0	0
WWETB	28	16	5	0	0
KETB	28	19	6	0	0
TOTAL	292	162	43	0	0

Event					
ETB	Excellent	Very Good	Good	Fair	Poor
KCETB	26	24	6	0	0
CDETB	43	22	4	0	0
National Event	30	12	1	0	0
DETB	51	25	3	0	0
DDLETB	9	15	3	0	0
GRETB	11	7	4	0	0
MSLETB	21	9	3	0	0
LWETB	32	20	5	1	0
WWETB	27	17	5	0	0
KETB	26	24	3	0	0
TOTAL	276	175	37	1	0

Presentation					
ETB	Excellent	Very Good	Good	Fair	Poor
KCETB	31	22	4	0	0
CDETB	49	17	3	2	0
National Event	30	13	0	0	0
DETB	50	21	3	2	0
DDLETB	13	12	3	0	0
GRETB	11	8	5	0	0
MSLETB	21	12	1	0	0
LWETB	38	18	4	0	0
WWETB	27	19	3	0	0
KETB	30	14	8	1	0
TOTAL	300	156	34	5	0

Overall Organisation					
ETB	Excellent	Very Good	Good	Fair	Poor
KCETB	30	23	3	0	0
CDETB	48	17	4	0	0
National Event	31	11	0	0	0
DETB	52	24	4	0	0
DDLETB	14	12	2	0	0
GRETB	11	7	4	0	0
MSLETB	21	12	1	0	0
LWETB	34	18	4	0	0
WWETB	33	13	3	0	0
KETB	28	20	5	0	0
TOTAL	302	157	30	0	0

Question 4: What did you enjoy most about the event? Please provide written comments.

ETB	TOTAL RESPONSES
KCETB	54
CDETB	65
National Event	42
DETB	43
DDLETB	22
GRETB	22
MSLETB	28
LWETB	48
WWETB	45
KETB	46
TOTAL	415

Question 5: Any further comments

ETB	TOTAL RESPONSES
KCETB	16
CDETB	23
National Event	15
DETB	14
DDLETB	1
GRETB	3
MSLETB	1
LWETB	7
WWETB	9
KETB	9
TOTAL	98

Appendix 10: Outreach and Communications

In order to support and promote the work of the NFLF and to raise awareness of learner voice activities, the standing of FET and to encourage people to take up the learning opportunities available in ETBs, AONTAS implemented an extensive communications strategy across multiple platforms to maximise impact and reach in 2018.

To respond to the expansion of regional NFLF events, AONTAS communications focused on locally targeted press releases, in collaboration with ETBs, to highlight these events. The NFLF reached an estimated audience of almost 100,000 people through local media coverage. 9 articles were printed in a range of local papers across Ireland from Donegal to Kerry.

See a full list of local media articles below:

REGIONAL NFLF EVENTS

1. Donegal, Finn Valley Post, 26th April 2018, FET learners have their voices heard at Donegal Regional Forum, estimated reach: 6,000
2. Kerry, Traleetoday.ie, 28th November 2018, **FET Learners From KCFE Have Their Voices Heard At Kerry Regional Forum**, estimated reach: 6,000
3. Donegal, Finn Valley Post, 3rd May 2018, Local Events, estimated reach: 6,300
4. Donegal, Letterkenny Post, 26th April 2018, FET Learners have their voices heard at the Donegal Regional Forum, estimated reach: 6,300
5. Donegal, Donegal Now, 23rd April 2018, FET Learners have their voices heard at the Donegal Regional Forum, estimated reach: 9,000
6. Donegal, Letterkenny Post, 3rd May 2018, Local Events, estimated reach: 6,300
7. Kerry, Kerry's Eye, 6th December 2018,

National Learner Forum Meeting in Tralee, estimated reach: 25,200

8. Kerry, Tralee Outlook, 29th November 2018, FET learners from KCFE have their voices heard at Kerry Regional Forum, estimated reach: 8,000

NATIONAL NFLF EVENT

1. Donegal, Donegal Now, 20th April 2018, Donegal represented at national Further Education and Training Forum, estimated reach: 9,000
2. Monaghan, Northern Standard, 26th April 2018, Local Delegates at National Further Education Forum, estimated reach: 14,000

In 2018, AONTAS saw significant growth in our online social media platforms (Facebook and Twitter) with a following of almost 10,000 people which extended our reach for NFLF activities. The NFLF events were promoted using the hashtag #LearnerVoice and this targeted content reached 160,000 people.

The national event was also captured by a videographer and shared on YouTube, www.aontas.com, and imbedded on our social media platforms. To date the video has been viewed almost **5,000** times: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U77EtKIGM84>

To further extend the reach of the NFLF, AONTAS also shared information about the NFLF and learner voice activities through a dedicated learner e-bulletin. Four editions were distributed to over 100 learners in 2018.

Almost 50,000 people accessed our website www.aontas.com in 2018. A new Learner Forum section of the website was developed to showcase the work of NFLF which includes links to the video and the latest reports.

Appendix 11: Learner Reactions to the Event

At the conclusion of the NFLF events, learners were provided with an evaluation form (Appendix 11). Between the ten events, a total of 517 evaluations were collected and analysed. The evaluations demonstrate that overall, learners enjoyed their experience at NFLF events. Of those who rated the event (489), 56% of learners rated it as excellent, 36% rated it as very good, 8% rated it as good, and one learner rated the event as fair.

Learners identified the ability to share their voice in a safe and open space as an important aspect of the event. As learners explained, they enjoyed “getting my point out in the open and listening to others,” “the chance to voice my opinions and views” and how “people could voice their experiences in participating in education as an adult in a safe respectful environment.” These quotations speak to the important role the Forum plays as a vehicle for facilitating and capturing learner voices in FET.

The evaluations revealed other important benefits of the NFLF. The NFLF also provides a unique opportunity for learners from across ETBs to come together to discover new courses, meet new people, and establish the building blocks for a collective FET

identity. Through the Forum, learners can discover further learning options within FET as well. For example, after participating in a group with an apprenticeship learner, one ESOL learner shared that s/he would now explore apprenticeship options in FET. Forum participants can meet with learners on courses and programmes different than their own, fostering a sense of community within FET. As one learner explained, the most enjoyable part of the event was “meeting different groups of people and hearing about their achievements and speaking about mine.” This was echoed by another learner who stated his/her most enjoyable part of the event was “meeting people from other groups and backgrounds”, and another who stated it was “getting to know different people.” Showcasing and celebrating a large and inclusive FET community is important because it lets learners know, as one learner stated, “I am not alone.”



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